Foucault and his Interlocutors / Edited and introduced by Arnold I. Davidson; Chicago: The Univ. Of Chicago Press, 1997 (146-182 f)

Foucault Revolutionizes History

Paul Veyne

Translated by Catherine Porter

Michel Foucault's name is so well known that his work does not require a lengthy introduction. I prefer to begin with concrete examples in order to show the practical usefulness of Foucault's method and to try to dispel certain preconceived notions about the philosopher: that Foucault reifies an agency that defies human action and historical explanation; that he privileges breaks and structures over continuities and evolutions; that he has no interest in the social sphere. . . . In addition, the word *discourse* has created a great deal of confusion;[1] let us say, oversimplistically, that Foucault is not Lacan, nor can he be assimilated to semantics. Foucault uses the word *discourse* in his work in a special technical sense, one that specifically does not designate what is said. The very title of one of his books, *Les Mots et les choses*, is ironic.[2]

Once these doubtless inevitable errors have been dispelled,[3] we discover in this difficult body of thought something that is very simple and very new, something that cannot fail to gratify historians and make them feel at home from the outset. It is just what historians were hoping for, indeed, what they were already doing, though without clarity. Foucault is the consummate historian, the culmination of history. This philosopher is one of the great historians of our era, beyond any doubt; but he might also be the author of the scientific revolution around which all historians have been gravitating. If we are all positivists, nominalists, pluralists, and enemies of *-isms*, Foucault is the first to merit those designations fully. He is the first completely positivist historian.

My first obligation is thus to speak as a historian rather than as a philosopher—and for a very good reason. My second and final obligation is to speak through examples. The one I have selected—and it is not of my own devising—will be the source of all my arguments. I refer to the explanation for the end of gladiator fighting, as discovered by Georges Ville and described in his great posthumous book on Roman gladiatorship.

The term for Foucault's initial intuition is not structure, or break, or discourse: it is exceptionality, *rarity*, in the Latin sense of the word. Human phenomena are exceptional: they are not ensconced in the plenitude of reason; there is empty space around them for other phenomena that we in our wisdom do not grasp; what is could be otherwise. Human phenomena are arbitrary, in Mauss's sense. They cannot be taken for granted, although for contemporaries and even for historians they seem to be so self-evident that neither the former nor the latter notice them at all. But enough of this for the moment; let us move on to the facts. The story we are about to hear, thanks to my friend Georges Ville, is a long one: how gladiator fighting came to an end.

The fighting stopped gradually, or rather by fits and starts, in the course of the fourth century A.D., during the reign of the Christian emperors. Why did it stop, and why then? The answer seems obvious: the atrocities came to a halt because of Christianity. Yet, as it happens, this is not the case at all. Gladiatorship did not owe its disappearance to the Christians any more than slavery did. The Christians only condemned gladiatorship as part of their general condemnation of all public spectacles, which distracted souls from concentrating exclusively on their salvation. Among public spectacles, the theater, with all its improprieties, always struck Christians as more deserving of condemnation than gladiator fighting. While the pleasure of seeing blood flow brings intrinsic satisfaction, the pleasure of onstage indecency incites spectators to lascivious conduct in their daily lives. Is the explanation to be sought, then, in a

To Irène. Aix and London, April 1978.

1. Foucault's readers are not to blame. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, an awkward and brilliant book in which the author achieved full awareness of what he was doing and took his theory to its logical conclusion ("What, in short, we wish to do is to dispense with 'things'" [Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London, 1972), p. 47]; hereafter abbreviated *AK*; compare pp. 16–17 and the self-critical footnotes on *The History of Madness* and *The Birth of the Clinic*, p. 47 n. 1 and p. 54 n. 1), was written at the height of the structuralist and linguistic frenzy; moreover, as a historian Foucault began by paying more attention to discourse than to practice, studying practice by way of discourse. Nevertheless, the connection between Foucault's method and linguistics remains only partial, or accidental, or circumstantial.

2. See *AK*, p. 48 and, more generally, pp. 46–49. *Les Mots et les choses* is available in English translation as *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. pub. (New York, 1971).

3. Furthermore, "in *The Order of Things*, the absence of methodological signposting may have given the impression that my analyses were being conducted in terms of cultural totality" (*AK*, p. 16). Even philosophers close to Foucault believed that his goal was to establish the existence of an *episteme* common to an entire era.

more broadly human—rather than narrowly Christian—humanitarianism, or in pagan wisdom? No, the answer does not lie here either. Humanitarianism is found only in a small minority of highly sensitive people (from time immemorial, crowds have flocked to witness torture, and Nietzsche, writing from the well-sheltered thinker's vantage point, described the healthy savagery of strong peoples). Such humanitarianism is too easily confused with a somewhat different sentiment, that of prudence. Before they adopted Roman gladiatorship with enthusiasm, the Greeks were wary of its cruelty, concerned that it might accustom the masses to violence, just as we worry today that violence on television may cause the crime rate to rise. This was not quite the same thing as deploring the fate of the gladiators themselves. In the view of the sages, however, both pagan and Christian, the bloody spectacle of combats sullied the onlookers' souls (this is the real meaning of the excessively celebrated condemnations issued by Seneca and Saint Augustine). But it is one thing to condemn pornographic films because they are immoral and sully the viewer's soul; it is quite another to condemn them because they turn the human persons who are their actors into objects.

In ancient times, gladiators had the same ambivalent reputation as porno stars. When they were not exercising their fascination as stars in the arena, they aroused feelings of horror because these willing participants in ludic death were at once assassins, victims, candidates for suicide, and walking future corpses. They were viewed as impure in exactly the same way prostitutes are. Both groups are sources of infection within communities; it is immoral to consort with them because they are unclean; they have to be handled with rubber gloves. This is understandable: for the vast majority of the population, gladiators, like executioners, aroused ambivalent feelings, both attraction and a prudent repulsion. On the one hand there was the taste for watching people suffer, the fascination with death, the pleasure of seeing corpses; on the other hand there was the anguish of seeing that within the very confines of public order it was legal to murder not only enemies or criminals but others as well. Society no longer provided a bulwark against the law of the jungle. In many civilizations, this political fear won out over the element of attraction; fear accounts for the cessation of human sacrifices. In Rome, on the other hand, attraction won out, and this is how the institution of gladiatorship, unique in world history, came into being. The mix of horror and attraction led to the forceful repudiation of the very gladiators who were acclaimed as stars; they were deemed impure in the way blood, sperm, and corpses are impure. This allowed people to witness fighting and torture in the arena with a perfectly clear conscience. The most horrifying scenes from the ring were among the most popular motifs of the "art objects" that adorned private homes.

But what is most astonishing is not the rather predictable lack of humanitarianism; it is the fact that this ingenuous attitude in the face of atrocity was legitimate, and even legal, orchestrated by public authorities; the sovereign himself, society's bulwark against the state of nature, organized these recreational murders for the entertainment of the public in peacetime, and it was he who presided and served as referee in the amphitheater. To flatter the master, court poets would congratulate him on the amusing ingeniousness of the tortures he had devised for everyone's pleasure *(voluptas, laetitia)*. Thus the horror itself, even legalized, is not the problem, for in other eras, too, crowds would flock to see public executions, autos-da-fé often presided over by Christian kings. The problem is that the public horror of gladiatorship was not veiled by any pretense whatsoever. Autos-da-fé were not intended to entertain; if a flatterer had congratulated a king of Spain or France for providing his subjects with that *voluptas,* he would have been infringing on the king's majesty and on the dignity of justice and its punishments.

Under these conditions, the cessation of gladiator fighting in the century of the Christian emperors looks like an impenetrable mystery. What was it that tipped the balance of ambivalence and allowed horror to win out over attraction? It cannot be pagan wisdom, or Christian doctrine, or humanitarianism. Could it be that political power was humanized or Christianized? But the Christian emperors were not professional humanitarians, and their pagan predecessors were not at all inhuman—they forbade human sacrifices among their Celtic and Carthaginian subjects, much as the English prohibited cremation among widows in India. Nero himself was not the sadist he is made out to be; Vespasian and Marcus Aurelius were no Hitlers. If the Christian emperors were inspired by their religion to bring gladiator fighting to a gradual halt, they went too far or not far enough. Christians did not clamor for such an outcome; they would have preferred to outlaw theater. Yet theater, for all its indecency, became more vigorous than ever, and it was to become very popular in Byzantium. Perhaps pagan Rome was a "society of spectacles" in which state power offered the people circuses and gladiators for political reasons? This bombastic tautology is not an explanation, especially since Christian Rome and the Byzantine Empire also turned out to be devoted to public spectacles. And yet an overbearing truth comes to the fore here: we simply cannot imagine a Byzantine emperor or a Christian king offering up gladiators to his people. With the end of antiquity, the state stopped killing for entertainment.

And for good reason. The real explanation for gladiatorship and its suppression lies in political power rather than in humanitarianism or in religion. However, this reason must be sought in the submerged base of the "political" iceberg, for this is the locus of the change that made gladiatorship unthinkable in the Byzantine Empire or in the Middle Ages. We need to turn away from standard "politics" to notice an *exceptional* form, a political period piece whose surprising convolutions constitute the key to the enigma. In other words, we must stop focusing our gaze on natural

objects in order to notice a certain practice, a very specifically dated one, that objectified those objects in a respect that is as dated as the practice itself. For this is why there exists what I just referred to, in a popular expression, as the "concealed base of the iceberg"; we tend to overlook the practice and see only the objects that reify it in our eyes. So let us make the opposite move: by dint of a Copernican reversal, we shall no longer have to bisect the domain of natural objects with more and more ideological epicycles, without ever managing thereby to reach the level of real historical movements. This was the method Georges Ville followed spontaneously; it provides an excellent illustration of Foucault's thought and demonstrates its fruitfulness.

Rather than taking for granted the existence of a body called the governed, in relation to which a body of "governors" proceeds to act, let us consider the fact that practices for dealing with "the governed" may vary so widely over time that the so-called governed have little more in common than the name. They may be disciplined, that is, told what they must do (and if nothing is prescribed, they are not to budge); they may be treated as juridical subjects, which means that while certain things are forbidden, within those limits they may move about freely; or they may be exploited, and this is what happens in many monarchies: the prince takes control of a populated territory as if it were grazing land or a fish pond, and, in order to live and do his job as prince among princes, he claims for himself a portion of what is produced by the human fauna populating his domain (the prince's art lies in knowing how to avoid shaving too close to the scalp). Satirists accuse the prince of plunging this human fauna into political indifference; flatterers declare that he "makes" his people happy; neutral observers say that he allows his people to be happy and to put chickens in their own pots, provided the weather is propitious. In any event, the prince does not harass his subjects, does not aspire to force them into eternal salvation or to lead them into some great enterprise. He lets nature do its work and he lets his subjects do theirs, lets them reproduce and prosper, more in good years than in bad; he behaves like a gentleman farmer who does not force the hand of nature. It remains clearly understood that he is the owner and that his subjects are only a natural species in residence on his property.

Other practices are possible, for example "great enterprises," as suggested above; examples are not hard to come by. Or perhaps the natural object designated "the governed" is not human fauna, or some tribe being led more or less willingly toward a promised land, but a "population" to be managed the way the natural tendencies of water systems and plant life are managed by an agent of the conservation department, who controls and channels them in such a way that natural processes can continue and plant life will not die out. The agent-manager does not leave nature to its own devices: he meddles with it, but only in order to leave nature in better shape than before. He might be compared with a traffic cop who "channels" the spontaneous movement of traffic so it will flow smoothly: that is his job. As a result, drivers proceed in safety; this is called the welfare state, and it is the one we live in. It is not at all like the Old Regime, where a prince encountering traffic on the road would have imposed his own right of passage and left it at that. This is not to say that the management of fluctuation makes everything perfect for everyone, for the spontaneity of nature cannot be regulated according to whim; traffic flowing in one direction has to be stopped in order to allow the cross traffic to advance, with the result that some drivers who may be in more of a hurry than others still have to twiddle their thumbs at red lights.

Here we have quite different "attitudes" toward the natural object "the governed," many different ways of treating the governed "objectively"; or we may prefer to say that there are many different "ideologies" characterizing the relationship between governors and the governed. Let us put it this way: there are many different practices, some of which objectify a population, others a fauna, still others a tribe, and so on. While it may appear that we are dealing merely with figures of speech, modifications of the conventions governing word use, in reality, a scientific revolution is taking place in this shift in terminology. Appearances are reversed in just the same way as a shirtsleeve is turned inside out; in the process, the false problems are snuffed out and the true problem falls into place.

Let us apply this method to the gladiators. We shall ask in what political practice people are objectified in such a way that, if they want gladiators, they are cheerfully given their fill, and in what practice it would be unthinkable to give them what they want. The answer is not hard to find.

Suppose we are responsible for a flock of sheep that is being moved, that we have "taken on" this pastoral responsibility. We do not own the flock: the owner would be interested only in reaping the profits from shearing the sheep, would otherwise leave them to their own devices. Our job, however, is to supervise the flock's movements, for the sheep are not in a pasture but out on a highway. We have to keep the flock from dispersing, in its own interest of course. "Not that we are guides who know the destination, decide to lead the animals there, and herd them along," a Roman emperor might say. "The flock moves of its own accord, or rather its route shifts as it advances, for it is on the highway of History. Our job is to ensure its survival as a flock despite the dangers of the road and the animals' treacherous instincts, their weakness and inertia. We shall beat them with sticks; if we have to, with our own hands. We administer blows, not justice in all its majesty. Our flock is the Roman people and we are its senators. We are not its owners, since Rome has never been a territorial property endowed with human fauna: Rome came into being as a collectivity of men, as a city-state. For our part, we have assumed leadership of

this human flock because we know better than it does what it needs. To carry out our mission we send 'lictors' on ahead carrying 'bundles' of knouts, so they can strike any animals who are creating disorder in the flock or wandering off. For sovereignty is not distinguished from menial police work by any measure of dignity.

"Our politics is limited to keeping the flock together as it moves along its historical trajectory; for the rest, we are well aware that animals are animals. We try not to abandon too many hungry ones along the way, for that would reduce the population of the flock; we feed them if we have to. Animals are neither moral nor immoral; they are what they are. We are no more concerned about denying gladiators' blood to the Roman people than a herder of sheep or cattle would be concerned about watching over his animals' mating behavior in order to prevent incestuous unions. We are intransigent on just one point, which is not the animals' morality but their energy: we do not want the flock to weaken, for that would be its loss and ours; so for example we do not let it have 'pantomime,' which the moderns would call opera, since this public spectacle has a softening effect. On the other hand, like Cicero and Pliny the senator, we see gladiators' combats as the best school for toughening up that any spectators can have. To be sure, there are those who cannot tolerate the spectacle, finding it cruel; but our sympathy as shepherds goes instinctively to the tough, strong, insensitive animals. It is thanks to them that the flock holds its own. Thus between the two poles of ambivalent feeling that gladiatorship arouses, we do not hesitate to endorse sadistic attraction rather than frightened repulsion, and we turn gladiatorship into a spectacle that is approved and organized by the State."

As I said, these words could have been spoken by a Roman senator or an emperor of the pagan era. Had I heard such talk earlier, of course, I would have written my big book on bread and circuses differently; I would have turned the argument around. But let us come back to our sheep. If we had been entrusted with children instead of sheep, if our practice had objectified a child-people and if we had objectified ourselves as paternal kings, our behavior would have been entirely different. We would have taken into account the sensitivity of the wretched population, and we would have gone along with their fearful rejection of gladiatorship; we would have commiserated with their terror at seeing unwarranted murder become an established institution within the confines of a peaceful state. "The Christian sect," we might have added, "would have liked us to go even further: it would have liked us to be priest-kings and not father-kings, so that, far from coddling children, we would view our subjects as souls to be led energetically down the path of virtue toward salvation, like it or not. The Christians would have liked us to ban theater as well as all other public spectacles. But we are well aware that children need to be entertained. For sectarians like the Christians, nudity is more offensive than gladiators' blood. We see things more imperially, however; and, like simple people in general and in keeping with public opinion everywhere, we view gratuitous murder as the most serious of matters."

What a gutting of rationalizing political philosophy! What a void surrounds those *exceptional* period pieces! What a lot of room lies between them for other as yet unimagined objectivizations! For, unlike the list of natural objects, that of objectivizations remains open. But let me hasten to reassure the reader, who must be wondering *why* the practice of "leading a flock" gave way to that of "coddling the children." It did so for the most positive, most historical, and almost the most materialist reasons in the world—for exactly the same kinds of reasons that explain any event whatsoever. One of these reasons, as it happens, was that in the fourth century A.D., when Roman emperors became Christians, they also ceased to govern via the senatorial class. Now it is fair to say that the Roman senate bore very little resemblance to today's senates, councils, or assemblies. It was a kind of thing with which we are completely unfamiliar: an academy, but of politics—a conservatory of the political arts. To understand what sort of transformation must have been involved in governing without the senate, we might imagine a literature that has always been subject to the dictates of an academy and that suddenly finds itself on its own; or we might imagine modern intellectual or scientific life without the university as its substructure or superstructure. The senate tended to preserve the gladiators the way the French Academy tends to preserve spelling: because its self-interest as a body lay in being conservative. Once the emperor is rid of the senate, once he begins to use a body of mere functionaries to run his empire, he ceases to play the role of head herdsman and takes on one of the roles available to true monarchs—father, priest, and so forth. And he becomes a Christian for just the same reason. It was not Christianity that led the emperors to adopt a paternalistic practice and made them ban gladiators; rather, it was history as a whole (the withering away of the senate, a new ethic according to which the body is not a toy, and so on) that brought about a change in political practice, with dual consequences: because they were paternalistic the emperors quite naturally adopted Christianity, and because they were paternalistic they put an end to gladiatorship.

The method followed here is self-evident. It consists in describing in quite objective terms what a paternalistic emperor does, what a head herdsman does, *without presupposing anything else at all*, without presupposing the existence of any goal, object, material cause (the governed masses, relations of production, an enduring State), or type of behavior (politics, depoliticization). It consists in judging people by their actions and in eliminating the eternal phantoms that language arouses in us. Practice is not some mysterious agency, some substratum of history, some hidden engine; it is what people do (the word says just what it means). If practices

are, in one sense, "hidden" and if we may provisionally call them the "concealed base of the iceberg," it is quite simply because "practice" shares the fate of nearly all our behavior and that of universal history: we are often aware of it, but we have no concept for it. In the same way, when I speak, I am generally aware that I am speaking and am not in a hypnotic state; on the other hand, I do not have a conception of the grammar I am using instinctively. I think I am expressing myself naturally, in order to say what needs to be said; I am not aware that I am applying restrictive rules. Similarly, the governor who gives his flock free bread or who denies it gladiators believes he is doing what every governor has to do, when dealing with the governed, owing to the nature of politics itself; he is not aware that his practice, observed in and of itself, conforms to a specific grammar, that it embodies a specific politics, just as, while we believe we are speaking without presuppositions, in order to say what has to be said, what is on our minds, when we break the silence we can only speak a specific language, French or English or Latin.

Judging people according to their actions means not judging them according to their ideologies; it also means not judging them according to lofty eternal notions such as the governed, the State, freedom, or the essence of politics, notions that trivialize the originality of successive practices and render it anachronistic. If I make the mistake of saying, in effect, that "there was the emperor on the one hand, *the* governed on the other," as soon as I observe that the emperor gave the governed subjects bread and gladiators and then go on to ask why, I shall conclude that he did so for a no less eternal reason: to depoliticize them, or to get them to obey him, or love him.

Indeed we are used to reasoning in terms of targets, or from the starting point of a topic. For example, I once believed and wrote, wrongly, that bread and circuses were aimed at establishing a relation between the governed and the governors, or that they were a response to the objective challenge constituted by the governed. But if the governed are always and everywhere the same, if they all have the same natural reflexes, if they have a natural need for bread and circuses, or a need to be depoliticized, or to feel loved by their Master, why were they given bread and circuses only in Rome? Thus we need to reverse the terms of the proposition: in order for the governed to be perceived by the Master only as objects to be depoliticized, loved, or taken to the circus, they had to have been objectivized as a flock-people; in order for the Master to have been perceived only as needing to make himself popular with his flock, he had to have been objectivized as a guide rather than as a father-king or a priest-king. These objectivizations, correlatives of a certain political practice, are what account for bread and circuses; bread and circuses will never be explained by starting with an eternal governed, eternal governors, and an eternal relation of obedience or depoliticization that unites them. For while these keys will open any door, they will never provide access to understanding a phenomenon as particular and as precisely dated as bread and circuses—unless we allow specifications, historical accidents, and ideological influences to proliferate, at the price of endless verbiage.

Objects seem to determine our behavior, but our practice determines its own objects in the first place. Let us start, then, with that practice itself, so that the object to which it applies is what it is only in relation to that practice (in the sense that a "beneficiary" is a beneficiary inasmuch as I cause him or her to benefit from something, and that, if I guide someone, that person is the guided party). The relation determines the object, and only what is determined exists. The governed is too vague a term, and it does not exist as an entity; there exists only a flock-people, then a child-people to be coddled. This is simply another way of saying that at one time the observable practices entailed guiding and at another they entailed coddling (just as being guided is only a way of saying that someone is guiding you at the moment: one is not a guided party in the absence of a guide). The object is only the correlative of the practice; prior to the practice there exists no eternal governed that could be targeted more or less accurately and with respect to which one could modify one's aim so as to improve it. The prince who treats his people like children does not even conceive of the possibility of behaving differently: he does what goes without saying, things being as they are. The eternal governed does not *exceed* what one makes of it, it does not exist apart from the practice that is applied to it; its existence, if there is such a thing, is not indicated by any concrete aspect. (The flock-people did not have social security, and no one dreamed of providing it, nor did anyone feel guilty for failing to do so.) A notion that is connected to nothing in practice is only a word.

Such a word has only an ideological—or rather idealist—existence. Let us consider the leader of the flock, for instance. He gives the animals in his charge free bread because his mission is to lead the entire flock to its destination without leaving too many starved corpses behind; a thinned-out herd cannot defend itself against wolves. This is the actual practice, as it emerges from the facts (and from the following fact in particular: free bread was given not to destitute slaves but only to citizens). It is true that ideology offered a vaguely noble interpretation of that cruelly precise practice: the senate was exalted in proclamations declaring it to be the father of the people and affirming that it sought the good of the governed. But the same ideological platitude is repeated about very different practices: the sovereign who takes over a fish pond and exploits it for his own profit by levying a tax is also viewed as a father who makes his subjects happy, whereas in fact he lets them cope as best they can with nature and the seasons, for better or for worse. And the conservation agent is yet another benefactor of his subjects, someone who regulates natural fluctuations not for the fiscal benefits that he can draw from

them, but for the proper management of nature itself, of which he has taken charge. We are beginning to see what ideology is: a noble and vague style, apt for idealizing practices while appearing to describe them. Ideology is an ample cloak that dissimulates the crooked and dissimilar contours of the real practices that succeed one another in history.

But where do these practices come from, each with its own inimitable contours? From historical changes, quite simply, from the countless transformations of historical reality, that is to say from the rest of history, like everything else. Foucault has not discovered a previously unknown new agency, called practice; he has made the effort to see people's practices *as they really are;* what he is talking about is the same thing every historian talks about, namely, what people do. The difference is simply that Foucault undertakes to speak about practice *precisely,* to describe its convoluted forms, instead of referring to it in vague and noble terms. He does not say: "I have discovered a sort of historical unconscious, a preconceptual agency, that I call practice or discourse, and that provides the real explanation for history. Ah yes! but how am I going to manage to explain this agency itself and its transformations?" No: he is talking about *the same thing we talk about,* for example, the practical conduct of a government; only he shows it as it really is, by stripping away the veils. Nothing could be stranger than to accuse Foucault of reducing our history to an intellectual process that is as implacable as it is irresponsible. Nevertheless, it is easy to understand why his philosophy is difficult for us to grasp: it does not look at all like Marx's or Freud's. Practice is not an agency (like the Freudian id) or a prime mover (like the relation of production), and moreover for Foucault there is no agency nor any prime mover (there is matter, however, as we shall see). That is why there is nothing wrong with calling practice, provisionally, the concealed base of the iceberg, in order to indicate that it presents itself to our spontaneous sight only heavily veiled, and that it is largely preconceptual; for the concealed base of an iceberg is not some agency that is different in nature from the exposed tip; it is made of ice, like the rest. Nor is it the motor that moves the iceberg along; it is below the line of visibility, that is all. It is accounted for in the same way as the rest of the iceberg. Foucault has only one thing to say to historians: "You may continue to explain history as you have always done. But be careful: if you look very closely, if you peel away the banalities, you will notice that there is more to explain than you thought; there are crooked contours that you haven't spotted."

For historians concerned not with what people do, but what they say, the method to follow is the same; the word *discourse* comes into play just as naturally to designate what is said as the word *practice* does to designate what is practiced. Foucault is not revealing a mysterious discourse different from the one we all understand; he is simply inviting us to observe exactly what is said. Now this observation proves that the realm of what is said presents biases, reticences, unexpected salient features and reflex angles of which the speakers are completely unaware. Underneath conscious discourse there is a grammar, as it were, a grammar that is determined by neighboring practices and grammars and that is revealed by attentive study of the discourse, provided that the student consents to lift off the heavy veils known as Science, Philosophy, and so on. In the same way, the prince thinks he governs or reigns; in fact, he manages fluctuations, or he coddles children, or he leads a flock. So it is clear what discourse is not: it is not semantics, not ideology, not the implicit. Far from inviting us to judge things on the basis of words, Foucault shows on the contrary that words mislead us, that they make us believe in the existence of things, in the existence of natural objects, of governed subjects, or of the State, whereas these things are only correlatives of the corresponding practices. For semantics is the incarnation of the idealist illusion. Nor is discourse ideology; it is almost the opposite. It is what is really said, unbeknownst to the speakers. The latter think they are speaking broadly and freely, whereas unwittingly what they are saying is narrow, limited by an incongruous grammar. Ideology, for its part, is much broader and freer, and for good reason: it is rationalization, idealization; it is an expansive veil. The prince wants to do all that is required and believes that he is doing just that, things being as they are; in reality, he behaves unwittingly like the owner of a fishpond, and ideology glorifies him as a good shepherd. Finally, discourse and its hidden grammar do not belong to the realm of the implicit; they are not logically contained in what is said or done, they are not axiomatic to or presupposed in what is said or done, for the good reason that what is said or done obeys a grammar of chance and not a logical, coherent, perfected grammar. If the political grammar of an era consists in coddling children or in managing fluctuations, it is owing to the hazards of history, to the salient features and reflex angles of neighboring practices and their transformations; it is not because Reason is constructing a coherent system. History is not utopia. Policies do not develop systematically from great principles (to each according to his needs, everything for the people and nothing by means of the people); they are the creations of history and not those of consciousness or reason.

So what exactly is that submerged grammar that Foucault wants us to notice? Why do we remain unconscious of it, as do the agents themselves? Because we repress it? No; because it is preconceptual. The role of consciousness is not to make us notice the world but to allow us to move within it. A king does not need to conceptualize what he is, or what his practice is; it suffices that they are what they are. The king needs to be conscious of the events occurring in his kingdom; that is all he needs in order to behave in terms of what he is without his knowledge. He does not need to be conceptually aware that he manages fluctuations; he will do so in any event. He simply needs to be aware that he is king, without further ado. A lion does not need to know he is a lion to behave like one, either; he needs only to know where to find his prey.

For a lion, being a lion goes so completely without saying that he is not aware that that is what he is; in the same way, kings who coddle peoples or who manage fluctuations do not know what they are. They are aware, of course, of what they are doing. They do not sign decrees in a sleepwalking state; they have the "mentality" that corresponds to their "material" acts. But it is absurd to make that distinction. When one behaves in a certain way one necessarily has the corresponding mentality; these two things go hand in hand and constitute a given practice, just like fear and trembling, or joy and hearty laughter. Representations and utterances constitute part of the practice, and that is why ideology does not exist, except for Flaubert's M. Homais, a celebrated materialist: to produce, one needs machines, one needs people, and these people need to be conscious of what they are doing. They must not be sleepwalkers; they must have their own representations of certain technical or social rules, and they have to have the requisite mentality or ideology. All of this constitutes a practice. But the people involved do not know what this practice is: it "goes without saying" for them, as for the king and for the lion, who do not know themselves what they are.

More precisely, they do not even know that they do not know (that is the meaning of the expression "to go without saying"), like an automobile driver *who does not see that he does not see,* if the dark of night is compounded by rain; for then not only does he see nothing beyond the range of his headlights, but he can no longer clearly make out where the lighted zone stops, so that he can no longer tell how far he can see and does not know that he is driving too fast for an unknown stopping distance. It is unquestionably an odd thing, well worth the attention of a philosopher, this capacity of human beings to remain unaware of their limits, their *exceptionality,* not to see that there is emptiness around them, to believe that at any given moment they are ensconced in the plenitude of reason. Perhaps this is the meaning of Nietzsche's idea (though I do not flatter myself that I understand that difficult thinker) that consciousness is merely reactive. By virtue of a "will to power," the king holds the job of king. He brings into material reality the potentialities of his historical period, and these potentialities tentatively mark out for him the practice of leading a flock or, if the senate fades away, that of coddling his people; for him, this goes without saying. He does not even suspect that he has any responsibility for it; he believes that his own behavior is dictated to him on a daily basis by things; he does not even suspect that things could be otherwise. While he remains unaware of his own will to power, which he perceives reified in natural objects, he is aware only of his own reactions, that is, he knows what he is doing, when he reacts to events by making decisions. But he does not understand that these particular decisions are a function of a certain royal practice, just as a lion's decisions are a function of being a lion.

The method thus consists, for Foucault, in understanding that things are only objectivizations of determined practices and that the determinations must be brought to light, since consciousness fails to conceptualize them. This bringing to light, at the end of an effort to visualize, is an original and even attractive experiment, one that might playfully be called "rarefaction." The product of this intellectual operation is abstract, and for good reason: it is not a picture in which one sees kings, peasants, or monuments, nor is it a received idea to which our consciousness is so accustomed that one is no longer sensitive to the idea's abstractness.

But what is most characteristic is the instant in which the rarefaction is produced. It does not take shape; on the contrary, it consists rather in a sort of unhooking. A moment before, there was nothing, nothing but a big flat thing so self-evident that it could hardly be seen, a thing called Power or the State. For our part, we were trying to grasp the coherence of a piece of history, one in which this big translucid kernel played a key role, along with common nouns and conjunctions; but it was not working, something was wrong, and false verbal problems such as "ideology" or "relations of production" were taking us around in circles. And then all at once we "realize" that the whole problem comes from the big kernel, with its falsely natural air; that we needed to stop believing in its self-evidence. We had to reduce it to ordinary experience, had to historicize it. And then, in the place that was previously occupied by the big thing-that-goes-without-saying, there appears a strange little "period" object, a rare, contorted object that has never been seen before. When we see it, we cannot help but take a moment to breathe a melancholy sigh over the human condition, over the poor unconscious and absurd things that we are, over the rationalizations that we fabricate for ourselves and whose object appears to be chortling.

In the time it takes to sigh, the bit of history has fallen into place all by itself. The false problems have fled; the joints all fit together; and, most important, the bit of history appears to have turned itself inside out like a sleeve. A moment before, we were like Blaise Pascal: we had the two ends of the historical chain (economy and society, the governors and the governed, interests and ideologies) firmly in hand, and it was in the middle that the muddle began: how could we make all that hold together? Now, it would be difficult for it not to. "Good form" is in the middle and is rapidly spreading to the edges of the picture. For, ever since the moment we historicized our false natural object, it has been an object only for a practice that objectivizes it. The practice, along with the object that it gives itself, is what comes first; it is this practice that is naturally unified. Infrastructure and superstructure, interest and ideology, and so on are no longer anything but useless patchworks imposed on a practice that functioned very well as it was and that is once again functioning very well: it is even on the basis of that practice that the edges of

the picture are becoming intelligible. So why were we so furiously bent on chopping it into two slices? It is because we saw no other way to get out of the false situation we had gotten into by virtue of having grasped the problem by its two ends and not by the middle, as Deleuze says. The falseness lay in mistaking the object of a practice for a natural, well-known, unchanging, virtually material object: the collectivity, the State, the seed of madness.

This object was given at the outset (as befits matter), and practice reacted: it "took up the challenge," it built on that infrastructure. We did not realize that each practice, as determined by history as a whole, engenders its own corresponding object, just as pear trees produce pears and apple trees bear apples; there are no natural objects, there are no things. Things, objects, are only correlatives of practices. The illusion of a natural object ("the governed throughout history") conceals the heterogeneous character of practices (coddling children is not managing fluctuations). Here is the source of all the dualist muddles; from here, too, stems the illusion of "reasonable choice." This last illusion exists, as we shall see, in two forms that at first glance look quite dissimilar. The first: "The history of sexuality is that of an eternal struggle between desire and repression." The second: "M. Foucault is against everything, he puts Damiens's frightful torture and the practice of incarceration in the same bag, as if a preference could not reasonably be declared." Our author is too much a positivist to nurture this dual illusion.

For "the governed" is neither a unity nor a multiplicity, any more than "repression" (or "its diverse forms") is, or "the State" (or "its forms in history"), for the simple reason that there is no such thing as "the governed." There are only multiple objectivizations ("population," "fauna," "subjects under law"), correlatives of heterogeneous practices. There are numerous objectivizations, and that is all: a relation between this multiplicity of practices and unity can be posited only if one attempts to credit the practices with a nonexistent unity; a gold watch, a zest of lemon, and a raccoon are also a multiplicity and do not seem to suffer for want of a common origin or object or principle. Only the illusion of dealing with natural objects creates a vague impression of unity. As one's vision becomes blurred, everything seems to look alike; a fauna, a population, and subjects under law seem to be the same thing, namely, the governed. The multiple practices disappear from view; they are the submerged base of the iceberg. This outlook does not allow for any unconscious, of course, or any ideological ruse or a politics of putting one's head in the sand. There is only the eternal teleological illusion, the Idea of the Good. From this perspective everything we do would be an attempt to reach an ideal goal.

Everything hinges on a paradox, one that is Foucault's central and most original thesis. *What is made*, the object, is explained by what went into its *making* at each moment of history; we are wrong to imagine that the *making*, the practice, is explained on the basis of what is made. I should like to try to show—in a first stage, rather too abstractly—how everything derives from this central thesis; then I shall do my utmost to clarify the matter.

The whole difficulty arises from the illusion that allows us to "reify" objectivizations as if they were natural objects. We mistake the end result for a goal; we take the place where a projectile happens to land as its intentionally chosen target. Instead of grasping the problem at its true center, which is the practice, we start from the periphery, which is the object, in such a way that successive practices resemble reactions to a single object, whether "material" or rational, that is taken as the starting point, as a given. Here is where the false dualist problems begin, along with the rationalisms. Since the practice is taken as a response to a given, we find ourselves with two links in a chain that we can no longer see how to solder back together. The practice is the response to a challenge, to be sure, but a given challenge does not always lead to the same response; the infrastructure determines the superstructure, to be sure, but the superstructure in turn reacts, and so on. For want of something better, we end up fastening the two ends of the chain together with a bit of string called ideology. And, more seriously still, we take the points of impact of successive practices to be preexisting objects that these practices were aiming for: their targets. Madness and the common good throughout the ages have been targeted differently by successive societies whose "attitudes" were not the same, so that they touched the target at different points. No matter: we can salvage our optimism and our rationalism, for these practices, however different they appear to be (or, rather, however unevenly they may have carried out the same attempt), still had a justification, namely, the target, which does not change (only the "attitude" of the marksman changes). If we are extremely optimistic, as few have been for at least a century, we shall conclude that humanity is making progress, that it is getting closer and closer to its goal. If our optimism is more retrospective indulgence than hope, we shall say that in the course of their history people gradually exhaust the totality of truth, that each society reaches one part of the goal and illustrates one potentiality of the human condition.

But we are most often optimists in spite of ourselves: we are well aware that indulgence is rarely called for and that societies are only what they are historically; for example, we understand that each society has its own list of what we call the tasks of the State: some societies want gladiators, others want social security; we know perfectly well that different civilizations have different attitudes toward "madness." In short, we believe both that no state resembles any other and also that the state is the State. Or, rather, we believe in the State only at the level of words: for,

since we have become prudent, we would not dream of drawing up a complete list or an ideal list of the tasks of the State. We know all too well that history is more inventive than we are and we do not rule out the possibility that the State will one day be held responsible for unhappy love affairs. Thus we avoid drawing up a theoretical list, and we settle for an empirical, open list: we "record" what tasks the State has found itself asked to perform to date. In short, for us the State with its tasks is merely a word, and the optimistic faith that we have in this natural object must not be very sincere, since it does not act. The fact remains that the word continues to make us believe in a thing called the State. It makes no difference that we know that that State is not an object whose theoretical investigation we might undertake in advance or whose unfolding would allow us to discover it little by little; we continue nonetheless to fix our sights on it, instead of trying to discover, beneath the surface, the practice of which it is simply a projection.

Our mistake is not that we believe in the State, whereas only states exist: our mistake is that we believe in the State or in states, and we fail to study the practices that project the objectivizations we mistake for the State or its varieties. As history unfolds, various political practices spring up, taking the shape of social security in one case, gladiatorship in another. We tend to view this field of explosions, in which all sorts of different machines are blowing up in all directions, as a kind of firing range or shooting gallery, the site of a contest in marksmanship; thus we are greatly disturbed by the degree to which shots that hit the so-called target fall wide of the mark. This is known as the problem of Unity and Multiplicity. "The points of impact are so far apart! One projectile lands on gladiators, another on social security. Given such dispersal, how can we ever determine the exact position of the target? Do we even know for sure that all the shots were aimed at the same target? Ah! the problem of Multiplicity is a tough one; it may be insoluble!" Indeed—because it does not exist. The problem disappears when we stop mistaking extrinsic determinations for modalities of the State; it vanishes when we stop believing in the existence of a target, that is, natural objects.

We need to substitute a philosophy of relation, then, for a philosophy of objects taken as end or as cause; and we need to grasp the problem at its center, by way of practice or discourse. A practice gives rise to the objectivizations that correspond to it, and it is anchored in the realities of the moment, that is, in the objectivizations of neighboring practices. Or, to be more precise, a practice actively fills the void left by neighboring practices; it *actualizes* the potentialities that these neighboring practices prefigure in hollow form. If these practices are transformed, if the periphery of the hollow shifts, if the senate vanishes and if a new ethics of the human body comes to the fore, the practice will actualize these new potentialities, and it will no longer be the same practice as before. It is thus not by virtue of some personal conviction or caprice that the emperor is transformed from leader of a flock to father of a child-people; in a word, it is not through ideology.

Saint Augustine called this actualization love (the vocabulary of scholasticism comes in handy here), and he made it a teleology. Like Spinoza, Deleuze does nothing of the sort; he calls it desire, a word that has given rise to comic misunderstandings on the part of the "new philosophers" (Deleuze as drug pusher). Desire in Deleuze's sense is the most obvious thing in the world, so much so that it is virtually invisible. It is the correlative of reification: to walk is a desire; to coddle a child-people is a desire; to sleep and to die are desires. Desire is the fact that mechanisms function, that assemblages work, that potentialities, including that of sleeping, are realized rather than not; "every assemblage expresses and creates a desire by constructing the plane that makes it possible."[4] *L'amor che muove il sole e l'altre stelle.* It suffices, through the accident of birth, for a certain baby to be born in the king's chambers, as heir to the throne; he will automatically be interested in his job as king, he would not give it up for an empire, or, rather, he will not even ask himself whether or not he wants to be king. He is king, that is all; that is what desire is. Does man have such a need, then, to be king? A moot question: man has a "will to power," to actualization, which is indeterminate; it is not happiness that he is seeking. He does not have a list of specific needs to satisfy, after which he would remain quietly in a chair in his room; he is the actualizing animal, and he realizes the potentialities of all sorts that come his way: *non deficit ab actuatione potentiae suae,* as Saint Thomas put it.[5] Without which, of

4. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York, 1987), p. 96.

5. In other words, the notion of desire means that there is no such thing as human nature, or rather that human nature is a form with no content apart from what history provides. It means, too, that the opposition between individual and society is a false problem; if we conceive of the individual and society as two realities external to one another, then we can imagine that one causes the other: causality presupposes exteriority. But if we realize that what is called society already includes the participation of individuals, the problem disappears: the "objective reality" of society includes the fact that individuals are interested in it and make it function. To put it in somewhat different terms, the only potentialities an individual can realize are those that are tentatively sketched out in the surrounding world and that the individual actualizes by virtue of the fact that he or she is interested in them; the individual fills in the hollow forms that "society" (that is, other individuals or collectivities) outlines. The capitalist would not be an "objective reality" if he did not include a capitalist mind-set as his driving force; without that mind-set the capitalist would not exist at all. The notion of desire thus also means that the opposition between the material and the ideal, the infrastructure and the superstructure, is meaningless. The idea of efficient cause, as opposed to the idea of actualization, is a dualist idea, that is, an idea whose time is past. In his fine study of the notion of basic personality according to Kardiner, Claude Lefort does a good job of showing how the idea that the individual and society are two separate realities united by a causal relation leads to aporias; see Claude Lefort, *Les Formes de l'histoire: Essais d'anthropologie* (Paris, 1978), pp. 69ff. Why, then, should the term *desire* be used for the fact that people are interested in virtual arrangements and that they make these arrangements work? Because, it seems to me, affectivity is the mark of our

course, nothing would ever happen. For an unrealized potentiality, a potentiality "in the wild state," could have nothing but a phantom existence. What would madness be, "materially," apart from a practice that makes it madness? One does not say to oneself: "All right, so I'm an emperor's son, and the senate is gone, but let's set all that aside and ask rather how we ought to treat the governed. Say, now! there's one belief, Christian ideology, that strikes me as particularly convincing on this issue." No: one discovers that one is father-king without even having had time to think about it, one *is* father-king, and, that being the case, one behaves accordingly, "things being what they are."

Actualization and causality are two different things. That is why there is neither any such thing as ideology nor any such thing as belief. Belief in the paternal nature of royal power or the ideology of the welfare state cannot act on consciousness and thereby influence practice, since, on the contrary, practice itself is what objectivizes in the first place, objectivizes a father-king rather than a priest-king or a guide, objectivizes a child-people rather than a people to be led to eternal salvation or a herd. Now, a sovereign who "is" the father-king and who finds himself "objectively" matched with a child-people cannot fail to know what he is and what his people is; he has the ideas or the mind-set corresponding to his "objective" situation. For people do think about their own practice; they are more or less aware of what they are doing. Their practice, potentially coupled with their own awareness of it, fills the void left by neighboring practices and consequently is explained by the latter. People's consciousness does not explain their practice, nor is consciousness itself explained by neighboring conditions, either as ideology or as the result of belief or superstition.

> There [is] no need . . . to pass through the authority of an individual or collective consciousness in order to grasp the place of articulation of a political practice and theory; there [is] no need to try to discover to what extent this consciousness may, on the one hand, express silent conditions, and, on the other, show that it is susceptible to theoretical truths; one [does] not need to pose the psychological problem of an act of consciousness. [*AK*, p. 194]

The notion of ideology is merely a blunder deriving from two quite unnecessary operations, one that mangles and one that trivializes. In the name of materialism, practice is separated from consciousness; in the name of natural objects, what we see is no longer precisely a father-king, no longer precisely flow control but, more banally, the perennial governor or the perennial governed. From this point on we are reduced to designating ideology as the source of all the precision, all the *exceptional* and dated overornamentation characteristic of practice; a father-king will be nothing more than the eternal sovereign, but one influenced by a certain religious ideology, the ideology according to which royal power is paternalistic by nature. Natural objects are diversified by successive ideologies. The genesis of the notion of belief is substantially the same: people's behavior is imputed to some superstition when it is out of the ordinary, and the superstition itself becomes incomprehensible. And that is why we call some mentalities primitive. But, if a mentality or a belief accounts for a practice, we still need to explain the inexplicable, namely, the belief itself; we shall be reduced to noting pitifully that sometimes people believe and sometimes they do not, that they cannot be made to believe in any ideology that is presented to them simply because they are asked to believe, and, furthermore, that they are quite capable of believing in things that, on the level of belief, are mutually contradictory, however compatible they may be in practice. Roman emperors could simultaneously put on gladiator shows and use humanism as a reason to forbid human sacrifices, which the people were not demanding; this contradiction is not contradictory for the leader of a herd, who makes it his practice to give his animals what their instincts require. A father-king, for his part, will seem contradictory in another way: he will not let the bad children have the gladiators they want, and he will put the wicked seducers to death by way of the most fearful tortures.

In short, there is no such thing as ideology, the sacred texts notwithstanding, and we may as well resolve never to use the word again. The term sometimes designates an abstraction, namely, the meaning of a practice (it is in this sense that I have just used it), and sometimes more or less bookish realities, political doctrines, philosophies, even religions, that is, discursive practices. In the example we are considering, ideology is the meaning that can be attributed to the doctrine of the father-king, a doctrine that historians can make explicit on the basis of the king's actions: "Things being as they are," they will write, "and the people being merely a child, the people must be defended against itself, it must be dissuaded from blood lust and bad behavior through exemplary punishments, but only after it has been publicly chastened and threatened." (Naturally there is always the possibility that, if the king has a sense of humor and

---

interest in things: desire is "the set of the affects which are transformed and circulate in an assemblage of symbiosis, defined by the cofunctioning of its heterogeneous parts" (Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, p. 70). In this light, desire, like *cupiditas* for Spinoza, is the origin of all the other affects. Affectivity—the body—is better acquainted with desire than consciousness is. The king thinks he sees his herd grazing because that is what imposes itself on his consciousness, things being what they are. His consciousness believes it sees a reified world; his affectivity alone proves that his world is actualized merely because the king is actualizing it, in other words, is interested in it. To be sure, people may also fail to be interested in a "thing"; but in that case the thing in question fails to exist objectively: thus capitalism does not succeed in existing in Third World countries where a feudal mentality prevails. The term "desiring-machine," found at the beginning of Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (1972; Minneapolis, 1983), is highly evocative of Spinoza (*automaton appetens*).

the gift of expression, he himself may have become aware of all this, like his future historians; but this is another matter.) Moreover, an ideology in the second sense of the word existed during the same period, namely, the Christian religion. That ideology too condemned evil thoughts, but it construed them somewhat differently: carnal temptations were deemed more dangerous than gladiators' blood.

The disappearance of gladiator fighting has long been credited to the influence of Christian doctrine on consciousness. In reality, that disappearance derives from the transformation of political practice, the meaning of which changed since things were no longer "objectively" what they had been.[6] This transformation, for its part, is not a conscious process. The king does not need to be persuaded that the people *is* a child: he sees that perfectly well all by himself; in his soul and consciousness, he will only deliberate about the means and timing he should use to coddle and chastise that child. It is easy to see the difference between ideology in the sense of doctrine and ideology in the sense of the meaning of a practice. (The doctrine in question, moreover, has its own concealed base and corresponds to a discursive practice, but that is another story.) Similarly, historians have disagreed about the increased severity of penal law at the time of the Christian emperors, particularly where sexual offenses were concerned: did this come about through the influence of Christianity? Did the law become more popular because the emperor was more paternalistic with his people, to such an extent that he applied the popular ideal of an eye for an eye in thoroughgoing fashion and even went beyond it? The second explanation has to be the correct one.

In any event, here we have two heterogeneous practices. The herd-people had a certain margin of sexual freedom and gladiators died; the child-people has a smaller margin and gladiators no longer die. If these transformations are measured on a scale of values, we may say that humanitarianism has progressed, that law has regressed, and that repression

6. Scientific revolutions have their precursors. The notion of "what goes without saying" broke through timidly, here and there, in phenomenology, and also elsewhere: Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principes fondamentaux de l'histoire de l'art: Le Problème de l'évolution du style dans l'art moderne*, trans. Claire and Marcel Raymond (Paris, 1952), pp. 17, 261, 276; trans. M. D. Hottinger, under the title *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art* (New York, 1932), seems to embody in advance pp. 193–94 of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. To study what-goes-without-saying, we would need to trace the expressions *fraglos* or *taken for granted* among the sociologists who are disciples of Husserl, such as Felix Kaufmann (*Die philosophischen grundprobleme der lehre von der Strafrechtsschuld* [Leipzig, 1929]), Alfred Schutz (*Phenomenology of the Social World*), and even Max Scheler (*Die Wissensformen und die gesellschaft: Probleme einer soziologie des wissens* [Leipzig, 1926], p. 61). But phenomenology could not go any farther, no doubt, less because of the ego cogito (for phenomenology was subtle enough to think it could discern what-goes-without-saying in the very enticing subconscious "fringes" of the cogito) than because of its optimistic rationalism; we need only read Schutz's studies on the social distribution of knowledge, reprinted in his *Collected Papers*, ed. Maurice Natanson, 4 vols. (The Hague, 1962–66), 1:14 and 2:120, to see how an excess of rationalism can cause an admirable subject to be overlooked.

has increased, and these judgments will not be false. But we have done no more than take note of measures; we have not explained the transformations. History as a whole has substituted one misshapen period piece, the child-people, for another, differently misshapen one, the herd-people. This kaleidoscope bears little resemblance to the successive figures of a dialectical development; it cannot be explained by progress in consciousness, or by a decline, or by a struggle between two principles, desire and repression. Every period piece owes its odd shape to the place left vacant for it by the contemporary practices between which it was molded. The cutouts of the various pieces are in no way comparable; they are not robotlike creations, one of which may have more moving parts, more freedom, less repression, than the others. The sexuality of the ancients, if that is what we want to talk about, was not fundamentally more or less repressive than that of the Christians. It was simply based on a different principle: not the normality of reproduction, but activity as opposed to passivity. Thus it gave a different shape to homophilia, accepting active male homosexuality while condemning the passive form—along with female homosexuality—and encompassing the heterosexual search for female pleasure in its condemnation.

When Foucault seems to put on equal footing the unspeakable torture inflicted on Robert-François Damiens (he was quartered for attacking Louis XV with a penknife, though the king was wounded only slightly) and the improvements in prison conditions brought about by nineteenth-century philanthropists, he is not claiming that, if each of us could decide to live in some earlier century, we would not have varying preferences, for every epoch offers attractions and risks that differ according to individual taste. No, he is simply reminding us of four truths. (1) The succession of heterogeneities that has just been evoked does not trace a vector we can call progress. (2) The driving force behind the kaleidoscope is not reason, desire, or consciousness. (3) In order to make rational choices, preference is not enough—we need to be able to compare and thus to aggregate (but according to what conversion rate?) the heterogeneous and measured advantages and disadvantages according to our own subjective scale of values. (4) Finally, and most importantly, we must not fabricate rationalizing rationalisms; we must not hide heterogeneity behind reifications. In exercising the virtue of prudence, we must not compare two icebergs and calculate our preferences while neglecting the concealed base of one of them, nor must we distort the appreciation of the possible by maintaining that "things are as they are," for in fact there are no things: there are only practices. According to this new methodology of history, the truth of the matter is found here, rather than in "discourse" or epistemological breaks, although the latter have had more success in capturing the public's attention. Madness exists as an object only in and through a practice, but the practice in question is not itself madness.

This point of view has provoked outrage. Nevertheless, the idea that madness does not exist is plainly a positivist one: it is the idea of madness in itself that is purely metaphysical, although familiar to common sense. And yet . . . If I were to say that someone who eats human flesh really and truly does eat it, I would obviously be right; but I would also be right to claim that the eater is a cannibal only within a cultural context, within a practice that "valorizes" or objectivizes that mode of nutrition in such a way as to find it barbaric, or, on the contrary, sacred, and, in any case, in such a way as to make something of it. In neighboring practices, moreover, the same eater will be objectivized not as a cannibal but in some other way: he has two arms and is able to work, he has a king and, is objectivized as a member of the child-people or as a beast belonging to the herd. We shall come back shortly to the discussion of this kind of problem, which stirred up heated discussion on an earlier occasion in Parisian circles, on the left bank of the Seine; to be sure, this happened in the fourteenth century. The fact that Foucault took such a decisive step, that of disqualifying the natural object, is what gives his work its philosophical stature, as far as I am able to judge.

A statement such as "attitudes toward *madmen* have varied considerably throughout history" is a metaphysical statement. Only through word play can one depict a madness "that exists materially" apart from a form that shapes it as madness; at most, there are neural molecules arranged in a certain way, sentences or gestures that an observer from Sirius might see as different from those of other humans, who are themselves different from each other. But what exist here are nothing but natural forms, trajectories in space, molecular structures or behaviors; these are *material for* a madness that does not yet exist at this stage. When one comes right down to it, the source of resistance in this polemic is the fact that, all too often, even when people think they are discussing the issue of the material or formal existence of madness, they have in mind another, more interesting problem: is it *correct* to attribute the shape of madness to the material for madness, or should one abandon all rationalist notions of mental health?

To say that madness does not exist is not to claim that madmen are victims of prejudice, nor is it to deny such an assertion, for that matter. The meaning of the proposition lies elsewhere. It neither affirms nor denies that madmen should not be excluded, or that madness exists because it is fabricated by society, or that madness is modified in its positivity by the attitudes various societies hold toward it, or that different societies have conceptualized madness in very different ways; the proposition does not deny, either, that madness has a behaviorist and perhaps a physiological component. But even if madness were to have such components, it would not yet be madness. A building stone becomes a keystone or a header only when it takes its place as part of a structure. The denial of madness is not situated at the level of attitudes toward the object, but at that of its objectivization; it does not mean that the only madmen are the people deemed mad. It means that at a level other than that of consciousness a certain practice is necessary for there even to be an object such as "the madman" to be judged to the best of one's knowledge and belief, or for society to be able to "drive someone mad." Denying the objectivity of madness is a matter of historical perspective and not of "openness to others." Modifications in the way madmen are treated are one thing; the disappearance of the objectivization "the madman" is another matter, one that does not depend on our will, however revolutionary, but one that obviously presupposes a metamorphosis of practices on such a scale that the word *revolution* pales in comparison. Animals do not exist any more than madmen do, though they may be treated well or badly; but, for an animal to begin to lose its objectivization, we need at a minimum the practices of an igloo full of Eskimos, during the long winter's nap, in the symbiosis of men and dogs mingling their warmth. The fact remains that through twenty-five centuries of history societies have objectivized in rather diverse ways the thing called dementia, madness, or insanity; thus we have the right to presume that no natural object is hidden behind the thing, and to doubt the rationalism of mental health. Moreover, it is undeniable that, for example, society can drive a person mad, and we are surely all familiar with examples of the phenomenon; but this kind of thing is not what is meant by the statement "madness does not exist." Whatever may be repeated or insinuated, the philosopher's phrase, whose meaning would have been instantly understood by the fourteenth-century Parisian masters,[7] does not translate its author's choices or obses-

7. For example, see Duns Scotus: "It is necessary to know in this connection that matter is in act, but that it is the act of nothing *[materia est in actu, sed nullius est actus]*; it is something in act, since it is a thing rather than nothing *[est quoddam in actu, ut est res quaedam extra nihil]*, an effectuation of God, a creation arrived at full term. But it is the act of nothing, if only because it serves as the basis for all actualizations" (Duns Scotus, *De rerum principio*, q. VII, art. 1, schol. 4, *Opera Omnia*, 26 vols. [Paris, 1891–95], 3:38B).

I have just amused myself translating into Scotist terms what is perhaps the fundamental problem of philosophy-history according to Foucault: as soon as one goes beyond the problematics of Marxist materialism, which is where many historians stop (but unless he had "convictions," a trained philosopher could not take that problematics seriously for long), one must both deny the transhistorical reality of natural objects and also grant those objects enough objective reality so that they remain something to be explained, and not simply subjective phantoms to be described; it is necessary for natural objects not to exist and for history to remain a reality to be explained. Thus, for Duns Scotus, matter is neither a being of reason nor a physically separable reality. For Foucault (who read Nietzsche in 1954–55, if I remember correctly), phenomenology offered an initial way out of this difficulty. For Husserl, "things" are not extramental *res*, but neither are they simple psychological contents; phenomenology is not a form of idealism. However, essences thus understood were immediate givens to be described, and not pseudo-objects to be explained scientifically or historically. Phenomenology describes a layer of beings that predates science; as soon as one moves on to explain these beings, phenomenology yields deliberately to science, while the essences turn back into things. Foucault ultimately resolved the difficulty through a Nietzschean philosophy of the primacy of relations: *things exist only through relation*, as we

sions. If a reader concludes triumphantly from all this that madness really does exist, except perhaps speculatively, as he had always supposed, that is his business. For Foucault as for Duns Scotus, the material for madness (behavior, neuromicrobiology) really exists, but not as madness; to be mad only materially is precisely not yet to be mad. A man must be objectivized as a madman for the prediscursive referent to appear retrospectively as material for *madness;* for why consider behavior and nerve cells rather than fingerprints?

Thus it would be wrong to accuse Foucault, a philosopher who believes that matter exists in act, of being an idealist (in the popular sense of the word). When I showed the present text to Foucault, he responded roughly as follows: "I personally have never written that *madness does not exist,* but it can be written; for phenomenology, madness exists, but it is not a thing, whereas one has to say on the contrary that madness does not exist, but that it is not therefore nothing." One may even say that nothing exists in history, since in history everything depends on everything else, as we shall see—which is to say that things exist only materially: they have a faceless, not yet objectivized existence. The claim that sexuality, for example, is practice and "discourse" does not mean that sex organs do not exist, or that what was called the sex drive before Freud came along does not exist; "'prediscursive'" referents (*AK,* p. 47) such as these are the footings of a practice, on the same basis as the importance or the disappearance of the Roman senate. But they are not pretexts for rationalism, and that is the point here. The prediscursive referent *is not* a natural object, a target for teleology: there is no return of the repressed. There exists no "eternal problem" of madness, considered as a natural object constituting a challenge that elicits varied responses through the ages. Molecular differences no more constitute madness than do differences between fingerprints; differences in behavior and reasoning are no more madness than are our differences in handwriting or differences of opinion.

What we see as the stuff of madness will be material for something entirely different in another practice. Since madness is not a natural object, we cannot have a "reasonable" discussion of the "correct" attitude to be "adopted" towards it. For what is called reason (and what philosophers have been concerned with) does not stand out against a neutral background, and it does not make pronouncements about realities. It speaks,

shall see further on, *and the determination of this relation is precisely what explains things.* In short, everything is historical, everything depends on everything else (and not on relations of production alone), nothing exists transhistorically, and to explain a so-called object amounts to showing on what *historical* context it depends. The only difference between this conception and Marxism is that, in sum, Marxism has a naive view of causality (one thing depends on *an* other, smoke depends on fire). However, the notion of a single determining cause is prescientific.

on the basis of "discourses" of which it is unaware, about objectivizations of which it is unaware (and with which those who have been called historians might do well to be concerned). All this displaces the borders of philosophy and history because in both cases it transforms their content. Their content is transformed because what was meant by truth is transformed. For some time now, nature and convention have been cast in opposition to one another; more recently, nature has been pitted against culture. There has been a good deal of talk about historical relativism and the arbitrariness of culture. History and truth. It had to break down sooner or later. History has become the story of what men have called truths and of their struggles over those truths.

Here, then, is a wholly *material* universe, made up of prediscursive referents that remain faceless potentialities; in this universe practices that are never the same engender, at varying points, objectivizations that are never the same, ever-changing faces. Each practice depends on all the others and on their transformations. Everything is historical, and everything depends on everything else. Nothing is inert, nothing is indeterminate, and, as we shall see, nothing is inexplicable. Far from being dependent upon our consciousness, this world determines our consciousness. A first consequence is that a given referent is not charged with becoming one particular changeless face; it does not have to become a particular objectivization: state, madness, or religion. This is the celebrated theory of discontinuities: there is no such thing as "madness through the ages," or religion through the ages, or medicine through the ages. Preclinical medicine had nothing in common with nineteenth-century medicine but the name; conversely, if we are looking for a seventeenth-century phenomenon that has something in common with what we mean by nineteenth-century historical science, we will find it not in the historical genre but in controversy (in other words, what resembles what we call History is the book called *Histoire des variations,* a book that is still admirable and, moreover, highly readable, rather than the unreadable *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*). In short, in a given era the set of practices gives rise, on a given material point, to a unique historical countenance in which we think we recognize what is called, in vague terms, historical science or religion; but what takes shape at that same point in another era will have its own unique and very different countenance and, conversely, a countenance vaguely similar to the earlier one will take shape at a some other point. This is what denying the existence of natural objects means: across the ages we do not encounter the evolution or modification of a single object that always appears in the same place. We are dealing with a kaleidoscope, not a tree nursery. Foucault does not say: "For my part, I prefer discontinuity, breaks," but: "Beware of false continuities." A false natural object such as religion or a certain religion aggregates very dissimilar elements (ritualism, sacred books, a sense of security, disparate emotions, and so on) that, in other eras, will be expressed in

very different practices and objectivized through these practices in very different guises. As Deleuze would say, trees do not exist; only rhizomes exist.

As accessory consequences, we find that there is no such thing as functionalism or institutionalism. History is an amorphous terrain, not a firing range: through the centuries, the institution we know as the prison is not a function that meets a continuing need, and the transformations of that institution cannot be explained by the successes or failures of such a function. We have to begin with a global viewpoint, that is, with successive practices, for, according to the historical period, the same institution will fulfill different functions and vice versa. Moreover, a given function exists only by virtue of a practice, and it is not the practice that responds to the "challenge" of the function (the function "bread and circuses" exists only in and through the practice of "leading the herd"; there is not a timeless function of redistribution or depoliticization spanning the centuries).

As a result, the opposition between diachrony and synchrony, between genesis and structure, is a false problem. Genesis is nothing more than the actualization of a structure;[8] in order for us to be able to contrast the structure known as medicine with its slow genesis, there would have to be continuity, medicine would have had to grow like a thousand- year-old tree. Genesis does not go from beginning to end; origins do not exist, or, if they do, they are rarely beautiful, as others have noted. Nineteenth-century medicine cannot be explained by starting with Hippocrates and moving forward through time, which does not exist; there were only successive structures (medicine in Molière's day, the clinic), *each* of which had its own genesis, a genesis that is explained in part by the transformations of the preceding medical structure and in part by the transformations of the rest of the world, in all probability; for why should a structure be entirely explicable in terms of the preceding structure? Why, on the contrary, should the successor structure be completely foreign to its predecessor? Once again, our author clears away metaphysical fictions and false problems, positivist that he is. It is odd that this enemy of trees should have been taken for a creationist. Foucault is a historian of the purest sort: everything is historical, history is entirely explicable, and *all words ending in -ism have to be rooted out.*

In history only individual or even singular constellations exist, and each one can be fully explained on the sole basis of the means available. Without recourse to the social sciences? Since every discourse, every practice has its anchor-points and its objectivizations, it seems difficult to speak of the former and the latter without drawing to some extent, for example, on linguistics or economics, if we are talking about linguistic or economic anchor-points; this is something Foucault scarcely mentions, either because it is more or less self-evident, or because he does not much believe in it, or because it is not what interests him. Unless I am blinded by my own egotism here—for in my inaugural lecture at the Collège de France I contended that history had to be written with the help of the social sciences and that it implied invariants. Be that as it may, it seems to me that the crucial issue for Foucault is the following: even if history were subject to scientific explanation, would the science in question be situated at the level of our rationalisms? Are the invariants of historical explanation the same thing as "natural objects"?

This, I believe, is the real nub of the question for Foucault. It is of little importance to him that the inevitable invariants are organized, at least here and there, in a system of scientific truths, or that one cannot go beyond a simple typology of historical conjunctures, or that the invariants can be reduced to formal propositions, to a philosophical anthropology like that of Spinoza's Book II or *The Genealogy of Morals*. The main point is that the social sciences, if sciences there must be, cannot be a rationalization of natural objects, a body of knowledge for the elite. They presuppose first and foremost a historical analysis of natural objects, that is, a genealogy, a bringing to light of the practice or discourse in question.

After the historian has done his work with them, can the invariants be organized in a hypothetico-deductive system? This is a factual question of minor interest: science does not refer to a constitutive activity of the mind, to a harmony between being and thought, to Reason, but more modestly to the fact that, in certain sectors, the movements of the kaleidoscope, the throw of the dice, the concurrence of historical moments, turn out to form relatively isolated systems, servo-mechanisms that, as such, are repetitive; this is often the case with physical phenomena. As for knowing whether the same thing holds true, at least here and there, in human history, the question is an interesting one, but it is limited in scope, indeed doubly so. It consists in asking oneself what phenomena are like, and not what the demands of Reason are; in no way can it lead to devaluing historical explanation as unscientific. Science is not a higher form of knowledge; it is knowledge that is applied to "models in series," whereas historical explanation deals with "prototypes," one case at a time. Owing to the very nature of the phenomena under investigation, science has formal models as invariants; historical explanation has truths that are more formal still. Although wholly caught up in the circumstantial, historical explanation is not a whit less rigorous than science. *Positivisme oblige.*

To be sure, positivism is only a relative program and a negative one. One is always a positivist with respect to someone else, someone whose rationalizations one denies; after the metaphysical fictions have been swept away, positive knowledge still has to be reconstructed. Historical analysis begins by establishing that there is no such thing as a State, not

8. See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York, 1994), pp. 183–84.

even a Roman State, but only correlatives (a herd to guide, a flow to manage) of dated practices each of which, in its own time, seemed to be self-evident, seemed to be politics itself. Now, since only the determinate exists, the historian does not account for politics itself, but rather for the herd, the flow, and other determinations; for politics, the State and Power do not exist.

But then how can one explain without banking on mainsprings, on invariants? Otherwise explanation would give way to intuition (one does not explain the color blue, one takes note of it) or to the illusion of understanding. Of course: except that the formal requirement of invariants does not prejudge the level at which these same invariants will be situated. If the explanation discovers relatively isolable subsystems in history (a given economic process, a given organizational structure), the explanation will settle for applying a model to them or at least relating them to a principle ("a door must be either open or closed; the algebraic sum of the stakes of a game of international security must be zero, whether the interested parties know it or not; if they did not know it, or if they preferred another outcome, that explains their fate"). If, on the contrary, the historical event is entirely circumstantial, the search for the invariant will not stop until the seeker arrives at anthropological propositions.

Except that these anthropological propositions themselves are formal, and history alone gives them content. There is no concrete transhistorical truth, no material human nature, no return of the repressed. For the idea of a repressed nature has no meaning except in the case of an individual, who has had his own history; in the case of societies, what is repressed in one era is in reality the different practice of another, and the eventual return of this so-called repressed is in reality the genesis of a new practice. Foucault is not the French Marcuse. I referred earlier to the horror inspired in the Romans by the very gladiator they perceived simultaneously as a star; was that horror, which did not succeed in bringing gladiatorship to an end before the time of the Byzantine Empire, a repressed fear of murder during a state of civil peace? Would fear of murder be a transhistorical requirement stemming from human nature, a requirement that governing authorities in all eras would do well to take into account, on the grounds that if the front door is shut it will come in through the back? No; for in the first place this fear was not repressed but rather modified through reactivity (the reactivity discussed in *The Genealogy of Morals*—here is an invariant mainspring with a philosophical flavor). It was a pharisaical disgust at the sight of death's prostitute, the gladiator. Secondly, the so-called transhistorical fear of murder is not transhistorical at all. It is material; it is concrete; it has to do with a specific governmental practice; it is the fear of seeing an innocent citizen die, within the secure space of civil peace, which implies a certain politico-cultural discourse, a certain practice of the city-state. This so-called natural fear cannot be enunciated in purely formal terms, even in a truism. It does not exist formally; it is not fear of death or murder (for it allows the murder of criminals).

For Foucault, the interest of history does not lie in the elaboration of invariants, whether these remain in the realm of philosophy or organize themselves into social sciences; it lies in using the invariants, whatever they are, to dissolve the rationalisms that keep on springing up. History is a Nietzschean genealogy. That is why history according to Foucault passes itself off as philosophy (which is neither true nor false); it is very far, in any case, from the empiricist vocation traditionally attributed to history. "Let no one enter here unless he is or becomes a philosopher." Foucault's is a history written in abstract terms rather than in the semantics of a specific period still invested with local color; it is a history that seems to find partial analogies everywhere, to sketch out typologies—for a history written in a web of abstract words offers less picturesque diversity than anecdotal narration.

This history of a humorous or ironic bent dissolves appearances, and thus it has created the impression that Foucault is a relativist ("what was true a thousand years ago is an error today"). As a history that rejects natural objects and ratifies the kaleidoscope, it has created the impression that Foucault is a skeptic. He is neither. For a relativist judges that men have held different views, over the centuries, of the *same* object: "About Man, about Beauty, some have thought one thing at one moment whereas others, in another era, have thought something else; how can anyone figure out what is true?" For our author, this is much ado about nothing, because the point at issue is precisely *not* the same from one era to another; as for the point that demonstrably belongs to a given era, the truth is perfectly explicable, devoid of any wobbly indeterminacy. Foucault would undoubtedly subscribe to statements affirming that humanity only sets itself tasks it can accomplish:[9] at any given moment, human practices are what all of history makes them, so that at any given moment humanity is adequate to itself—which is not very flattering for humanity. Nor does the denial of natural objects lead to skepticism; no one doubts that rockets aimed at Mars will, thanks to Newton's calculations, reach their target, and Foucault does not doubt, I hope, that Foucault is right. He simply reminds us that the objects of a science and the very notion of science are not eternal truths. And Man, quite clearly, is a false object: the human sciences do not thereby become impossible, but they are obliged to change their object, an enterprise undertaken by the physical sciences as well.

In reality, the problem lies elsewhere. If I am not mistaken, the notion of truth is disrupted because philosophical truth, having to confront

9. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1974), no. 196: "One hears only those questions for which one is able to find answers." Marx says that humanity solves all the problems it sets itself; Nietzsche says that it sets itself only problems it can solve; compare *AK*, pp. 44–45, and Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 158.

the truths of scientific inquiry, has been replaced by history. Before, all science was provisional and philosophy was aware of this; now, all science is provisional and historical analysis demonstrates this, over and over. Analyses such as those of medicine, modern sexuality, or Roman power are perfectly valid or at least they may be. What cannot be valid, on the other hand, are claims to knowledge of the nature of sexuality "in general" or power "in general": not because the truth about these grandiose objects cannot be reached, but because there is no place for truth or for error either, since these grandiose objects do not exist. Big trees do not grow in kaleidoscopes. Men believe they do, they may be made to believe this, and they may even fight over their belief, but that is another story. The fact remains that so far as sexuality is concerned, or Power, or the State, or madness, or a lot of other things, there can be no truth and no error, since these "things" do not exist; one cannot make true or erroneous statements about the digestive or reproductive processes of centaurs.

At every moment, the world is what it is: the fact that its practices and objects are *exceptional*, that they are surrounded by emptiness, does not mean that they are surrounded by some truth which no one has grasped to date. The figures the kaleidoscope will produce in the future will be neither more nor less true than earlier ones. There is, in Foucault, no repressed and no return of the repressed; there is nothing unsaid clamoring to be heard:

> the positivities that I have tried to establish must not be understood as a set of determinations imposed from the outside on the thought of individuals, or inhabiting it from the inside, in advance as it were; they constitute rather the set of conditions in accordance with which a practice is exercised. . . . These positivities are not so much limitations imposed on the initiative of subjects as the field in which that initiative is articulated. [*AK*, pp. 208–9]

Consciousness cannot balk at the conditions of history, since consciousness is not constitutive but constituted. To be sure, it rebels continually, rejecting gladiators, discovering or inventing the Poor. These rebellions signify the establishment of a new practice, not an eruption of the absolute.

> The existence of systems of rarefaction does not imply that, over and beyond them lie great vistas of limitless discourse, continuous and silent, repressed and driven back by them, making it our task to abolish them and at last to restore it to speech. Whether talking in terms of speaking or thinking, we must not imagine some unsaid thing, or an unthought, floating about the world, interlacing with all its forms and events.[10]

Foucault is no more an unwitting Malebranche than he is the Lacan of history. Let me go even further and declare that he is not a humanist. For what is a humanist if not someone who believes in semantics? Now "discourse," for humanists, is the negation of semantics. But this cannot be! Language does not reveal reality, and Marxists ought to be the first to understand this and to keep the history of words in its proper place. No, language is not born against a background of silence; it is born against a background of discourse. A humanist is someone who interrogates texts and people *at the level of what they are saying*, or rather who does not even suspect that there could be any other level.

Foucault's philosophy is not a philosophy of "discourse" but a philosophy of relation. For relation is the name of what has been called structure. Instead of a world made up of subjects, or objects, or the dialectic between them, a world in which consciousness knows its objects in advance, targets them, or is itself what the objects make of it, we have a world in which relation is primary. Structures are what give to matter their own objective faces. In this world, one does not play chess with eternal figures, the king or the fool; the chessmen are what the successive configurations of the chessboard make of them. Thus

> we should try to study power, not starting from the primitive terms of relation, civil subject, State, law, sovereign, and so on, but starting from relation itself, insofar as it is relation that determines the elements on which it bears; rather than asking ideal subjects what they may have yielded of themselves or of their powers in order to allow themselves to be subjected, we have to try to find out how relations of subjection can manufacture subjects.[11]

Foucault is a philosopher of relation who does not ontologize Power or anything at all; if anyone does, it is those who speak only of the State, whether to bless it or curse it or define it "scientifically," whereas the State is the simple correlative of a certain specifically dated practice.

Madness does not exist; only its relation to the rest of the world exists. To find out how a philosophy of relation plays itself out, we have to see it at work on a well-known problem, that of the enrichment of the past and its works in terms of the interpretations that the future will give it through the centuries. In a well-known passage in *The Creative Mind*, Henri Bergson studies this apparent action of the future on the past.

10. Foucault, "The Discourse on Language," trans. Rupert Swyer, appendix to Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1982), p. 229.

11. Foucault, "Il faut défendre la société," *Annuaire du Collège de France* (Paris, 1976), p. 361.

Concerning the notion of preromanticism, he writes:

> If there had not been a Rousseau, a Chateaubriand, a Vigny, a Victor Hugo, not only should we never have perceived, but also *there would never really have existed,* any romanticism in the earlier classical writers, for this romanticism of theirs only materialises by lifting out of their work a certain aspect, and this slice (découpure), with its particular form, no more existed in classical literature before romanticism appeared on the scene than there exists, in the cloud floating by, the amusing design that an artist perceives in shaping to his fancy the amorphous mass.[12]

The paradox of selective cutouts is known today as the paradox of multiple "readings" of a given work. Here we have the problem of relation in a nutshell, and it is especially the problem of the individual.

Leibniz writes about a traveler in India who does not know that, back home, his wife has died.[13] The traveler nevertheless is truly transformed: he becomes a widower. To be sure, "being a widower" is only a relation (the same person may be at the same time a widower with respect to his late wife, a father with respect to his son, and a son with respect to his father); the fact remains that the relation resides in the individual who bears it *(omne praedicatum inest subjecto):* to have a relation of widowerhood is to *be* a widower. It must be one thing or the other, we will be told. The husband's status may be determined from without, just as the preromantic cutout is only, according to some, an interpretation inflicted from without on classical works that are helpless to defend themselves; in this case, the truth of a text will be what is said about it and the individual—father, son, spouse and widower—is what the rest of the world makes of him. Alternatively, the relation may be internal, emerging from within the interested party itself; it was inscribed from time immemorial, in the traveler-monad, that he would be a widower and God could read his future widowerhood in that monad (which obviously presupposes that, through a preestablished harmony, the monad married to the traveler dies for her part at the appropriate moment, just as two well-synchronized clocks mark the fatal hour at the same moment); in this case, everything that is said about a text will be true. In the first case, nothing is true of an individuality, traveler, or work; in the second case, everything is true, and the text, stuffed to the bursting point, contains in

12. Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind,* trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York, 1946), p. 24. The Bergsonian idea of the enrichment of the past by the future is also found in Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* no. 94, "Growth after Death"; see also Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits,* trans. R. J. Hollingdale, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1986), 2:217, no. 12 and *The Will to Power,* trans. Kaufmann and Hollingdale (New York, 1967), no. 974.

13. See Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Philosophische Schriften,* trans. and ed. Hans Heinz Holz, 3 vols. in 5 (Darmstadt, 1965–85), 5:129. Cited by Yvon Belaval, *Leibniz critique de Descartes* (Paris, 1960), p. 112.

advance the most contradictory interpretations. This is what Russell calls the problem of external and internal relations.[14] In fact, it is the problem of individuality.

Does a work have only the import that is attributed to it? Does it have all the imports that may be discovered in it? And what becomes of the import given it by the chief interested party, the author? For the problem to arise, the work has to exist, has to have been erected like a monument; it has to be a full-fledged individuality, complete with meaning, with import. Only then can one be astonished that this work in which nothing is lacking, neither text (in print or manuscript) nor meaning, is additionally capable of receiving new meanings from the future, or that it perhaps already contains all other meanings imaginable. But what if the work did not exist? What if it received its meaning only through relation? What if its meaning, which can be declared authentic, were quite simply the import that it had in relation to its author or to the period in which it had been written? What if, similarly, the imports to come were not enrichments of the work but other imports, different but not competing ones? What if all these imports, past and future, were different individuations of a matter that received them indifferently? In this case, the problem of relation vanishes, along with the work's individuality. The work, as an individuality that supposedly retains its physiognomy through time, *does not exist* (only its relation to each of its interpreters exists), but it *is not nothing:* it is determined in each relation; the meaning it had in its time, for example, may be the object of positive discussions. What exists, on the other hand, is the *matter* of the work, but that matter is nothing, so long as the relation has not made one thing or another of it. As Duns Scotus said, matter is in act, without being the act of any thing. This matter is the manuscript or printed text, insofar as that text is *capable of* taking on *a* meaning, is made to have *a* meaning and is not some gobbledygook typed out at random by a monkey at a keyboard. Relation comes first. That is why Foucault's method very probably grew out of a reaction against the wave of phenomenology that came along immediately after the Liberation in France. Perhaps Foucault's problem was the following: how can one do better than a philosophy of consciousness and still avoid falling into the aporias of Marxism? Or perhaps it was the inverse: how can one escape a philosophy of the subject without falling into a philosophy of the object?

Phenomenology is not guilty of being an "idealism," but it can be faulted for being a philosophy of the cogito. Husserl does not bracket off the existence of God and the devil into parentheses only in order to open the brackets back up surreptitiously, as Lukács claimed; when Husserl describes the centaur's essence, he leaves pronouncements about its exis-

14. See Bertrand Russell, *Principles of Mathematics* (London, 1937), pars. 214–16, and Jean Claude Pariente, *Le Langage et l'individuel* (Paris, 1973), p. 139.

tence or nonexistence and its physiological functions to the sciences. Phenomenology goes awry not when it fails to explain things (since it never promised to explain them) but when it describes them on the basis of consciousness, taken as constitutive and not as constituted. Every explanation of madness presupposes first of all an accurate description of madness. For such a description, can we rely on what our consciousness allows us to see? Yes, if consciousness is constitutive, if, as the saying goes, it knows reality "as well as if it had made it itself." No, if consciousness is constituted without its own knowledge, if it is the unwitting dupe of a constituting historical practice. And our consciousness is indeed duped. It believes that madness exists, although it hastens to add that madness is not a thing, since our consciousness finds itself so much at home there—provided that it shows enough subtlety in its descriptions to slip into that familiar place. And we have to acknowledge that the subtlety of phenomenological description does elicit admiring exclamations.

Now it is curious that Marxists share the same belief in the object (and the same belief in consciousness: the consciousness of agents is the medium through which ideology acts on reality). The explanation starts from a given object, the relation of production, and moves on to other objects. We hardly need to recall here for the hundredth time the inconsistencies to which this approach leads: that in no case can a historical object, an event, such as the relation of production, explain "in the final analysis"; in no case can it be a prime mover, since the object itself is a conditioned event. If the use of water-powered mills causes serfdom, then we need to ask for what historical reasons water-powered mills were used rather than whatever method had been customary before; thus our prime mover is no such thing. There can be no *event in the final analysis;* that is a contradiction in terms. The Scholastics explained this in their own way by saying that a prime mover cannot have any force: if it belongs to the order of the virtual before it exists, if it is an event, it must have causes in order to be actualized, and thus it is no longer a last resort. Let us skip over the subsequent muddles, which do not elicit admiring exclamations; the relation of production ultimately becomes the label for everything that is useful for explaining how the world works, including symbolic property—which amounts to jumping into the pond to get out of the rain. What the relation of production is supposed to explain is now part of the relation of production. Consciousness itself is part of the object that is supposed to determine it. What is most important lies elsewhere, however: it is the fact that objects continue to exist; people continue to speak of the State, power, the economy, and so on. Not only do the spontaneous teleologies thus remain in place, but the object to be explained is taken as an explanation, and that explanation moves on from one object to another. We have seen the difficulties to which this has led; we have also seen that it perpetuated the teleological illusion, idealism in Nietzsche's sense, the "history and truth" aporia. In contrast, Foucault proposes a positivism in which he invites us to eliminate the last unhistoricized objects, the last traces of metaphysics; and he proposes a materialism according to which explanation no longer proceeds from one object to another, but from everything to everything, and this objectivizes specifically dated objects on faceless matter. For the mill even to be perceived as a means of production and for its use to disrupt the world, it must first be objectivized owing to a step-by-step disruption of the surrounding practices, a disruption that itself . . . and so on ad infinitum. To tell the truth, this is what we historians, like Molière's M. Jourdain, had always believed *at heart.*

The Foucault-style genealogy-history thus completely fulfills the project of traditional history; it does not ignore society, the economy, and so on, but it structures this material differently—not by centuries, peoples, or civilizations, but by practices. The plots it relates are the history of the practices in which men have seen truths and of their struggles over these truths.[15] This new model history, this "archaeology," as its inventor calls it, "is deployed in the dimension of a general history" (*AK,* p. 164); it does not specialize in practice, discourse, the concealed part of the iceberg—or, rather, the concealed part of discourse and practice is not separable from the exposed part. In this regard there is no evolution in Foucault, and the *History of Sexuality* did not innovate when it linked the analysis of a discursive practice to the social history of the bourgeoisie; *The Birth of the Clinic* had already anchored a transformation of medical discourse in institutions, political practice, hospitals; and so on. Every history is archaeological by nature and not by choice. Explaining history and making it explicit consists in first perceiving it whole, in relating the so-called natural objects to the specifically dated and exceptional practices that objectivized the objects, and in explaining the practices not on the basis of a unique motive force but on the basis of all the neighboring practices in which they are anchored. This pictorial method produces strange paintings, in which relations replace objects. To be sure, the paintings are indeed those of the world we know. Foucault is no more an

15. Foucault's method may well be derived from a meditation on section 12 of the second essay of Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals,* trans. Kaufmann and Hollingdale (New York, 1967), pp. 76–79. More generally speaking, the primacy of relation implies an ontology of the will to power; Foucault's work could have as its epigraph two texts from Nietzsche's *The Will to Power.* First: "Against the doctrine of the influence of the milieu and external causes: the force within is infinitely superior; much that looks like external influence is merely its adaptation from within. The very same milieus can be interpreted and exploited in opposite ways: there are no facts *[es gibt keine Tatsachen]*" (no. 70). As we can see, facts do not exist, not only on the level of the interpreting consciousness, but also on the level of reality where they are exploited. Which leads to a critique of the idea of truth, in a second text: "'Interpretation,' the introduction of meaning—not 'explanation.'. . . There are no facts *[es gibt keinen Tatbestand]*" (no. 604). Here the word *interpretation* designates not only the meaning one *finds* in a thing, its interpretation, but also the fact of interpreting it, that is, the meaning one *gives* it.

abstract painter than Cézanne. The landscape around Aix is recognizable, only it is endowed with a violent emotional charge; it seems to be emerging from an earthquake. All the objects, human beings included, are transcribed here in an abstract spectrum of colored relations in which the painter's touch obscures their practical identity[16] and in which their individuality and their limits are blurred. After these thirty-seven pages of positivism, let us reflect a moment on this world in which a faceless and perpetually agitated matter brings into being on its surface, at constantly shifting points, faces that are always different and that do not exist, in which everything is individual, so much so that nothing is.

Foucault is not seeking to reveal that a "discourse," or even a practice, exists: he says that no rationality exists. As long as we believe that "discourse" is an authority or an infrastructure, as long as we ask what relation of causality that authority may have to social or economic evolution, and whether Foucault does not do "idealist" history, we have not yet understood. Foucault's importance is precisely that he is not "doing" Marx or Freud: he is not a dualist, he does not claim to be contrasting reality with appearance, as rationalism does when all else fails, with the return of the repressed as the reward. Foucault, for his part, strips away the reassuring banalities, the natural objects in their horizon of promising rationality in order to restore to reality—the only reality, the unique reality, our reality—its irrational, "exceptional," uncanny historical originality. It is one thing to undress reality in this way in order to dissect it and explain it; it is something else again, something more naive, to think that one is discovering a second reality underneath, a second reality that explains the first and operates it by remote control. Is Foucault still a historian? There is no right or wrong answer to this question, since history is itself one of those false natural objects. History is what one makes of it. It has never stopped changing; it does keep its eye fixed on an eternal horizon. What Foucault does will be called history and, by the same token, will belong to history, if historians avail themselves of the gift he is offering and do not find it too unripe; in any event, the windfall will not remain unclaimed, for natural elasticity (also called will to power, but that expression is so equivocal . . .) abhors a vacuum.