FOUCAULT, VITALISM, RESISTANCE

FOUCAULT, VITALISM, RESISTANCE: THE SUBJECT OF RESISTANCE IN THE THOUGHT OF MICHEL FOUCAULT

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Michel Foucault's elucidation of a mode of subjectivity upon which he could predicate the possibility of resistance to power. While most studies of his thought have emphasized the extent to which, for Foucault, subjects are the products of power, this thesis seeks to examine that mode of subjectivity which, for him, can escape the reach of power or can resist power. This thesis shows that Foucault borrowed extensively from the works of Georges Bataille and Georges Canguilhem in articulating a vitalist conception of the subject, a subject whose ability to resist power resided in the vital forces which traversed it.

In achieving these tasks, this thesis responds to the liberal critics of Foucault who argue that his conception of power effectively eliminates the rationale for or possibility of resistance. The thesis also elucidates for the first time the nature of the intellectual influence Bataille had upon Foucault, showing that Foucault used Bataillean conceptions of sovereignty and the sovereign subject. It also radically reinterprets the influence Canguilhem had on Foucault, showing that, beyond well documented methodological influences, Canguilhem provided Foucault with a framework for theorizing power and resistance.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a history of Michel Foucault's attempts between 1961 and 1979 to conceive of a subject of resistance.[1] It is also an intellectual history of the influence on Foucault of the work of Georges Bataille and Georges Canguilhem (the former a philosopher and social critic, the latter an historian and philosopher of science) who, until recently, have remained largely unknown to the English-speaking world. This study offers a much needed historical approach to the question of Foucault and subjectivity and elucidates important influences on his work which have not been examined before. While philosophers and political and social theorists have often addressed the question of subjectivity in Foucault's thought, their analyses overlook the way in which the question of the subject was an on-going concern for him and that he conceived

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[1]The subject of resistance is that subject who, while susceptible to power, is also capable of resisting its effects. Which is to say, it is a subject which does not derive any of its defining characteristics as a subject from the effects of power. For humanists, the subject of resistance is the rational, individual, meaning-giving subject. For Foucault, as we will see, it is just such a subject that is a product of power. Hence, he was forced to reconceive a subject of resistance.

subjectivity differently over time. Insofar as this thesis seeks to show the influence of Bataille and Canguilhem on Foucault, it inserts Foucault's work within the context of French intellectual life in the fifties, sixties and seventies, in contrast with other studies which have attempted to understand his work in the context of the most important figures of twentieth-century philosophy. While figures such as Nietzsche and Heidegger were especially important to him, I believe my thesis will sustain the proposition that at least on the question of the subject of resistance Canguilhem and Bataille were most influential.

Foucault's efforts to reconceive subjectivity arose against the backdrop of the dominance of existentialism, phenomenology and Marxism in French intellectual life in the late 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s. For him, their dominance constituted a barrier to the essential tasks of philosophy (taken in its literal sense as love of wisdom). As I will explain in more detail in Chapter Two, for Foucault it was the stubborn persistence of an essentially humanist conception of subjectivity even in such supposedly radical philosophies as existentialism and phenomenology that effectively limited the horizons of modern philosophy. Thus, it was important for him to dislodge this conception of subjectivity in order for philosophy to fulfill its aims.

On the whole, though, Foucault's work in the period under consideration was not directly concerned with

the problem of the subject. Nonetheless, his larger project of a history of the conditions of possibility of discourse and social practice (which is to say a history of the conditions of thought which gave rise to certain discourses, which organized experience, and which ultimately determined social practices) indirectly concerned the issue of subjectivity. Foucault sought to show that the subject of humanism and philosophical anthropology was constituted in the tightly integrated and historically contingent nexus of discourses and social practices that arose at the close of the eighteenth century. He also hoped to "decentre" this subject by describing its historical contingency.

As regards the question of subjectivity, it is this Foucault that is most familiar to us. My concern, on the other hand, is to account for those other forms of subjectivity that were the basis upon which he could argue that the social and discursive constitution of subjectivity was not the final word on this question. In his early work - most notably Madness and Civilization - he argued that madness and artistic creation revealed sovereign modes of being, modes of being capable of transgressing the subjectivity to which we have been socialized and capable of contesting the authority of the reason in whose name such socialization is accomplished. In his later work, he predicated resistance upon a certain vitalist conception of the subject.

Foucault, then, was not content simply to "decentre" the subject. He also invested his work with a rhetoric of social and political criticism, without at the same time resorting to a humanist conception of the subject. As a result, his work reveals a tension between an analysis of subjectivity as historically constituted and a non-humanist subjectivity capable of resisting the constitutive effects of given historical configurations of power and knowledge. It is to this latter form of subjectivity that this thesis will turn its attention in addressing the question of how Foucault reconceived the subject.

I will argue that between 1961 and 1964 his reconception of the subject was deeply influenced by the work of Georges Bataille, a shadowy figure of the French intellectual world from the 1920s to the 1960s who sought to articulate the sovereignty, over and against the rational subject, of the subject of "inner experience" - the subject of states of rapture and ecstasy who has lost control of himself. For Foucault, the individual is capable of resistance by dint of an inner, Dionysiac force which contests culture's attempts to constitute individuals as rational, Apollonian subjects. This force, he argues, is evident in the experiences, amongst others, of madness and artistic creation, experiences in which one loses oneself.

In his work from The Order of Things (1966) to The Archaeology of Knowledge (1969), which was primarily con-

cerned with the history and theory of the appearance of discourses, Foucault abandoned all reference to a mode of subjectivity that stood outside the constitutive effects of discourse and social practice. My treatment of these works, therefore, will be necessarily brief. I will, however, attempt to situate them within the context of French intellectual life and Foucault's own *oeuvre* and argue that he introduces, at this time, a "structuralist" conception of the subject. I will also briefly discuss the influence of Georges Canguilhem, who will play a larger role in subsequent chapters.

The rejuvenation of radical politics and the counter-cultural emphasis on experimentation with drugs, sexuality and self-expression that came in the wake of May `68, posed its own challenges to Foucault's circumscription of subjectivity in the years 1966-1969. The openness to new experiences that was in the air suggested the possibility of resistance to the discourses and practices in which subjectivity was constituted. Once again, then, there appears in Foucault's work a tension as he tried to conceive a subject of resistance without reverting to a Dionysiac subject or the subject of humanism, and as he sought to extend and preserve his analyses of the history of the emergence of discourses and practices in which subjectivity was constituted. To define a subject of resistance he turned, once again, to the work of Georges Canguilhem. Yet in this new

conception, Canguilhem's importance was not as an historian of science but as a "philosopher of error," a philosopher who emphasized what he believed to be life's natural mutability of form. From this philosophy Foucault conceived a vitalist subject conceived as that being in whom the energy of life constantly produces mutations of thought and of ways of living that render any final victory by power impossible.

Chapter One is a critical examination of the rather extensive literature on Foucault in which I seek to give some indications of the place this thesis takes up within that literature. In Chapter Two I give a biographical sketch of Foucault, from his birth to his election to the Collège de France in 1969. I also examine the intellectual environment in which Foucault came to intellectual maturity and I outline his critique of the humanist subject which was the point of departure for his reconception of subjectivity. Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six deal with the varying stages of Foucault's reconception of subjectivity and with the influence of Bataille and Canguilhem in this effort. In Chapter Seven I will discuss Foucault's response to the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79, as a moment of crisis in his elucidation of the Dionysiac and the vitalist modes of subjectivity. In the Conclusion I will briefly discuss the significance of this thesis as regards Foucault's status as a philosopher of resistance.

Chapter 1

Getting his Papers in Order

The importance of Foucault's work for the social sciences and humanities has resulted, not surprisingly, in a burst of publishing activity concerning his thought. Yet, the inaccessibility of his thought (because of its radical reinterpretation of several important concepts - such as power and subjectivity - and because of the obscurity of his prose) has meant that many works about him are not interpretive studies, but "guidebooks" to his thought for the uninitiated, or works which examine the methodological implications of his work for a variety of disciplines. The sheer number of such works virtually precludes a thorough review of them. Furthermore, these works neither offer new perspectives on his thought nor directly touch on the issues dealt with in this thesis. Therefore, I have restricted my discussion of secondary works to those which raise issues of direct concern to this work.

Foucault's challenge to the historical discipline has been two-fold. In the first instance, his insistence upon the historicity of both truth and subjectivity has been greeted in the anglo-saxon historical community with both hostility and derision. Foucault's famous comment at the conclusion of The Order of Things, that man is "an invention

of recent date" who would be "erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea,"[1] was a red flag for anglo-saxon historians. It challenged the very assumption behind their work that "man makes history" and is not made by it. Very little of the hostility that Foucault has provoked has made it into print.[2] Yet it is palpable to those historians who have endeavoured both to study his work and to use his insights in their own work.

Yet Foucault's questioning of historians' traditional outlook on the issues of historical truth and human agency were welcomed by some in the profession. Hayden White, a consistently provocative voice in historiography, welcomed Foucault's theoretical challenges to the "*essentially antitheoretical bias that prevails in the profession at large*"[3] - an antitheoretical bias that supports specialization and stands in the way of a "metahistorical" vision.[4] He sees in Foucault's work the attempt to "defamiliarize the phenomena of man, society and culture which have been rendered all too transparent by a century of study, interpretation, and conceptual over-

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[1]Michel Foucault, The Order of Things (New York: Random House, 1971), 387.

[2]Allan Megill, "The Reception of Foucault by Historians," Journal of the History of Ideas, 48 (March 1987), 117-141.

[3]Hayden White, "The Tasks of Intellectual History," The Monist, 53 (1969), 616. Emphasis in original.

[4]*Ibid.*, 626.

determination" at the hands of "the conventional historian" whose task it has been to "*re*familiarize" the reader with all this. In exposing the "'underground' histories of thought" of the main scholarly traditions of the nineteenth century, Foucault "heralds ... the rebirth of a prereligious imagination" and recaptures "the whole of human life ... the *meaning* of which is nothing but what it *is*."[5]

Mark Poster, too, has welcomed Foucault's contribution to history both insofar as he suggests a new way of "deploying history in current political struggles"[6] and insofar as his work can aid critical theory in overcoming certain impasses. Foucault, Poster argues,

> strives to alter the position of the historian from one who gives support to the present by collecting all the meanings of the past and tracing the line of inevitability through which they are resolved in the present to one who breaks off the past from the present and, by demonstrating the foreignness of the past, relativizes and undercuts the legitimacy of the present.[7]

Through the application of the concept of discontinuity, he shows "how the past was different, strange, threatening" and not simply the first step in a progress of humanity that

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[5]Hayden White "Foucault Decoded: Notes From Underground," in Hayden White ed., Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) 256, 251, 259; White, The Monist, 621.

[6]Mark Poster, "Foucault and History," Social Research, 49 (Spring 1982), 116.

[7]*Ibid.*, 117-8.

leads inevitably to the present.[8] For Poster as for Hayden White, Foucault's histories, by defamiliarizing the past, restore to it its proper autonomy and preempt the use of the past to legitimize present conditions.

In Foucault, Marxism, History: Mode of Production vs. Mode of Information and in a collection of essays Critical Theory and Poststructuralism: In Search of a Context, Poster argues that in Foucault, critical theory can find important conceptual advances that allow it successfully to confront and analyze advanced industrial society as it had not been able to do in the past. Foucault, he argues, provides

> models of analysis that contain theoretical elements which, properly interpreted, open up new directions for critical theory, directions which can lead it out of its current impasses. But these new directions only become apparent when certain important changes in the social formation of advanced industrial society are recognized. To that end I have coined the somewhat infelicitous phrase 'mode of information' to represent these changes and to contrast the current situation to Marx's concept of the mode of production.[9]

In showing that effects of power arise not only in social practices but also in the application and articulation of new sciences of the individual, Poster argues that Foucault provides critical theory with the concepts to understand and question the legitimacy of an economic and social system in

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[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Mark Poster, Foucault, Marxism, History: Mode of Production vs. Mode of Information (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), i.

which the working class can be seen to have made a substantial material gain and to have been successfully integrated into the capitalist system. As such, he argues, one faces the "inescapable" conclusion "that Foucault is continuing the work of Western Marxists by other means," that he "remains within its problematic."[10] In these two works Poster hopes to show how, practically, Foucault's work complements Western Marxism's critique of advanced industrial society.

While few historians have come to accept Foucault with the enthusiasm of White and Poster, historical scholarship in the past decade-and-a-half has had to come to terms with the implications of this work for their discipline. Studies of the methodological implications of Foucault's work for historians now dot a variety of scholarly journals and collections of essays. In "Foucault for Historians" Jeffrey Weeks provides a useful guide to Foucault's account of "the emergence of modern forms of rationality" and the "mutual involvements of power and knowledge" for readers of one of history's most decidely Marxist journals.[11] Patricia

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[10]*Ibid.*, 40. Foucault himself often drew attention to the parallels between his work and that of the Frankfurt School. See Michel Foucault, Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori, R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito, trans., (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), 117.

[11]Jeffrey Weeks "Foucault for Historians" History Workshop Journal 14 (Autumn 1982) 106-119. As my discussion below will point out this effort at introducing Foucault to Marxism is overshadowed by a still lingering antipathy of Marxists for Foucault's theoretical propositions.

O'Brien, while noting that since the late 1970s Foucault had gained an entry into anglo-saxon historiography because his "local insights" in studies of the prison or of madness shared with it "common elements in a socio-historical agenda," argues that it has "never been recognized for what it is: an alternative model for writing the history of culture."[12] She then presents the central elements of this methodology and of Foucault's critique of Marxist, *annaliste* and liberal historiography. The fruits of these efforts to introduce historians to Foucault can be seen in the bibliographies of a variety of works of social and intellectual history published in the last decade. As a sign of the increasing relevance of his work for historians, several articles on the application of Foucault's thought to the study of Russian social history were featured in the April 1993 issue of the American Historical Review.[13]

Yet it is only recently - and in a very un-Foucaultian fashion - that historians have sought to make

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[12]Patricia O'Brien, "Michel Foucault's History of Culture" in Lynn Hunt ed., The New Cultural History, (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989) 27, 25.

[13]See Laura Engelstein, "Combined Underdevelopment: Discipline and the Law in Imperial and Soviet Russia," American Historical Review 98 (April 1993), 338-353, and subsequent articles by Rudy Koshar and Jan Goldstein. See also Tina Loo, "Dan Cranmer's Potlatch," Canadian Historical Review (June 1992).

his life and thought the subject of historical inquiry.[14] Until recently the basics of Foucault's life and academic history could be culled from dust covers of his works. The broader intellectual and political context in which his thought developed was alluded to in most studies of his thought, though for long there were few attempts to sustain arguments about the influence of this context. Mark Poster, for instance, argued in Foucault, Marxism, History that in Discipline and Punish and The History of Sexuality he sought to address the limits of critical theory that May `68 had revealed, though he makes no argument that Foucault saw May `68 in these terms. Yet, even on this point, nobody before the 1980s had made the argument as to how in particular May `68 had affected his work or how his work had been influenced by other events or thinkers. For long, the most detailed account of Foucault's life and work was to be found in Alan Sheridan's Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth. But he made plain from the outset his modest aim was "to provide a guidebook" to Foucault's writings. It was not to be seen as an intellectual biography.[15] In the introduction and con-

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[14]In the Introduction to The Archaeology of Knowledge he wrote, "Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order" (Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, (New York: Harper Colophon, 1976), p. 17). This sentiment was characteristic of his early unwillingness to situate himself within intellectual history.

[15]Alan Sheridan, Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth (London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1980), 1.

clusion Sheridan sets the intellectual context in which Foucault was writing - the turning away of Foucault's generation from existentialism and phenomenology; the rise of structuralism; the events of May `68 - and in the course of the work he notes the influence of Nietzsche and Georges Dumézil (historian of ancient religion at the Collège de France) on Foucault's work.[16] Yet the book remained just a guidebook based on quotations from Foucault's works and "précis or disguised quotation."[17]

Another early intellectual history of Foucault's work was Pamela Major-Poetzl's Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Western Culture.[18] In this odd assessment of the influences behind Foucault's work, she stresses the similarities between Foucault's archaeology and field theory in physics. As an intellectual history, the book was a failure and has faded into a well-earned obscurity.

Intellectual history's effort to come to terms with Foucault as an historical figure only began in earnest with Allan Megill's "Foucault, Structuralism, and the Ends of History" (1979) and Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche,

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[16]*Ibid.*, 205, 209.

[17]*Ibid.*, 1.

[18]Pamela Major-Poetzl, Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Western Culture (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida (1985).[19] For Megill, Foucault's work is defined by its essentially Nietzschean and Heideggerian character. He argues that Foucault, like Nietzsche, promotes rather than regrets "a crisis of historical consciousness."[20] Foucault, he contends, borrows from Nietzsche a genealogical approach which calls into question "historical reality itself"[21] and reveals the writing of history to be an essentially literary endeavour the purpose of which is "to deny, through the assertion of a single truth, the multiple truths of things."[22] For Megill, "simply to condemn Foucault's portrayal of the past as mistaken or simply to praise that portrayal as insightful represents a mistaken attempt to assimilate Foucault to the structure of orthodox historiography." Rather, one must understand that "he writes 'history' in order to destroy it, as a discipline, as a mode of consciousness, and as a mode of existence."[23]

In his 1979 article Megill argues that the Nietzschean/Heideggerian aspect of Foucault's thought over-

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[19]Allan Megill, "Foucault, Structuralism, and the Ends of History," Journal of Modern History, 51 (September 1979): 451-503. Allan Megill, Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985).

[20]Megill, 1979, 453.

[21]*Ibid.*, 497.

[22]*Ibid.*, 496.

[23]*Ibid.*, 456.

came his early and unrecognized links to structuralism.[24] On the one hand, he argues that in The Birth of the Clinic and The Order of Things, Foucault abandoned the attempt to reconstruct the "reality of the past" (as he had attempted to reconstruct the actual "experience" of madness in Madness and Civilization).[25] Rather, following Nietzsche, he sought to show "that there is no *signifié original*; for words, which are always invented by the higher classes, do not indicate a *signifié* but rather impose an interpretation."[26] Yet, Megill argues, Foucault's efforts in both works are subverted by a "metaphorics of depth." In "archaeology's" recourse to "depth interpretation in the classic sense ... in the attempt to move from what is visible and superficial to what is invisible, profound and certain" both works remain within the ambit of a logocentric culture. "Foucault's metaphorical bias ... links him at the most basic level to Apollonian formalism and to all the logocentric themes of origin and of end, of *archê* and *telos*, that Apollonian formalism implies."[27] It is only with The

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[24]Megill introduces a curious definition of structuralism. Beyond the narrow "structuralism of the sign," he argues that there is a structuralism constituted by the recourse to spatial metaphors, the effect of which - over and against any Nietzschean decentering - is to promote the logocentrism of Western culture. *Ibid.*, 470-476.

[25]*Ibid.*, 481.

[26]*Ibid.*, 479.

[27]*Ibid.*, 476.

Archaeology of Knowledge, which Megill views as an extended parody of Descartes's Discourse on Method and thus as a parody of depth interpretation, that Foucault finally rejects "Apollonian formalism" and embraces "exteriority" and the Dionysian implications of Nietzsche's thought.[28] It is only after The Archaeology of Knowledge that Foucault abandoned structuralism and let his Nietzscheanism find full voice in his genealogy.[29]

No doubt Foucault was influenced by both Nietzsche and Heidegger and Megill's works began the work of establishing this relation by recourse to Foucault's own recollections about their influence on him. It also provides a plausible interpretation of the influence of Nietzsche on his work. Yet in his desire to cement his interpretation he strains the bounds of credibility. In an attempt to explain lingering concerns about historical objectivity in Foucault's early work, Megill argues that "there was a sense in which he did not *know* that his concern was not ultimately with the past at all, that it was only with the reorientation in his conception of power that he came to see this."[30] He argues that Foucault's structuralism "obscured, both for him and for us, the true nature of his historical voca-

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[28] *Ibid.*, 483-489.

[29] *Ibid.*, 489.

[30] *Ibid.*, 493.

tion."[31] In other words, at those points when Foucault exceeds the bounds of the Nietzschean genealogy attributed to him, Megill writes it off as a sort of false consciousness, suggesting that the immanent logic of his work was betrayed by the work itself.

Paul Rabinow's and Hubert Dreyfus's Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics is an important contribution to the history of Foucault's work. While not historians themselves, their aim is to situate Foucault's work "between two methodological reactions to phenomenology" of the past two decades - structuralism and hermeneutics. In so doing their book provides a very useful account of Foucault's relation to and criticisms of all three of these modes of thought. It also provides a history of the successes and failures of Foucault's developing *oeuvre*, recalling how they pushed him along different routes to achieve his goals. Its authority stems not only from its usefulness but also from the fact that Foucault was, over a period of eight years, both a friend and a colleague to the authors at the University of California at Berkeley. Foucault also gave it his imprimatur, describing it as "a very clear and intelligent analysis of the work that I have attempted to do."[32] This is not surprising, since it seems that the

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[31]*Ibid.*, 459.

[32]Paul Rabinow and Hubert Dreyfus, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), from the dustcover.

authors "tried ... version[s] out on Foucault" before the book went to press.[33]

For Dreyfus and Rabinow the guiding thread of Foucault's work has been his lifelong attempt "to develop a method for the study of human beings and to diagnose the current situation of our society."[34] For them, Foucault is and always has been a philosopher and historian of social practices. It is by viewing Foucault's work in this way that the authors can present its history as a movement from periodic failure to greater methodological clarification. But is the certainty of purpose they attribute to him justified? They argue that in The Birth of the Clinic, The Order of Things and The Archaeology of Knowledge Foucault "was deflected from an interest in ... social practices," that the approach used in these works "led, by its own logic and against Foucault's better judgment, to an objective account of the rule like way discourse organizes ... social practices," that "archaeology serves genealogy" and is, by implication, a subsidiary of his later works of the 1970s.[35] Rabinow, in his introduction to The Foucault Reader, argues that "Foucault's aim" was to examine reason "as a social practice" and that despite The Order of Things and The Archaeology of Knowledge "he never intended to isolate dis-

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[33] *Ibid.*, ii.

[34] *Ibid.*, vii.

[35] *Ibid.*, xii, xxv.

course from the social practices that surround it...."[36] Like Megill, Dreyfus and Rabinow explain away Foucault's deviations from the larger task they attribute to his work as avenues pursued seemingly against his will and his own better judgment. Dreyfus and Rabinow do not seem to take into consideration that his work might not have a single definable character, that it has a history.

This ultimately unconvincing device cried out for a new approach to the intellectual history of Michel Foucault, one that took the various stages of the development of his work as being legitimate in their own terms. In the last few years this has been remedied by Didier Eribon's Michel Foucault, James Miller's The Passion of Michel Foucault and David Macey's The Lives of Michel Foucault. "This book," Eribon wrote, "is a biography, and not, therefore, a study of Foucault's *oeuvre*. But surely the reason for writing a biography of Foucault is that he wrote books."[37] Eribon, then, has tried to "reconstruct the intellectual landscape" in which they were written and which conditioned Foucault's early intellectual development.[38] He is very successful in this effort. Using Foucault's own writings, extensive inter-

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[36]Paul Rabinow "Introduction" to Paul Rabinow (Ed.) The Foucault Reader (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 4-5, 10.

[37]Didier Eribon, Michel Foucault, trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), iii.

[38]*Ibid.*, ii.

views with those who were close to Foucault (both family members and colleagues) and with those who were his intellectual opponents, personal papers and correspondence hitherto unavailable, archival research in locations as widely spread as Uppsala, Tunis, and Berkeley, Eribon's work has become indispensable for those interested in the development of his thought.

Perhaps its greatest merit is that Eribon did "not attempt to reveal 'the' truth about Foucault."[39] By resisting the temptation to provide the "definitive" interpretation of his work, he manages to restore its historicity - the specific demands, questions and influences that gave all his works their particular character. In the process the reader is introduced to a Foucault who was a Nietzschean, who was a Heideggerian, who was concerned with the question of power and "how to study human beings,"[40] but one who did not pursue a single intellectual agenda. In many ways, Eribon's book is workman-like in its reconstruction of the background against which Foucault's work emerged. He is neither an historian nor a philosopher (but, rather, an editor at Le Nouvel Observateur) and he shies away from delving too deeply into philosophical questions. But in portraying Foucault and his thought as the complex interaction of a life and a (shifting) agenda in an equally complex world of

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[39] *Ibid.*, xi.

[40] Dreyfus and Rabinow, xvii.

ideas and sensibilities, he offers a far more convincing account of his *oeuvre* than heretofore.[41]

Miller's book follows, to a certain extent, in Eribon's footsteps. (Indeed, Miller relies upon Eribon's work for a good many biographical details). Like Eribon, he sketches out "the broader cultural and social context within which this life [and work] unfolded."[42] And in many ways he has enlivened the story of the development of Foucault's work even more than Eribon, dwelling more on the philosophical and (for Foucault) personal issues involved. Yet it is in just this regard that Miller's work displays a single-minded obstinacy. For he cannot be shaken from his central thesis - that Foucault was engaged in a "lifelong struggle to honor Nietzsche's gnomic injunction, 'to become what one is'," and that his writing can be approached "as if it expressed a powerful desire to realize a certain form of life."[43] The attempt to realize this "form of life" manifested itself in "his unrelenting, deeply ambiguous and profoundly problematic preoccupation with death, which he explored not only in the exoteric form of his writing, but also, and I believe critically, in the esoteric form of

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[41]David Macey's The Lives of Michel Foucault: A Biography (New York: Pantheon, 1993) is very similar to Eribon's. It does not offer an interpretation of Foucault's life and work. Rather, it is a simple recounting of both.

[42]James Miller, The Passion of Michel Foucault (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 5.

[43]*Ibid.*

sado-masochistic eroticism."[44] Thus, Foucault's calling into question of the author and the subject represent, for Miller, a manifestation in his scholarly life of that same impulse which drove him to confront death by engaging in sado-masochistic practices.[45] Foucault's standing front and centre with students in their battles with police at Vincennes campus in 1969, he argues is yet another manifestation of this obsession. For Miller, the barricades and the unleashing of repressed impulses (in the words of André Glucksmann, "all the perversions that haunt" the ruling class) showed Foucault that May `68 was "*his* kind of revolution."[46]

It is in reducing all of Foucault's life and work to an effect of his living the life he must live that Miller's otherwise brilliant account stretches credibility to the breaking point. His comment, at the end of his discussion of Discipline and Punish, that "Foucault, of course, was talking about himself"[47] is typical of his attempt to read all of Foucault's works as the public manifestation of his

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[44]*Ibid.*, 7.

[45]For Miller, Foucault was literally driven. He argues that for Foucault the obsession with death and violence was his *daimon*, which he uses in both a Greek and a Nietzschean sense - denoting both "the power of a singular fate" and the necessity of "becoming `what one is'" to the point of "unleashing a compulsion to malignancy." *Ibid.*, 70-71.

[46]*Ibid.*, 168. Emphasis in original.

[47]*Ibid.*, 224.

daimon, as progressive steps in his "Nietzschean quest."[48] One need not reject Miller's work out of hand, but it might have been that Foucault - the product of the very best of French educational institutions, a man who actively campaigned for election to the Collège de France - had more serious scholarly concerns in mind when composing his works. Miller argues that he "was forced to ascribe to Foucault a persistent and purposeful self, inhabiting one and the same body throughout his mortal life, more or less consistently accounting for his actions and attitudes to others as well as to himself, and understanding his life as a teleologically structured quest...."[49] Miller does not explain why he was forced to proceed on this basis, but in so doing he undermines the promise of an even more compelling attempt than Eribon's to understand Foucault's work in terms of the context in which it developed.

Nonetheless, Eribon and Miller have opened a new phase in the intellectual history of Michel Foucault. It is within this opening that this thesis develops. It seeks to show how and why Foucault developed his particular conceptions of the subject and to which bodies of thought he turned in doing so.

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[48]See *ibid.*, 67, 68, 72, 81, 85, 105, 108, 125, 143-4, 164, 182, 183, 193, 244, 258, 285, 319.

[49]*Ibid.*, 7.

For the past fifteen years, the question of the status of the subject has been addressed by social and political philosophers within the context of a debate about the political consequences of Foucault's thought. In all his works he argues that subjectivity is a construct of historically contingent discourses and social practices. Yet, beginning in the 1970s (when he himself became involved in radical political struggles), he held out the possibility of effective resistance to power. The issue over which debate has raged most furiously is whether or not Foucault has precluded the reasons for or possibilities of resistance to power by portraying the subject as the product of power and reason as an important form of power.

Jürgen Habermas, Richard Rorty, Charles Taylor, Michael Walzer, Peter Dews, and Nancy Fraser have been the leading and most persistent liberal critics of the political implications of Foucault's thought.[50] For them, Foucault's critique of modern power begs the question "why revolt?" On the one hand, he argues that subjectivity itself is an effect of power and that liberation might be had in "unmasking this identity and the manner of its implantation" so that we might "cease to be accomplices in its control and

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[50]Some will take issue with my describing these figures as liberals. But for the sake of convenience in discussing them as a group, I have followed Rorty's lead in this regard. See Richard Rorty, "Moral Identity and Private Autonomy," in Michel Foucault: Philosopher, trans. Timothy . Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 1992), 329-330.

shaping of ourselves."[51] Yet in the next breath he rejects the "false idea of a liberation through the truth of one's natural ... desires."[52] For him "autonomy, reciprocity, recognition, dignity and human rights" are "instruments of domination within the current 'disciplinary power/knowledge regime'." If this is true, his critics argue, why revolt, why resist, why not submit to domination?[53] "Whence," asks Fraser "does Foucault's work, his description of 'the carceral society', for example, derive its critical force? How does Foucault make it look so ugly and menacing without speaking to the humanist ideals associated with the concept of the subject?"[54] If for Foucault "there is no such thing as a free human subject, no natural man or woman," argues Walzer, if "[m]en and women are always social creations, the products of codes and disciplines," Foucault's calls to abolish the existing system amount to nihilism. This question arises again with Foucault's reduction of validity

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[51]Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," Political Theory, 12 (May 1984): 163.

[52]*Ibid.*

[53]See Nancy Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions," Praxis International 1 (October 1981): 283; and Jürgen Habermas, "The Genealogical Writing of History: On Some Aporias in Foucault's Theory of Power," Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory 10 (1986): 7.

[54]Nancy Fraser, "Foucault's Body-Language: A Post-Humanist Political Rhetoric," Salmagundi 61 (Fall 1983): 56.

claims of whatever political stripe to effects of power.[55] On what grounds is revolt possible or desirable, Habermas asks, if, as Foucault argued, "to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system," if there is no "right side" in political struggles?[56]

For Rorty, Foucault's political position was ultimately unsustainable because he refused to distinguish clearly between his public, moral identity, according to which he became engaged in political struggles, and his private autonomy as a philosopher, according to which he had the privilege to ask "What has universal validity to do with me?"[57] In a liberal society, argues Rorty, citizens are asked to have a "moral identity, and to have it irrespective of whatever other, private identities they may also have."[58] And, indeed, he argues that in his political engagement, Foucault "was a useful citizen of a democratic country, one who did his best to make its institutions fairer and more decent."[59] But by putting the concerns of private autonomy at the centre of his philosophical reflection, Foucault's

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[55]Habermas, "Aporias," 1.

[56]*Ibid.*, 5, 7. The quote to which Habermas refers is from Michel Foucault, "Revolutionary Action: `Until Now', in Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 230.

[57]Rorty, 333.

[58]*Ibid.*, 331.

[59]*Ibid.*, 333.

work attacks the very fabric of a liberal society and undercuts the progressive politics for which he himself struggled.

Nancy Fraser has argued that far from rejecting "liberal norms of legitimacy and illegitimacy" Foucault has merely pre-supposed them - which is to say, that he was either being deceitful or a bad scholar.

> He fails to appreciate the degree to which the [liberal] normative is embedded in and infused throughout the whole language at *every* level, and the degree to which, despite himself, his own critique has to make use of modes of description, interpretation, and judgement formed within the modern Western normative tradition.[60]

Which is to say that she sees a certain humanism at work in his thought despite his attempts to distance himself from it. Habermas, too, argues that Foucault's work was distorted by either a certain blindness or bad faith. By his "uncircumspect leveling of culture and politics to immediate substrates of violence" Foucault obscured the "unmistakable gains in liberty and legal security and the expansion of civil rights guarantees" over the past two centuries. While he accepts Foucault's point that there exist "special power relationships" in prisons, clinics, schools, and the military, they "have by no means remained undisturbed by an

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[60]Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power," 284.

energetically advancing enactment of legal rights" in whose cause "Foucault himself has been politically engaged."[61]

Peter Dews raises similar concerns. He sees a basic similarity between Foucault's thought and that of the French "philosophers of desire," Jean-François Lyotard and Gilles Deleuze, and he sees similar political implications arising from this thought. For Dews, Foucault and the *désirants* are similar insofar as they view "self-identity" as "inherently repressive of a desire theorized as boundless flux" and which constitutes the basis of any possible resistance to power (although he allows that Foucault is "sensitive to the difficulties of appealing to any supposedly natural force as the basis of power").[62] To Dews, whose own work is deeply indebted to Habermas and the Frankfurt School, this position is problematic. On the one hand, it supports a "facile evaluation of the modern subject" and of modernity, which Dews, like Habermas, views as "both progressive and regressive."[63] On the other hand, the tendency to oppose self-identity to desire undercuts the possibility of a progressive politics or political critique. "As Adorno often underlines," he argues, "a liberation of 'desire' from all

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[61]Jürgen Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1987), 290.

[62]Peter Dews, "Power and Subjectivity in Foucault," New Left Review, 144 (March-April 1984): 95, 94.

[63]*Ibid.*, 95.

constraining identity would cease to be a liberation at all, since there would no longer be a self to enjoy the lifting of the barriers."[64]

As Rorty points out, "Much of the time, [Foucault's] only politics was the standard liberal's attempt to alleviate unnecessary suffering."[65] The essence of the liberal critique of his philosophy (insofar as it is a political philosophy) is that in conceiving meaning, truth and values as instruments of power he opens the door to an anarchism, a nihilism and (ultimately) a renascent fascism (the spectres of which linger in the background of this critique). According to the liberals, we need fixed truths and "a common vocabulary" to guide political society and political discourse[66] and "we need men and women who tell us when state power is corrupted or systematically misused, who cry out when something is rotten and who reiterate the regulative principles with which we might set things right."[67] For these liberals, it is only by establishing certain universal principles based on the ultimate value of the human subject that the politics that Foucault himself practiced might be safeguarded.

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[64]*Ibid.*

[65]Rorty, 329.

[66]*Ibid.*, 331.

[67]Michael Walzer, "The Politics of Michel Foucault" in Foucault: A Critical Reader, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 67.

But as Paul Rabinow pointed out at a recent conference, the emphasis the "Habermasians" (as he calls them) put on the necessity of universal principles for a progressive politics ignores the fact that such progress as there has been in history has come about without such principles guiding human conduct. For his part, Rorty argues that the "constantly shifting compromises which make up the political discourse of a [liberal] society" requires a "common, banal, moral vocabulary." But this vocabulary is not given to us in some originary act, but arises in and is legitimized by social practice, including the "self-overcoming and self-invention" that he wishes to keep confined to the private realm.[68] Nor can we ignore such self-overcoming as a factor in the shifting compromises of society.

A few others, outside the liberal camp, have embraced Foucault's suggestion that it is in the exercise without reserve of what Rorty calls our autonomy that we can effectively resist power. For Foucault, it was a matter of exploiting openings in the struggle against power to promote "new forms of subjectivity." Reiner Schürmann argues that, for Foucault,

> a subject can ... constitute itself in agreement with its truth, synchronically opened. It can move into the space left for such self-constitution in the way each epochal net allows for it. A subject can make current figures of discourse and effects of power its own or

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[68]Rorty, 331.

> combat them; it can or cannot assume those subject functions.[69]

By consistently "thinking differently," he argues, one can constitute oneself an "anarchistic subject" in opposition to "social totalization."[70] Schürmann, however, seems to gloss over blithely Foucault's conceptions of power and resistance and how this self-constitution might arise over and against the effects of power. Stephen Ross, though, who also sees the radical political potential in the idea of self-constitution, points out that, for Foucault, we are not "trapped" by power, even if we can never completely escape its effects. For Foucault, "both resistance and imagination of alternatives belong as much 'within' power networks as the forces they are designed to oppose. If there is a social determinism, it includes the alternatives and possibilities engendered by its own divisions."[71]

For John Rajchman, it was Foucault's arch skepticism that made his politics progressive. What began as a "questioning of anthropologism turns into an ethic of free thought":

> in suspending universalist narrative and anthropological assurance about an abstract freedom, Foucault directs our attention to the very concrete form of writing,

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[69]Reiner Schürmann, "On Constituting Oneself an Anarchistic Subject," Praxis International 6 (October 1986): 298.

[70]*Ibid.*, 307.

[71]Stephen Ross, "Foucault's Radical Politics," Praxis International, 5 (July 1985): 139.

> thinking, and living in a permanent questioning of those systems of thought and problematic forms of experience in which we find ourselves.[72]

Through this "endless questioning of constituted experience"[73] one can never achieve an absolute liberty. Yet one can achieve partial victories and temporarily escape the effects of power.

I believe that Schürmann, Ross and Rajchman have identified an important aspect of Foucault's politics: that, beyond any exterior determination of subjectivity, Foucault allowed for - and pinned his own radical political hopes upon - a form of subjectivity that insistently reconstituted itself. Yet all three view subjectivity solely in terms of consciousness. But as I will argue in Chapter 5, the mode of subjectivity that Foucault ultimately envisaged as being capable of resisting power was vitalist in character. Peter Dews, while hostile to Foucault's political stand, came close to recognizing the vitalist grounds on which he made this stand (although I believe he errs in seeing the "forces" which resist power in terms of "desire"). Rather, as I will show, what Foucault was getting at was a subjectivity founded on the mutability proper to individuals as living beings.

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[72]John Rajchman, Michel Foucault and the Freedom of Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 6-7.

[73]*Ibid.*, 7.

It is Gilles Deleuze who has best recognized this aspect of Foucault's thought. However, unlike this work, he makes no attempt to explore the intellectual antecedents of this aspect of Foucault's thought and in doing so he overlooks what I believe to be the important contribution of Canguilhem in this regard.[74] Yet, Deleuze asks, as do I,

> [is] not the force that comes from outside a certain idea of Life, a certain vitalism, in which Foucault's thought culminates? Is not life this capacity to resist force?[75]

Deleuze recognizes that "life emerges as the new object of power" in Foucault's analyses in Discipline and Punish and The History of Sexuality and that "when power in this way takes life as its aim or object, then resistance to power already puts itself on the side of life, and turns life against power."[76] And, as I will, Deleuze points to the inherent mutability of life as an important facet of life's ability to resist power.[77]

My analysis in Chapter 5 will confirm Deleuze's vitalist interpretation of Foucault's work, but it is not simply a recapitulation of Deleuze's work. Dews correctly pinpoints the origins of Deleuze's thought in a "Nietzschean

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[74]Indeed, for Deleuze, Nietzsche is the intellectual touchstone for Foucault.

[75]Gilles Deleuze, Foucault, trans. Seán Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 93.

[76]*Ibid.*, 92.

[77]*Ibid.*, 85.

naturalism ... a pure theory of forces"[78] and Deleuze projects this Nietzscheanism onto Foucault. I will show that, while Nietzsche influenced Foucault in a very general sense, it was Canguilhem who was the decisive vitalist influence in Foucault's later writings.

While liberals attack Foucault for his attack on the humanist subject, for others, further to the left, it is an important tool in undermining liberalism and the liberal state. Jeffrey Minson, in Genealogies of Morals: Nietzsche, Foucault, Donzelot and the Eccentricity of Ethics and "Strategies for Socialists? Foucault's Conception of Power",[79] has attempted to find what in Foucault is relevant to current debates within Marxism and to the development of socialist electoral programmes. He denounces, along with the liberal critique, "the untenable central concern of his position as a whole, which reduces politics to domination."[80] Yet he argues that Marxists can profitably alter the focus of Foucault's work "from the formation of subjects

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[78]Dews, 95.

[79]Jeffrey Minson, Genealogies of Morals: Nietzsche, Foucault, Donzelot and the Eccentricity of Ethics (London: Macmillan, 1985), x. As Minson indicates in the preface he aligns himself with British Marxist theorists Paul Q. Hirst, Barry Hindess, and Mark Cousions, who have oriented their work toward the official line of the Communist Party of Great Britain and against the Western Marxism of E.P. Thompson and the Frankfurt School.

[80]Jeffrey Minson, "Strategies for Socialists? Foucault's Conception of Power," Economy and Society 9 (February, 1980): 2.

to the formation of categories of person ... from power to liberalism". [81] Thus "reformed," his work would lend support to a radical critique of "liberalism", "personalist ethics" and the "moral ontology of human personality" which pre-empt "left-wing social movements".[82] Of course, the reform of Foucault's work that Minson envisions is not so much reform as putting its powers in an ideological harness.

The influence of Canguilhem on Foucault's thought has been the subject of two books, Dominique Lecourt's Marxism and Epistemology: Bachelard, Canguilhem, Foucault and Gary Gutting's Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason.[83] Lecourt's work is a collection of her essays examining the historical epistemology of Bachelard, Canguilhem, and Foucault. Yet, the work does not offer a synthetic view of their work and, as such, does not really flesh out the methodological links between them. This task is successfully taken up in Gutting's book, though he, like Lecourt, ends his analysis with The Archaeology of Knowledge. I, however, will argue that Canguilhem continued to influence Foucault's work into the 1970s and that he was

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[81] *Ibid.*, 7.

[82] *Ibid.*, 6, 18.

[83] Dominique Lecourt, Marxism and Epistemology: Bachelard, Canguilhem, and Foucault, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1975); Gary Gutting, Michel Foucault's Archaeolgy of Scientific Reason (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

central to Foucault's analysis of power and his reconception of the subject of resistance.

Even less has been written on the influence of Bataille on Foucault. Habermas was perhaps the first (beyond Foucault himself) to write about this influence, recognizing that it was through Bataille that "Nietzsche's motif of a critique of reason" reached Foucault and that Bataille, at least for a time, instilled a certain romanticism in Foucault manifest chiefly in Madness and Civilization.[84] Yet his discussion of this influence lasts no more than a few pages. Megill, too, noted his influence. But for him, Bataille, along with Antonin Artaud, merely provided Foucault with "a rhetoric distinctly different from earlier rhetorics of Nietzsche and Heidegger," but one that would be marshalled in the service of an essentially Nietzschean and Heideggerean project.[85] And Eribon, drawing chiefly on Foucault's own interviews, notes that the young Foucault was fascinated by "writers who dealt with 'transgression', the 'limit experience' of excess and expenditure."[86]

Miller offers a more detailed examination of Foucault's indebtedness to Bataille, in particular through Foucault's 1963 essay, "A Preface to Transgression." Yet, as

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[84]Habermas, Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 239, 240.

[85]Megill, Prophets of Extremity, 189.

[86]Eribon, 28.

one might expect, he argues that Bataille's importance to Foucault was in revealing a possible philosophical utility of confronting death (or at least the eradication of the autonomous subject) in sado-masochistic or otherwise degrading sexual practices.

> As Foucault expressed this possibility in typically oblique terms, a human being who in the paroxysm of the erotic moment embraces the 'pure violence' of forbidden pleasures might feel paradoxically 'fulfilled', momentarily satisfied 'by this alien plenitude which invades it to the core of its being', revealing `its positive truth in its downward fall.'[87]

For me this is a far too narrow view of Bataille's influence. Rather, I will argue in Chapter 3 that Bataille was influential insofar as he conceived a form of subjectivity that revealed itself in "inner experience" (such as dreams, religious ecstasy, artistic creativity and eroticism) and which also served as an effective means of resisting repressive social practices and institutions.

I have endeavoured to show in this chapter aspects of the current state of secondary literature on Foucault. What I believe this effort has revealed is, on the one hand, an increasing tendency for intellectual history to address Foucault's work as a subject of study rather than as simply a body of controversial concepts which raised serious methodological question for historians in general. On the other hand, I have tried to show in what way the argument being pursued in this thesis both fills in certain gaps in the

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[87]Miller, p. 89.

existing literature and in what way it will make a distinct contribution to our understanding of Foucault. Yet it is the argument itself that will be the test of these latter criteria.

While I cannot, of course, adopt James Miller's "studied ignorance" toward the secondary literature on Foucault, I heartily agree with his conclusion that it is "altogether too extensive" and that anyone "tempted to master it would doubtless soon give up, out of a combination of boredom and fatigue...."[88] On that basis, I have sought only to give a summary of those aspects of the secondary literature that have implications for the particular argument presented in this thesis.

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[88]Miller, p. 6.

Chapter 2

Humanism, Structuralism, Protest

Foucault achieved intellectual maturity in the 1950s, when existentialism and phenomenology dominated French intellectual life. In many ways, his work from 1961 onward must be read as an effort to confront and transcend this domination. For him, both existentialism and phenomenology remained within the analytic of finitude initiated by Kant at the turn of the eighteenth century, an analytic which sought to make man the object of empirical sciences and the transcendental foundation of all possible knowledge. Far from constituting profound breaks with previous forms of thought, existentialism and phenomenology merely reassert the discoveries of earlier forms of anthropological reflection. In exposing the links between these new philosophies and earlier modes of philosophical anthropology he hoped to clear a space within which truly new forms of thought might emerge. This task dominated his work up until 1968. In this chapter, then, I will briefly outline Sartre's existentialism and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, examine the key figures in the origins of French anti-humanism, and outline what was, perhaps, Foucault's definitive critique of humanism and anthropology:

his analysis of the analytic of finitude in The Order of Things. I will also briefly discuss the impact of the events of May `68 on his work, how they reintroduced a concern for freedom and resistance - a concern that had disappeared from his work as he refined and strengthened his critique of existentialism and phenomenology. To begin, I will provide a brief biographical sketch of Foucault's career up until the end of the period covered by this thesis.

Born Paul-Michel in 1926 in Poitiers, Foucault early on manifested his brilliance, regularly finishing in the top three in his classes. Having fought off his father's demands that he follow him in a medical career, he applied himself to the task of securing a place in a Parisian lycée from which he might gain entry into the Ecole normale supérieure (the traditional testing ground of France's intellectual elite). In 1945 he was admitted to the prestigious Lycée Henri IV and then, in 1946, to the École normale where, over the next five years, he earned the Licence de philosophie (1948), the Licence de psychologie (1949), and the Agrégation de philosophie (1951). In 1952 he took the Diplôme de psycho-pathologie from the Institut de psychologie de Paris. In all cases he finished at or near the top of his class.[1]

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[1]A useful chronology of Foucault's life is to be found in James Bernauer and David Rasmussen eds. The Final Foucault (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991), 159-166.

Throughout these years, Foucault was, in many ways, an outsider. His homosexuality, he felt, set him apart from his colleagues. While very few people seemed to know of it, he suffered under the moral stigma that was attached to it in France in the 1940s and 1950s. He felt compelled to explore his new-found sexuality in surreptitious nocturnal outings from which he would return guilt-ridden.[2] In part this may explain the erratic behaviour which made him even more of an outcast amongst his colleagues. Both in and out of class he would launch into vigorous and insulting harangues of colleagues. Armed with a knife, he once chased a fellow student through the halls of the Ecole normale residence. He attempted suicide several times in these years. This behaviour prompted his father to take him to seek psychiatric help, although this help amounted to but a single session. His erratic behaviour finally ceased once he established himself in a private apartment, where he perhaps found a physical isolation that paralleled what he perceived to be his social isolation.

Despite much personal turmoil, Foucault enjoyed a series of professional successes. Beginning in 1952 he worked as an Assistant in the Faculty of Letters at the University of Lille. But, more important, he made important

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[2]On Foucault's homosexuality see Eribon, pp. 27-30. Louis Althusser later argued that it was because of his homosexuality that Foucault ended his brief membership in the Parti Communiste français which "condemned homosexuality as a bourgeois vice and a sign of decadence." Eribon, 56.

intellectual acquaintances with Ludwig Binswanger and Jacqueline Verdeaux, leading figures in existential psychoanalysis. As well, in 1954, at the age of twenty-eight, he published a book, Maladie mentale et personnalité, and an important introduction to Verdeaux's translation of Binswanger's "Traum und Existenz."[3] He also secured a position at a psychiatric hospital, the Hôpital Ste. Anne.

Yet, in 1955 he left France to take up a position as the Director of the Maison Française and Lecturer at the University of Uppsala. It was a radical departure from a seemingly successful academic and clinical career that he later attributed to the stifling environment of existentialism, phenomenology and Marxism in France, although he hinted elsewhere that the intolerance of homosexuality in French society also played a role.[4]

No doubt existentialism, phenomenology and Marxism had swept French intellectual life in the decade after

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[3]Maladie mentale et personnalité (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1954). "Introduction" to Ludwig Binswanger, Le rêve et l'existence, trans. Jacqueline Verdeaux (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1954), 9-128. Translated into English as "Dream, Imagination, and Existence," trans. Forrest Williams, Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry XIX, 1 (1984-1985): 29-78.

[4]On the dominance of existentialism, phenomenology and Marxism see "An Interview with Michel Foucault," in Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel, trans. Charles Ruas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 174; "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," in Lawrence D. Kritzman ed. Politics, Philosophy, Culture: INterviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984 (New York: Routledge, 1988), 20-21; and "The Minimalist Self," in *ibid.*, 8. On the role of homosexuality, see "The Minimalist Self," 5.

World War II. Marxism in the guise of the Parti Communiste français had become for many a viable political alternative to the parties of the centre and right not only because of the heroism displayed by communist *résistants* during the Occupation but also because communism seemed to represent the most profound break with both the failed Third Republic and the Vichy regime. Merleau-Ponty's election to the Collège de France in 1952 was a clear sign that phenomenology, which had had little currency within the French academy before 1939, had arrived. The crowd that jammed its way into the Mutualité in 1945 to hear Sartre's "Existentialism is a Humanism" symbolized the mass popularity that existentialism would enjoy for years to come. Just as Marxism seemed to represent a break with France's political past, so phenomenology and existentialism appeared to break radically with the main currents of French academic philosophy and modern philosophy as a whole.

This was particularly true of Sartre's existentialism, which presented itself as a liberation philosophy for the Everyman. Sartre sought to turn philosophy away from idealist preoccupations with the activity of thought by emptying consciousness of all contents. For him, consciousness was devoid of contents or substance of any sort. He conceived it, rather, as pure intentionality toward objects,

which were, for him, other than consciousness.[5] As such, consciousness was wholly in-the-world. For Sartre, the intentional activity of consciousness constituted a radical freedom for the individual insofar as it allowed him to transcend, or "negate," reality. As he argued in The Psychology of Imagination (1940), it is

> enough to be able to posit reality as a synthetic whole in order to posit oneself as free from it; and this going-beyond [*dépassement*] is freedom itself, since it could not happen if consciousness were not free. Thus to posit the world as world or to `nihilate' [*néantir*] it is one and the same thing.[6]

In Being and Nothingness he argued, even more succinctly, that "there is no difference between the being of man and his *being-free*."[7] For Sartre, consciousness was triply free insofar as it was "world-constituting, world-surpassing, and world-nihilating." Which is to say that consciousness is "noetically free" insofar as it gives meaning to the world, that it is "transcendentally free" insofar as it transcends the circumstances of its situation, and it possesses the

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[5]Sartre, Jean Paul. The Transcendance of the Ego, trans. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick (New York: Noonday Press, 1957), 21.

[6]Jean-Paul Sartre, The Psychology of Imagination, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), 240.

[7]Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 56.

freedom of nihilation insofar as it is "always 'other' than its world, its self, or other selves...."[8]

Sartrean existentialism, then, discovers the possibility of a radical freedom in this "constantly renewed act" which is proper to being-in-the-world. "[I]t is choice of myself in the world," he argued, "and by the same token it is a discovery of the world."[9] It was this freedom to choose that, for Sartre, made the individual responsible and it was the failure to choose that constituted bad faith. While this formula might, at a quick glance, provide solace to liberal humanists, Being and Nothingness is profoundly hostile to humanist conceptions of the subject. Sartre's aim here is to empty consciousness of all content or substance. Thus, there could be no self or ego that was identical with consciousness. Rather, self was an intentional "other" of consciousness along with all the other objects in its field. Consciousness he defined as "presence-to-self," something that has been described as a "productive void."[10]

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[8]Thomas R. Flynn, Sartre and Marxist Existentialism: The Test Case of Collective Responsibility (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 7.

[9]Being and Nothingness, 461. When Sartre speaks of choice as a principal element of freedom, it is not simply a choice amongst alternatives. What interests him is the prereflective, original choice taken without reference to reason or necessity, the choice by which one constitutes a world in setting criteria and establishing values according to which second-order, reflective choices are made.

[10]Flynn, 10, 11.

"Man is free," Sartre argued, "because he is not a self but a presence-to-self."[11]

In the aftermath of World War II and the Occupation, however, Sartre's first public act was to make peace with humanism by taking the teeth out of the nihilating powers of the for-itself and by tempering the conflict between the for-itself and the in-itself. In "Existentialism is a Humanism" he still maintains that "existence precedes essence."[12] Therefore he can also maintain that man "is responsible for everything he does" and is.[13] Yet at the same time, and in somewhat contradictory fashion, he attempts to introduce a notion of a universal human essence into a philosophy which had formerly denied the existence of any universals. While holding that it is through the activity of the pre-reflective consciousness that the individual chooses himself and his world, he "realizes that [man] cannot be anything ... unless others recognize it as such." Man must recognize that the "other is indispensable to [his] own existence."[14] "In this sense," he argued, "we may say that there is a universality of man; but it is not given, it is perpetually being made."

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[11]Being and Nothingness, 440.

[12]Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 15.

[13]*Ibid.*, 18, 27-8.

[14]*Ibid.*, p. 44.

> I build the universal in choosing myself; I build it in understanding the configuration of every other man, whatever age he might have lived in.... At heart, what existentialism shows is the connection between the absolute character of free involvement, by virtue of which every man realizes himself in realizing a type of mankind, an involvement always comprehensible in any age whatsoever, and the relativeness of the cultural ensemble which may result from such a choice.[15]

In reinterpreting his existentialism in this way he introduces the notion of a finitude that is fundamentally opposed to the original choice outlined in Being and Nothingness and which anticipates instead the historical anthropology of The Critique of Dialectical Reason.[16]

The radical character of existentialism, then, was extinguished with "Existentialism is a Humanism." Michel Tournier recalled the disappointment with which he and Gilles Deleuze greeted the lecture. Expecting another intellectual triumph equal in magnitude to Being and Nothingness they were shocked to discover that their "master had gone and fished up that old duffer humanism."[17] From this point on Sartre never lost his desire to make of existentialism a philosophy that could discover transcendental, historical (though not *a priori*) humanistic categories of Reason, Truth, Justice and Objectivity. Yet even as he tried

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[15]*Ibid.*, 46-7.

[16]In Being and Nothingness he argued that "every choice is a choice of finitude" insofar as it constituted a world." Being and Nothingness, 495.

[17]Quoted in Miller, The Passion of Michel Foucault, 43.

to do this he maintained a philosophical commitment to an absolutely free human agency.

His attempts in the late 1940s and early 1950s to reconcile existentialism with Marxism entailed two challenges to the independence of the human agent: how to comprehend the relation of the individual to economic, social and cultural structures and how to account for individual responsibility within the context of group *praxis*. On the first issue, Sartre rejected any crude social determinism. When he writes in The Critique of Dialectical Reason of "dialectical bonds" he does not derogate the human agent in favour of any constitutive determinism. Rather, he depicts the subject as both socially constituted and socially constitutive. While what he calls the "practico-inert" - the economic, social, and cultural ensemble - leaves its indelible mark upon the individual subject, it is nonetheless a product of human endeavour and thus susceptible to the purposeful activity of the human agent.[18] "Only the project," he argued,

> as a mediation between two moments of objectivity, can account for history; that is for *human creativity*. It is necessary to choose. In effect, either we reduce everything to identity (which amounts to substituting a mechanistic materialism for dialectical materialism) and we make of the dialectic a celestial law which imposes itself on the Universe, a metaphysical force which by itself engenders the historical process .... or we restore to the individual man his power to go beyond his

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[18]Jean-Paul Sartre, The Critique of Dialectical Reason. Vol. 1.: Theory of Pracitcal Ensembles, trans. Alan Sheridan Smith (London: New Left Books, 1976), 51.

> situation by means of work and action. This solution alone enables us to base the moment of totalization *upon the real*.[19]

In essence, Sartre has sought both to take into account the social constitution of the subject while at the same time preserving for human agency the world-constituting, world-surpassing, and world-nihilating powers of the for-itself as presented in Being and Nothingness.

Nor does the collective nature of projects (i.e. revolutionary activity) present a problem to Sartre, as is shown in his conception of the collective subject.

> I mean by the "collective subject" the *subject of the praxis* and not some kind of "collective unconscious." The subject is the group *brought together* by the situation, *structured* by its very action, *differentiated* by the objective requirements of the praxis and by the division of labour, at first random then systematic, which the praxis introduces, *organized* by the leaders which it chooses for itself or which it discovers for itself finding *in their person* its own unity.[20]

There is no hint here of a loss of autonomy. The group is a "practical determination of everyone by everyone, by all and by oneself from the point of view of a common praxis."[21]

Sartrean existentialism, then, was a humanism whose paramount moment was the Critique, the stated aim of which was "to establish that there is only *one* human history, with

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[19]Quoted in Mark Poster, Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 270.

[20]Jean-Paul Sartre, The Communists and the Peace, trans. Martha H. Fletcher (New York: George Braziller, 1968), 222-3.

[21]Critique of Dialectical Reason, 506.

one truth and *one* intelligibility."[22] For Foucault, Sartre's work constituted a pathetic attempt by a man of the "nineteenth century to try to think the twentieth century."[23]

Foucault's denunciation of what he saw as the facile humanism of Sartre's work could not be applied to the work of Merleau-Ponty. Whereas Sartre ultimately preserves against all conditionings the constitutive powers of the human agent, Merleau-Ponty felt compelled to reject such a sharp distinction between subject and object. For him, we could not "apply the classical distinction of form and matter to perception...."[24] Rather, for him, that the subject could perceive the world at all was a function of what he described as the "inalienable presence" of the world in perception - a world which "is always `already there' before reflection begins...."[25] The philosophical task that Merleau-Ponty set himself was to restore this world, to reveal the complicity in the act of perception between the world and the perceiving subject.

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[22]*Ibid.*, 69.

[23]Michel Foucault, "L'Homme, est-il mort?: Un entretien avec Michel Foucault," Arts et Loisirs 38 (June 15, 1966): 8.

[24]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics, ed. James M. Edie (Milwaukee: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 12-13.

[25]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), vii.

Immediately one sees the divergence of method between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Whereas for Sartre being-in-the-world could be posited on the basis of the principle of intentionality (an empty consciousness intending an object which is other than consciousness), for Merleau-Ponty the phenomenological body is the privileged mode of being-in-the-world. For him, the body was "a system of all my holds on the world" that "founds the unity of the objects which I perceive."[26] It "carve[d] out within the plenum of the world in which concrete movement takes place a zone of reflection and subjectivity: it superimposes upon physical space a potential or human space."[27]

"We grasp external space," he argued, "through our body. A 'corporeal or postural schema' gives us at every moment a global, practical, and implicit notion of the relation between our body and things, of our hold on them."[28] To illustrate this, Merleau-Ponty argued that for the football player the field is not simply an object, but "a field of forces, vectors, and openings which call for 'movements' in accordance with the play." The field "is present only as 'the immanent term of his practical intentions'." The player "becomes one with it and feels the direction of the 'goal',

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[26]Primacy of Perception, 17-18.

[27]*Ibid.*

[28]Quoted in Robert C. Solomon ed., Existentialism (New York: The Modern Library, 1974), 252.

for example, just as immediately as the vertical and horizontal planes of his own body." Rather than knowing where the goal is, the goal is "lived" in the order of "naturizing thought which internally subtends the characteristic structure of objects."[29] This illustrates that "perceptual behaviour emerges from these relations to a situation and to an environment which are not the workings of a pure and knowing subject."[30]

The task of phenomenological archaeology, then, is to reveal the structures of perception as "different modalities of our co-existence with the world."[31] But it is also to reveal that "perceived things, unlike geometrical objects, are not bounded entities whose laws of construction we possess *a priori*, but that they are open, inexhaustible systems which we recognize through a certain style of development...."[32] In other words, perceived things create their own structures of perception.

> One phenomenon releases another, not by means of some objective efficient cause, like those which link together natural events, but by the meaning which it holds out - there is an underlying reason for a thing

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[29]John O'Neill, Perception, Expression, and History: The Social Phenomenology of Maurice Merrleau-Ponty (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 15.

[30]Solomon ed., 251.

[31]*Ibid.*, 252.

[32]*Ibid.*, 253.

> which guides the flow of phenomena without being laid down in any one of them, a sort of operative reason.[33]

Objects are perceived not simply according to physiological processes that give rise to our grasping space, but they elicit a synthesizing, symbolic behaviour which establishes our relations to our milieu.

For Merleau-Ponty, then, culture, values, and the world of history, are "no more external to us than language."[34] These realms constitute the structures of perception. Ever changing and intimate aspects of our being-in-the-world, they form "a perpetually new natural and historical situation" which accounts for what Merleau sees as the "continued birth" of the perceiving subject.[35] If we want to understand the structure of experience we must understand it as a function of this exchange between subjectivity and situation.

If the aim of the Husserlian reduction, however, was to penetrate the structure of experience, Merleau-Ponty was pessimistic about its success. For him, "the most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction." It is endlessly postponed in the "unmotivated upsurge of the world."[36] As such, there could

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[33]Phenomenology of Perception, 50.

[34]Primacy of Perception, 9.

[35]Solomon ed., 253.

[36]Phenomenology of Perception, xiv.

never be any ultimate independence of the ego; it was always linked to the world by the chains of lived experience. Indeed, the aim of his work was to return philosophical inquiry to this ground against every impulse to establish a subject-object dichotomy.[37]

As I noted above, Foucault never harboured the same contempt for Merleau-Ponty's work as he did for Sartre's. Nonetheless, for him it still constituted an important manifestation of the limits of modern philosophy. Specifically, as we will see, Foucault saw in Merleau's work an analysis that remained well within the ambit of the philosophical anthropology initiated by Kant at the end of the eighteenth century when he posed the question *Was ist der Mensch?* What frustrated Foucault about this was not only that Merleau revealed how little modern philosophy had progressed from the time of Kant, but more so, that, as Merleau so candidly admitted, the fulfillment of this anthropology was to be ever postponed, thus condemning modern philosophy, so constituted, to endlessly fruitless analysis. "Man," which was the object and premise of this analysis, would remain elusive.

It was not until the publication of The Order of Things in 1965 that Foucault found the analytical structure to disarm existentialism and phenomenology. In the mid-

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[37]Jerrold Siegel, "A Unique Way of Existing: Merleau-Ponty and the Subject," Journal of the History of Philosophy, 24 (July 1991): 456.

1950s, without such an analysis in hand, he left France for Sweden, in order to escape a stifling intellectual environment.

While the intellectual environment of France in the 1950s was certainly dominated by the concerns of existentialism and phenomenology, it was also a decade of a growing anti-humanism in various disciplines that left its mark on Foucault's work. In the forefront of the turn against humanism stood the figures of Nietzsche and Heidegger. A month before his death, Foucault recalled:

> Heidegger has always been for me the essential philosopher. I started by reading Hegel, then Marx, and I began to read Heidegger in 1951 or 1952; then in 1952 or 1953, I no longer remember, I read Nietzsche.... My whole philosophical development was determined by my reading of Heidegger. But I recognize that Nietzsche prevailed over him. I don't know Heidegger well enough: I practically don't know Being and Time nor the things recently published. My knowledge of Nietzshce is much greater. Nevertheless, these were my two fundamental experiences. I probably wouldn't have read Nietzsche if I hadn't read Heidegger. I tried to read Nietzsche in the fifties, but Nietzsche by himself said nothing to me. Whereas Nietzsche and Heidegger - that was the philosophical shock![38]

But what does this specifically mean?

Based on the preceding passage it is difficult to know which of Heidegger's works Foucault read. But it seems likely - especially in 1951 and 1952 - that "The Letter on Humanism" would be among them insofar as it was a response to Sartre's "Existentialism is a Humanism" and would thus

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[38]"The Return of Morality," trans. John Johnston in Slyvère Lotringer ed., Foucault Live: Interviews, 1966-1984 (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), 326.

have a certain appeal to a French audience. While the frontal attack on the humanism of existentialism might well have caught Foucault's attention, Heidegger's specific attack on humanist metaphysics suggested an avenue of interpretation that, in conjunction with Nietzschean genealogy, can be seen to have affected all of Foucault's work since 1960. Heidegger attempts to show in "The Letter on Humanism" that in all humanisms "the *humanitas* of *homo humanus* is determined with regard to an already established interpretation of nature, history, world, and the ground of the world, that is, of being as a whole."[39] Which is to say that humanism will of necessity remain metaphysical insofar as it "presupposes an interpretation of being without asking about the truth of Being."[40] There is nothing in Foucault's work to suggest that he shared Heidegger's concern with divining the "truth of Being" or his belief that the task of thinking was to "unfold ... into the fullness of its essence .... the relation of Being to the essence of man."[41] But his work consistently evinced a concern to unearth the structure of rationalities and the constitution of subjectivity in discourse and social practices and one can see how Foucault might have been pointed down this path by Heidegger's analy-

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[39]Martin Heidegger, Basic Writings, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 202.

[40]*Ibid.*

[41]*Ibid.*, 204, 193.

sis of the layers of interpretation that humanism does not recognize in its own discourse.

Thus, despite what separates Foucault and Heidegger (Heidegger's concern with the "truth of Being," his sense of a decline of Western civilization), one can possibly see the grounds upon which Heidegger did become essential for Foucault.

One can also see how Nietzschean genealogy might complement Heidegger's attack on humanist metaphysics. In his 1964 essay, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx", the importance of all three (but especially of Nietzsche, who dominates Foucault's argument) is their discovery that interpretation is an infinite, unachievable task and that philosophy therefore became "a sort of philology terminally *en suspens*, a philology without end ... a philology which would never be absolutely fixed."[42] Foucault, along with Nietzsche, rejected "the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies" and the "search for 'origins'"[43] in favour of genealogy:

> Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations ... the error, the false appraisals, and the faulty calcula-

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[42]Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," Cahiers de Royaumont 6: Nietzsche (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967), 187.

[43]Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, 140.

> tions that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents.[44]

While Foucault wrote this in 1971, all his work is essentially genealogical: which is to say, that his overriding concern is to reveal the historicity of a philosophy for which "subjectivity" is "the fundamental thesis and point of departure."[45]

While Heidegger and Nietzsche provided Foucault with an outline for the historical critique of rationality, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan seemed to have pointed out the possibility of a complementary critique of subjectivity. Foucault argued at one point that he stopped believing in "meaning" when "Lévi-Strauss demonstrated - about societies - and Lacan demonstrated - about the unconscious - that 'meaning' was probably only a sort of surface effect, a shimmer, a foam, and that what ran through us, underlay us, and was before us, what sustained us in time and space, was the system."[46] While the work of Nietzsche and Heidegger suggested an historical critique of truth, Lévi-Strauss and Lacan engaged in a critique of the rational, meaning-giving subject.

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[44]*Ibid.*, 146.

[45]Michel Foucault, "Introduction à l'Anthropologie de Kant," (Thèse complémentaire, Université de Paris, Sorbonne, 1961), 126.

[46]Michel Foucault, "L'homme, est-il mort?," Arts et loisirs 38 (June 15, 1966): 9.

For both, the model of language served as an important point of departure. Lévi-Strauss began his own work on the basis of Franz Boas's argument that culture was like a language, that "the structure of a language remains unknown to the speaker until the introduction of a scientific grammar" and that "[e]ven then the language continues to mold discourse beyond the consciousness of the individual, imposing on his thought conceptual schemes which are taken as objective categories."[47] On this basis he argued that "[a]ny culture may be looked upon as an ensemble of symbolic systems," the law of the symbolic relation standing to individual consciousness as does language.[48] For any given system,

> what confers upon it its socio-cultural character is not what it retains from nature, but, rather, the essential way in which it diverges from nature. A kinship system does not consist in the objective ties of descent or consanguinity between individuals. It exists only in human consciousness: it is an arbitrary system of representations, not the spontaneous development of a real situation.[49]

What gives these symbolic systems their particular form are unconscious structures ("or, more accurately ... structural laws") whose activity "consists in imposing forms upon con-

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[47]Claude Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 19.

[48]Jean Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, The Language of Psychoanalysis, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton and Co. 1973), 440.

[49]Structural Anthropology, 50.

tent."[50] Which is to say that unconscious structures provide the law of the relation of each particular symbol within a given system. For Lévi-Strauss, then, the task of anthropology was to reveal the unconscious structures which gave form to the specific contents of consciousness and to show that "these forms are fundamentally the same for all minds - ancient and modern, primitive and civilized ...."[51]

Just as Lévi-Strauss had justified an anthropology conceived along these lines by reference to Marx's statement, "Men make their own history, but they do not know that they are doing it,"[52] so Lacan gave an indication of the task he set for his psychoanalysis by arguing that "Man speaks ... but it is because the symbol has made him man."[53] In so arguing, he seeks both to return psychoanalysis to its interpretive roots (and away from the ego-based psychoanalysis that dominated the official thought of the International Psychoanalytic Association[54]) and to broaden its interpretive powers by bringing to it (as Lévi-Strauss

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[50]*Ibid.*, 202, 21.

[51]*Ibid.*, 21.

[52]*Ibid.*, 23.

[53]Jacques Lacan, Ecrits: A Selection, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton and Co., 1977), 65.

[54]For a discussion of the terms of Lacan's break with the IPA see Sherry Turkle, Psychoanalytic Politics: Jacques Lacan and Freud's French Revolution, 2nd. ed. (New York: Guildford Press, 1992), 97-118.

had brought to anthropology) the teachings of Saussure's linguistics.

As with Lévi-Strauss's anthropology, the analyst begins his work with what is present in consciousness - the patient's discourse. Then, through the patient's "unfinished sentences, his hesitations, his inflexions and his slips of the tongue,"[55] the analyst begins to discern "the *primary language* in which, beyond what he tells us of himself, he is already talking to us unknown to himself, and, in the first place, in the symbols of his symptom."[56] Finally, "in order to free the patient's speech" the analyst introduces the patient to the language of his own desire "by evoking [the symbol] in a carefully calculated fashion in the resonances of his remarks."[57] The aim of the analyst's interventions is to allow the patient to read down the chain of significations to the original signifier - his desire - which has been given symbolic mediation by the Word.

Lacanian analysis, then, proceeds on the understanding that the "symptom is ... structured like a language,"[58] which is to say that it is a signifier, "a presence made of absence."[59] In the subject, this "symbolic function" also

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[55]Ecrits, 10.

[56]*Ibid.*, 81.

[57]*Ibid.*, 82.

[58]*Ibid.*, 59.

[59]*Ibid.*, 65.

takes place: "man makes an object of his action, but only in order to restore to this action in due time its place as grounding."[60] Thus, he argues, "it was certainly the Word ... that was in the beginning, and we live in its creation, but it is the action of our spirit that continues this creation by constantly renewing it."[61] The task of the analysis, then, is "to follow the ascending ramification of the symbolic lineage in the text of the patient's free associations,"[62] to bring to consciousness the absence - as the source of the symptom - indicated by present symbols.

The archetypal case is the Oedipus complex. While at a young age the son's desire for the mother is expressed in a narcissistic desire to *be* the phallus (not the father's literal penis, but the object of the mother's desire), the presence of the father will eventually exclude the possibility of the child's urge to lose his being in the image of another. The father's no is signified by the child's assumption of the father's name (in French the homonym, *le non du père/le nom du père*). What speaks in the father's name is both the social laws and inhibitions governing kinship which the child accepts with the father's name but also a symbolic lineage, insofar as one signifier (the name of the father) replaces another signifier (the desire to be

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[60]*Ibid.*, 73.

[61]*Ibid.*, 61.

[62]*Ibid.*, 59.

the object of the mother's desire) which is pushed further down the chain of signification. Thus, in the analytic experience, it is a matter of tracing this symbolic lineage along the chain of signification.

As with Heidegger and Nietzsche, however, the influence of Lacan and Lévi-Strauss upon Foucault was limited. As he recalled near the end of his life, the work of both was important in contesting the dominance of existentialism, phenomenology and Marxism.[63] Yet, Foucault never relied on the methods introduced into their respective disciplines by Lacan and Lévi-Strauss. As he quite correctly pointed out, the work of Lévi-Strauss was grounded in the structural analysis of myths pioneered by Roman Jakobson, Vladimir Propp and Nicolai Troubetzkoy.[64] Lacan, of course, sought to remain faithful to Freud's legacy. Both, moreover, modeled their work on that of Saussure. While Foucault surely recognized the importance of these figures, he owed them no methodological debt.

In a general sense, the works of Heidegger, Nietzsche, Lévi-Strauss and Lacan were among the most influential in the effort to free philosophy from its

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[63]"An Interview with Michel Foucault," in Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel, trans. Charles Ruas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 174.

[64]Michel Foucault, "But Structuralism was not a French Invention," in Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori, trans. R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), 87.

grounding in the subject. They opened up new horizons of thought whereas phenomenology, existentialism and Marxism remained trapped within the anthropological horizon. Foucault was also attracted by new developments in anti-humanism in literature and the arts. He recalled that Beckett's Waiting for Godot was "a breathtaking performance" which, along with the experiments of the *nouveau roman*,[65] promised to breathe life into drama and the novel. Without them, he claimed, he would have never written Raymond Roussel. Rather, he would have slammed his books shut with a good laugh.[66]

When in 1960 Foucault returned from his self-imposed exile, he carried with him his critical introduction to Kant's Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht, which constituted his first important attempt to break with modern philosophy. Here he stresses the importance of both the Anthropologie and the Critique of Pure Reason in the development of philosophical anthropology as the dominant mode of modern philosophy. This introduction would never be published, but it served as the basis for his more important work, The Order of Things.

The last half of The Order of Things describes the "radical event" that traversed the "entire visible surface

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[65]Ruas, "An Interview with Michel Foucault," 174.

[66]*Ibid.*

of knowledge" at the close of the eighteenth century.[67] Two principal elements constituted this event. On the one hand was Kant's development of a transcendental analytic - which is to say the analysis and description of the *a priori* categories of understanding that structure what is given in experience. On the other hand was the development of the sciences of economics, biology and philology as the sciences of man - that being whose finitude is established by life, labour, and language.[68] These two paths of analysis initiated the analytic of finitude that has defined modern thought, an analytic which seeks to establish the transcendental in man by an analysis of the empirical conditions of his existence. At the heart of this development was the birth of man as both the subject and object of all possible knowledge. The analytic of finitude, predicated on such a figure, was doomed to a ceaseless reflection, for whatever knowledge the sciences of man arrived at was, necessarily, a function of those as yet undiscovered aspects of man's finitude. "[T]he whole of modern thought," Foucault argued, "is imbued with the necessity of thinking the unthought - of reflecting the contents of the *In-itself* in the form of the *For-itself*, of ending man's alienation by reconciling him

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[67]The Order of Things, 217.

[68]As Foucault points out, this level of analysis had already been formulated by Kant when, beyond "the three critical questions (What can I know? What must I do? What am I permitted to hope?)" he posed a fourth and "ultimate one:" *Was ist der Mensch?*. *Ibid.*, 341.

with his own essence."[69]

Foucault goes on to examine the persistence and the failures of the analytic of finitude in the thought of Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, and Heidegger. Merleau-Ponty, he argues, had sought to overcome the tensions between and the naïveté inherent in those analyses which "operate within the space of the body," which seek to show that knowledge arises within "the structures of the body," that it has "anatomo-physiological conditions," and those which reveal the "historical, social or economic" conditions of knowledge.[70] For this task he proposed the "analysis of actual experience." As Foucault admits, this analysis "does indeed provide a means of communication between the space of the body and the time of culture."[71] But at the end of the day this project is "merely fulfilling with greater care the hasty demands laid down when the attempt was made to make the empirical, in man, stand for the transcendental." For in the analysis of actual experience, the "possible objectivity of a knowl-

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[69] *Ibid.*, 327.

[70] *Ibid.*, 319. Their naïveté, Foucault argued, was that both presupposed the truth of the object (either the body or history) and the truth of the discourse ("a truth that makes it possible to employ, when dealing with the nature or history of knowledge, a language that will be true," p. 320). Ultimately, he argued, "a discourse attempting to be both empirical and critical cannot but be both positivist and eschatological; man appears within it as a truth both reduced and promised. Pre-critical naïveté," he argued "holds undivided rule." *Ibid.*, 320.

[71] *Ibid.*, 321.

edge of nature" is articulated "upon the original experience of which the body forms an outline," and the possibility of an objective knowledge of a culture is articulated "upon the semantic density which is both hidden and revealed in actual experience."[72] Thus, "what is given in experience and what renders experience possible correspond to one another in an endless oscillation."[73]

This endless cross-reference of the empirical and the transcendental in Merleau-Ponty, is repeated, Foucault argues, in the relations between the *cogito* and the unthought in Husserl and the "retreat and return of the origin" in Heidegger. Husserl's task of making explicit the unthought background of "commitments and practices" that "makes thought and action possible" necessarily collapses insofar as the thought which makes explicit the unthought itself requires an unthought background. Thus, his phenomenological project takes on "the monotony of a journey which, though it probably has no end, is nevertheless perhaps not without hope."[74] Foucault finds the analytic of finitude at work in Heidegger, too, although its fruitlessness is posited more frankly. Heidegger admits that the inquiry into the meaning of man's origins will be forever foiled by their ceaseless retreat backwards in time, to the

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[72]*Ibid.*

[73]*Ibid.*, 336.

[74]*Ibid.*, 314.

point they become the "essential mystery." Yet he holds out the promise that man's origins will be revealed in an equally inapprehensible "essential future." "The origin," Foucault summarizes, "becoming what thought has yet to think ... would be forever promised in an imminence always nearer yet never accomplished."[75]

For Foucault, the primary condition of possibility for the emergence of the analytic of finitude and for its persistence in modern thought despite its manifest fruitlessness and inexhaustibility was the appearance of a certain conception of 'man' at the close of the eighteenth century. A "quite recent creature which the demiurge of knowledge fabricated with its own hands less than two hundred years ago,"[76] man, posited as both the "difficult object and sovereign subject of all possible knowledge,"[77] was inconceivable in the Classical *episteme*. For Classical thought, God's infinite sovereignty and man's corresponding finitude were the very facts that made absolute knowledge impossible. As a result, the task of thought was not to explain how man could know. Rather, thought was taken up with the analysis and proper ordering of representations: "all knowledge, of whatever kind, proceeded to the ordering of its material by the establishment of differences and

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[75]*Ibid.*, 332.

[76]*Ibid.*, 308.

[77]*Ibid.*, 310.

defined those differences by the establishment of an order."[78] If the sciences of order could nonetheless address the question of human nature it was because "in the general arrangement of the Classical *episteme*, nature, human nature, and their relations, are definite and predictable functional moments."[79] For Classical thought, then, the man of modern philosophy was inconceivable. Yet it was precisely this figure that was indispensable to modern thought. Modern philosophy was initiated and sustained, Foucault argues, by the introduction of a radically new conception of man, a figure which imposed its own requirements upon the development of thought.

The Order of Things is a central Foucaultian work for a number of reasons. At one level, it represents his coming to terms with the intellectual world of his youth. It also represents one of the most convincing and erudite analyses of modern philosophy.

At another level, it reveals the important influences on his thought. As I will show in Chapter 4, it reveals the influence of George Canguilhem's historical epistemology. The influence of Nietzsche's genealogy is also clearly evident.

Most important as regards the concerns of this thesis, The Order of Things defines the parameters of his

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[78] *Ibid.*, 346.

[79] *Ibid.*, 310.

reflection on the question of the subject. Here Foucault argues that "man" is an "invention." The "man" of modern philosophy was not a natural man, but a concept necessary to sustain the whole constellation of modern thought, both philosophy and the "human sciences." And, as he had shown in Madness and Civilization five years before, to the extent that such a man had a concrete existence, it was insofar as he was the product of practices and discourses made possible by the invention of man. (See Chapter 3 below). While in 1966 Foucault had seemingly no concern with the implications of his work for political philosophy, by revealing man to be nothing but a philosophical device and an effect of socialization, he set the stage for his later analysis of modern power.

After returning to France in 1960, Foucault took up a position as *maîtres des conférences* and professor of philosophy at the University of Clermont-Ferrand and entered into an extremely productive period of his life. While his stature grew with the publication of Madness and Civilization (1961), The Birth of the Clinic (1963) and Raymond Roussel (1963), it was only with The Order of Things that he attained the celebrity that he would retain until his death. But almost immediately after the publication of The Order of Things he left France again, to take up a post at the University of Tunisia, apparently out of frustration at not being able to land a position in Paris. In 1969, however,

Foucault, after much lobbying, was elected to the Collège de France.

As I pointed out earlier, up until this time, Foucault had evinced hardly any interest in political engagement. While he had been a member of the Parti Communist Française (PCF) from 1950 to 1953 (and not a very good one at that),[80] he quit the party in 1953 over the issue of his homosexuality and the alleged "Doctor's Plot" against Stalin.[81] Having made his break with the PCF, Foucault did not experience the disillusionment (or, for Trotskyists, the vindication) that came with the revelations of the XXth Party Congress and the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. Indeed, he was not even in France at the time of either. Nor did the Algerian uprising or the collapse of the Fourth Republic in 1958 loom large in his life. He later recalled that he experienced all this "like a foreigner" and that he "personally didn't participate in one of the most decisive experiences of modern France."[82]

It was not until after the events of May `68 that Foucault became a *philosophe engagé* and began in earnest his reflection on power. Nonetheless, he was not an actual

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[80]See Eribon's discussion of his participation, pp. 50-56, in which he discusses Foucault's heterodoxy and work for the communist journal, La nouvelle Critique.

[81]See Eribon's discussion, p. 56, and Foucault's remarks in Remarks on Marx, 53.

[82]Remarks on Marx, 74-75.

participant in these events, either, being employed at the time at the University of Tunisia. From this event, too, he was "a bit displaced, marginal...."[83] Nonetheless, Tunisia had its spring of unrest in March 1968 - a month of riots and boycotts and repression during which Foucault hid dissidents and a printing press in his apartment,[84] an experience, he recalled, that "represented in some ways the chance to reinsert myself in the political debate. It wasn't May of `68 in France that changed me; it was March of `68, in a third world country."[85]

At the same time, however, Foucault was not totally cut off from the experience of May `68. His long time companion Daniel Defert, in Paris at the time, would hold the phone to a radio so that Foucault could hear the live broadcasts of the events in the street. But, more important, the events of May `68 altered the French political scene and the role intellectuals would play in it. The events marked the beginning of the end of the PCF's dominant role on the French left and of the virtually hegemonic role it played in intellectuals' politics. They also initiated the decline of the role of the intellectual as prophetic diviner of universal truths in the aid of political struggles and the advent of a new left based upon localized struggles (i.e.

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[83]*Ibid.*, 132.

[84]Miller, 168-171.

[85]Remarks on Marx, 136.

feminism, environmentalism, prison reform). To the extent that Foucault, after May, became a prominent voice in the redefinition of politics and the political role of the intellectual, one can see that May played a far more central role in his life and thought than his foregoing remarks might indicate.[86]

The activism of the May movement (primarily the occupation of universities and the street fighting in Paris) was directed against modern bureaucratic and consumer society which subjected individual autonomy to the will and apparatus of "the plan."[87] There were four main groups behind this activism: Maoists, Trotskyists, Anarchists, and Situationists. The Maoists (as represented by the *Union des Jeunesse Communistes*) took its lead from the cultural revolution in China which criticized the party leadership (short of Mao), managers of industry and intellectuals for allowing the social hierarchy indicative of capitalism to betray the people's revolution. Trotskyism, (as represented by the *Jeunesse Communistes Révolutionnaires* and the *Fédération des Etudiants Révolutionnaires*) on the other hand, had deeper roots in France. Since the late 1940s Cornelius

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[86]See Chapter 5.

[87]Postwar French society has been referred to as the "société du plan," in reference to the increased co-operation between business and government in economic management. A good deal of criticism was also directed at the hierarchy of both the university and the PCF, though neither of them were so clearly recognizable as arms of "modern bureaucratic and consumer society."

Castoriadis and Claude Lefort (among others) had been presenting a Trotskyist critique of both capitalism and Soviet socialism through the organization *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and the journal of the same name. Extending Trotsky's critique of the Stalinist state apparatus, Castoriadis argued that the states of the Eastern bloc, despite their differences with the West, were founded upon the same "rationality" as western capitalist states - an "integrated bureaucratic capitalism," the "essence" of which was the division between planners and planned, between "command" and "execution."[88] Although Castoriadis had dissolved *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in June 1967 out of a frustration with "the unlimited capacity of the general population for self-deception,"[89] his critique resonated throughout May and its aftermath.

The Anarchists (represented by the *Mouvement du 22 Mars*, or *M22M*) and Situationists, however, extended the Maoist and Trotskyist critiques of political parties, the state and modern capitalism even further. Anarchists and Situationists both claimed to defend the anti-bureaucratic spontaneity that gave the events of May their particular

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[88]Brian Singer, "The Early Castoriadis: Socialism, Barbarism, and the Bureaucratic Thread," Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory, vol. 3, no. 3 (Fall 1979): 37.

[89]*Ibid.*, 44.

quality,[90] and to oppose both party and theory. For Daniel ("Red Danny") Cohn-Bendit, who, along with Alain Geismar and Jacques Sauvageot, was one of the unofficial leaders of *M22M*, "The setting up of any party inevitably reduces the freedom of the people to freedom to agree with the party.... In other words, democracy is suborned not by bad leadership but by the very existence of leadership."[91] In Enragés et Situationnistes dans le Mouvement des Occupations, Réné Vienet denounced "Leninist theologians," the "farce" of the cultural revolution, and "Radical theory, rendered difficult by intellectuals wholly incapable of living."[92] What primarily separated the two movements was tactics. While the situation varied from campus to campus, it seems that the M22M played the leading role in the occupations and in keeping the occupiers in almost constant plenary session. For them, it seems, if not for the PCF, May was a revolutionary situation to be exploited. For the Situationists, the walls themselves and the absence of usual forms of constraint presented the possibility of a "critical vandalism":[93] "The disappearance of forced work necessarily coincided with the

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[90]Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, Obsolete Communism: The Leftwing Alternative (London: Andre Deutsch, 1968), 251; René Vienet, Enragés et Situationnistes dans le mouvement des occupations (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 142.

[91]Cohn-Bendit and Cohn-Bendit, 250.

[92]Vienet, 134-5, 19, 136.

[93]*Ibid.*, 30.

free expression of creativity in all domains: writing, language, comportment, tactics, techniques of combat, agitation, songs, posters, and comic strips."[94] "Everyday life, suddenly rediscovered, would become the centre of all possible conquests."[95] If the lasting image of May was the pitched battles between police and students in the streets surrounding the Sorbonne, the message of May was to be found in Situationist grafitti[96] - "Ici on spontane"; "Soyez réalistes ... demandez l'impossible";[97] "Je prends mes désirs pour la réalité car je crois en la réalité de mes désirs";[98] "Sous le pavé, la plage."

In the wake of May, Foucault went through a double transformation. On the one hand, he flung himself into radical political activity. He helped found the *Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons* and became a member of the *Groupe d'Information sur la Santé*. He spoke out against repression and injustice in many interviews and articles and was a regular participant in a variety of political demonstrations. In January 1969, during his brief stint as

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[94]*Ibid.*, 138.

[95]*Ibid.*, 136.

[96]Vienet argues that, while there was no organized Situationist grafitti campaign, the grafitti of May contained passages culled from Situationist tracts. *Ibid.*, 22.

[97]James Leith, "The New French Revolution, May 1968" Queen's Quarterly, vol. 36 (Spring 1969): 91.

[98]Vienet, 100.

chair of the Department of Philosophy at the new and experimental Vincennes University, he was to be found hurling bricks from a rooftop at police charged with ending a student occupation.[99] Foucault never lost his taste for radical activism acquired in these years, although it became much more restrained after his experiences with the Iranian Revolution.[100]

On the other hand, Foucault took up for the first time the question of power and the possibility of resistance to it - a question which could hardly be avoided in the wake of May. The question of power was certainly not inconsequential in Madness and Civilization, yet there he presented it in a very conventional fashion as repression - as the restraint or exclusion by a culture and its institutions of certain instincts, desires and modes of being which become foreign to it according to forgotten yet essential choices. That Foucault could write of the alienation of individuals in this process showed that he had failed to expunge a certain humanist belief in individual autonomy and the validity and sanctity of individual experience.

As I point out in Chapter 5, while he seems to revert to the stance of Madness and Civilization in sub-

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[99]Miller, 178. Miller also points out, however, that Foucault's tolerance for student occupations and disruption of the University stopped at the doorway to his own lectures. Miller, 178.

[100]See my discussion of this point in Chapter 7.

sequently championing the value of experimentation with drugs and sexuality (very much in the mode of the counter-culture of the sixties that came through strongly in May `68), he ultimately transcends a humanist stance through a form of vitalism deriving from Canguilhem's work. To the extent he held out the possibility of resistance to power, it is not founded upon the ultimate value of the human subject, but upon the very indeterminacy of human being that ceaselessly surges forth in the very fact of our living.

The dominance of existentialism and phenomenology in French intellectual life and May `68 formed the backdrop against which Foucault articulated his work. In the first instance he felt compelled to clear the philosophical decks by exposing the extent to which existentialism and phenomenology remained ensnared within traditional modes of modern philosophical discourse. In the course of this endeavour he came to discount any constitutive role for the subject and came to be seen by many as an enemy of individual freedom. May `68 put human freedom at the centre stage of French intellectual life in the 1970s and Foucault found himself faced with the challenge of conceiving of the possibility of a human freedom and resistance to power without reverting to a humanist conception of the subject.

Chapter 3

Bataille and the Dionysiac

As I indicated in the previous chapter, Foucault left France in 1955 at least in part to escape the intellectual dominance of existentialism, phenomenology and Marxism. In many ways, his unpublished "Introduction" to his translation of Kant's Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht and Folie et dérasion: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique[1] are his early efforts at a critique of both the configuration of knowledge which underlay existentialism, phenomenology and Marxism[2] and of the social practices which he argued were intimately linked to it. What Foucault hoped to show in his "Introduction" was the "propadeutic character" of the Critique of Pure Reason for the Anthropology in particular and for modern philosophy and the human sciences

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[1]Foucault returned to France in the fall of 1960 with completed drafts of both works which he submitted to the Sorbonne as the primary thesis and the *thèse complémentaire* for the *doctorat ès lettres*. His translation was published as Anthropologie du point du vue pragmatique (Paris: Vrin, 1964). Folie et déraison (Paris: Plon, 1961) was abridged by Foucault and translated into English as Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason (Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Pantheon, 1965).

[2]As Foucault would argue in The Order of Things, the "recent rapprochement" of phenomenology and Marxism "is not of the order of a tardy reconciliation: at the level of archaeological configuration they were both necessary - and necessary to one another - from the moment the anthropological postulate was constituted...." P. 322.

in general.[3] It was in the Critique that he located the origins of the analytic of finitude and the appearance of man as the "difficult object and sovereign subject of all possible knowledge."[4] But for Foucault, this development made its effects felt far beyond the bounds of philosophy:

> the Critique in its `propadeutic' character as regards philosophy, added a constitutive role in the birth and the development of the concrete forms of human existence. There was a certain critical truth of man, offspring of the critique of the conditions of truth.[5]

Which is to say, that the development of the analytic of finitude had important implications for social practice.

Just as Kant's Critique had sought to establish a "critical truth of man," so there arose in the social sphere dividing practices by which a culture "exercised its essential choices," by which it "rejected something which will be for it the Other."[6] In Madness and Civilization Foucault sought to write the history of the establishment of these "limits" - "of this act of scission, of this distance set, of this void instituted between reason and what is not reason"[7] - according to which the mad were "liberated" from

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[3]"Introduction," 4.

[4]Dreyfus and Rabinow, 27. As noted earlier, the outlines of what would become The Order of Things can be discerned in this "Introduction." Foucault, in The Order of Things, again points out the important role of Kant in the origins of the analytic of finitude, 341.

[5]"Introduction," 4.

[6]Folie et déraison, iii-iv.

[7]Madness and Civilization, x.

their madness in confinement and became the object of a rational discourse. In "reason's subjugation of non-reason"[8] that transpired in these practices, he saw the constitution of a "tragic structure," a rejection of "other experiences" (of which madness is one) which "trace a limit" "on the frontiers of our culture."[9] Through the practices by which the mad were restored to reason (practices linked directly to the intellectual movement that gave rise to the analytic of finitude) what Foucault describes as the "essential" and "sovereign enterprise of unreason"[10] was lost to modern consciousness.

In describing the modern confrontation of reason and non-reason as tragic in character, Foucault clearly echoes Nietzsche, the Nietzsche who in The Birth of Tragedy wrote of a "sanity" that appeared "cadaverous and ghostly" beside the intensity of "Dionysiac revelers."[11] But in speaking of the "sovereignty" of madness, I will argue that Foucault is invoking the work of Georges Bataille a wide-ranging social and cultural critic who has been described as a "shadowy (if

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[8]*Ibid*, ix.

[9]Folie et déraison, iv.

[10]Madness and Civilization, 140.

[11]Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, trans. Francis Golfing (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 23.

crucial) precursor" of post-structuralism.[12] It was to the work of Bataille that Foucault turned in conceiving of a sovereign, Dionysiac subject, a subject capable of resisting the constitutive discourses and social practices of the modern age.

While Foucault's work was not overtly political in character in these years, the questions of freedom and repression were central to his work. For him the chief constraints to freedom were the discourses and social practices which made the rational, individual, meaning-giving subject the limit and measure of humanity. As we will see, the importance of madness and of the experience of artistic creativity to Foucault was that in these experiences this limit that the rational, meaning-giving subject formed was necessarily transgressed. For Foucault, madness and artistic creativity showed that the limits of human possibility were not given in the figure of a free and responsible subject, an identity that the mad, for instance, were forced to assume in their cure. The limits of the world were not defined by a reason which organized objective reality for us. What was sovereign and limitless was the subjective reality of the mad, for instance.

The conceptions of sovereignty and of what I call the Dionysiac subject which Foucault uses derive, I argue,

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[12]Georges Bataille, Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939, ed. Alan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), from the dust cover.

from the work of Bataille. For Bataille, as for Foucault, sovereignty is equivalent to limitless possibilities. Sovereignty, then, is achieved in the transgression of the individual, which, insofar as it consists in a conscious effort at self-definition, constitutes the most basic limit to an existence of limitless possibility. Both argue that sovereignty is potentially open to each individual, but is undermined by a socialization process which demands that we avoid those experiences which call into question the rational self. As I suggested above, one can describe these experiences as Dionysiac in character. For both Bataille and Foucault, Nietzsche's Dionysos was an important reference point in their criticisms of the oppressive rationalization of modern life. Beyond this common intellectual provenance, for both Bataille and Foucault the experiences which contest or transgress the rational self are Dionysiac insofar as they derive from a self-overcoming vitality and because they are purely "inner" in character. The vital aspect of the Dionysiac mode of being is very important to Bataille. It is less so for Foucault, but, as we will see below, the sovereignty of the experience of the mad is not unrelated to its vital character.[13] For both, a literature that derives

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[13]At the penultimate moment of his introduction to Folie et déraison, Foucault quotes the poet René Char: "Compagnons pathétique qui murmurez à peine, allez à la lampe éteinte et rendez les bijoux. Un mystère nouveau chante dans vos os. Développez votre étrangeté légitime." (P. xi.) This passage, which celebrates the legitimacy of a difference that "sings in [one's] bones," clearly indicates the affinity Foucault saw between sovereignty and vitalism.

from a uniquely inward vision and contests, in a radical way, the limits of the self and of objective reality, are central manifestations of the sovereign subject.

The romantic dichotomy of reason and inward passion, then, is the starting point for both Foucault and Bataille. This is apparent in Madness and Civilization. The work is about the Classical experience of madness stretching from Willis to Tuke and Pinel who, in "liberating" the mad heralded the dawn of a new experience of madness. Foucault seeks to unearth this experience of madness from the vast intellectual and institutional world that was its historical *a priori*, that world which made possible such an experience in the first place. It is, he argued, a history of "limits,"

> of those obscure gestures, necessarily forgotten at the very moment they are accomplished, by which a culture rejects something which will be, for it, Exterior.[14]

It is a

> structural study of the historical ensemble - notions, institutions, juridical and police measures, scientific concepts - which holds captive a madness whose savage state can never be restored in itself.[15]

As these passages indicate, Foucault is concerned not only with reconstructing the social practices and intellectual developments by which a culture experiences madness, but also with the savage state of madness itself as a primitive

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[14]Folie et déraison, iii-iv.

[15]*Ibid.*, vii.

form of liberty that is alienated in its marginalization or suppression in European history.

He argues that the Classical[16] experience of madness was one in which the mad were reduced to nothing in the face of the "binary structure" that underwrote Classical reason and which manifested itself in various bi-polar relations - "truth and error, world and phantasm, being and non-being, Day and Night."[17] This polarity, at work in science and culture, allowed, indeed demanded, an imprisonment of the mad, their elimination from sight in the social realm that corresponded to their reduction to non-being in the intellectual realm. The majority of the work is devoted to the detailed reconstruction of this structure in the thought and institutions of the Classical world.

Yet in the final chapters Foucault begins to map out that torsion within the Classical experience of madness, beginning at the end of the eighteenth century, which heralded the emergence of the modern historical *a priori*, a configuration of discourses and social practices generated by the appearance of "man." This development gave rise to conditions of possibility which allowed for a modern experience of madness. The symbol of this new experience is the liberation of the mad from the prisons by Tuke and Pinel and

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[16]For Foucault, the "Classical age" was that period which stretched, roughly, from the reign of Louis XIV to the end of the eighteenth century.

[17]*Ibid.*, 625.

their confinement in more humane institutions, in which the mad were not only restored to sight but became the objects of a careful examination by a range of new sciences that appeared in the nineteenth century.

In Tuke's religious asylum and in Pinel's secular one Foucault discovered an unending "confrontation of reason and unreason."[18] Tuke's Retreat, he argued, was organized so as "to place the insane individual within a moral element where he will be in a debate with himself and his surroundings."[19] Tuke believed that an element of reason still persisted within the insane individual and that his exposure to religion, "the concrete form of what cannot go bad,"[20] would provide the basis for re-establishing "a primitive complicity between the madman and the man of reason"[21]:

> The asylum no longer punished the madman's guilt ... but it did more, it organized that guilt; it organized it for the madman as a consciousness of himself, and as a non-reciprocal relation to the keeper; it organized it for the man of reason as an awareness of the Other, a therapeutic intervention in the madman's existence. In other words, by this guilt the madman became an object of punishment always vulnerable to himself and the Other; and, from the acknowledgement of his status as object, from the awareness of his guilt, the madman was to return to his awareness of himself as a free and responsible subject, and consequently to reason.[22]

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[18]Madness and Civilization, 254.

[19]*Ibid.*, 245.

[20]*Ibid.*, 244.

[21]*Ibid.*, 245.

[22]*Ibid.*, 247.

Whereas in the Classical age the mad were simply confined, in the modern age the asylum sought to cure the mad, to turn them into reasonable beings. In the process, the autonomy of the mad's experience of madness was obliterated. Pinel's asylum operated on similar principles, though with a stronger moral tone. It was "a religious domain without religion, a domain of pure morality, of ethical uniformity."[23] Yet the ethical environment of Pinel's asylum was not divorced, at its deepest levels, from the project of Tuke's asylum. In the modern age reason became one with morality.

The asylum "reduces differences, represses vices, eliminates irregularities."[24] This was achieved by making the asylum a zone of perpetual judgment - a judgment that achieved its greatest success by making the patient the judge of his own shameful insanity. Yet it is with the appearance of the "medical personage" in the asylum that "the deepest meaning of confinement is abolished: mental disease with the meanings we now give it is made possible:"[25]

> Life in the asylum as Tuke and Pinel constituted it permitted the birth of that delicate structure which would become the essential nucleus of madness - a structure that formed a kind of microcosm in which were symbolized the massive structures of bourgeois society and

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[23] *Ibid.*, 257.

[24] *Ibid.*, 258.

[25] *Ibid.*, 273.

> its values: Family-Child relations, centred on the theme of paternal authority; Transgression-Punishment relations, centred on the theme of immediate justice; Madness-Disorder relations, centred on the theme of social and moral order. It is from these that the physician derives his power to cure; and it is to the degree that the patient finds himself, by so many old links, already alienated in the doctor, within the doctor-patient couple, that the doctor has the almost miraculous power to cure him.[26]

In the course of this cure, the patient is "alienated in the real person of the doctor [and] the doctor dissipates the reality of the mental illness in the critical concept of madness."[27]

For Foucault, then, the liberation of the mad that Tuke, Pinel and modern psychiatry believed themselves to have achieved is, on the contrary, a profound alienation. This "liberation" reduces madness to a symptom of a disordered reason, denying any positive value to the experience of madness itself. His "solid sovereignty as a subject dissolves" in his recognition of the "absurd pretensions" of his madness.[28] This liberation entails the construction in the mind of the madman a self-consciousness patterned on a "truth" of man rooted in the analytic finitude. This self-consciousness is an invisible fortress that keeps the forces of madness at bay and confines the individual to the realm of that which is reasonable within him.

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[26]*Ibid.*, 274.

[27]*Ibid.*, 277.

[28]*Ibid.*, 264.

In and of itself, this denial of the autonomy of that experience of madness is, for Foucault, tragic in character. Yet the tragedy, for him, is heightened by the fact that in the modern experience an "essential" aspect of the "enterprise of unreason" is lost. While psychoanalysis could "unravel some of the forms of madness" it could not penetrate what was sovereign in madness. It remained deaf to "that language which was delirium."[29]

The sovereignty of unreason of which Foucault speaks (and which, as we will see, parallels Bataille's conception of sovereignty) consists in its ability to call into question the highly structured self-consciousness according to which we recognize ourselves as rational, individual, meaning-giving subjects and its ability to contest reason's truth claims. For Foucault, the sovereignty of madness is its power of radical transgression and contestation.

Foucault sees such a sovereignty portrayed in Goya's representations of the mad, in *The Madhouse*, *Sleep of Reason*, the *Gran Disparate*, the *Raging Madness*. In the madman in the tricorne hat portrayed in *The Madhouse* Foucault sees "a human presence already liberated and somehow free since the beginning of time...." In all Goya's portrayals of the mad he sees a "dark freedom" that is all the more free insofar as it is articulated against a world in which reason

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[29]*Ibid.*, 278, 286.

asserts its sovereignty.[30] In the face of a reason, which has embedded itself in the discourses and practices of the modern age, "[m]adness has become man's possibility of abolishing both man and the world - and even those images which challenge the world and deform man." As the radical negation of reason, in the modern age madness has "a hold on Western culture which makes possible all contestation, as well as total contestation."[31]

For Foucault, the contestatory power of madness and its sovereignty derives from the fact that a mode of subjectivity is revealed in madness that is before all culture and all self-identity and is, as a result, before all limits on human possibility. On the one hand, in madness one finds the primitive power of the flesh. The liberated human presence of the man in the tricorne is constituted "by the inarticulate power of his muscular body, of his savage and marvelously unconstricted youth." From all the "unprofaned flesh" portrayed in *The Madhouse* radiates a "human truth."[32] In madness one finds revealed a "primitive vivacity" which engages reason in an indefinite debate.[33] For Foucault, the body is the locus of untamed vital forces which it is the task of socialization and individuation to tame and channel

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[30]*Ibid.*, 279.

[31]*Ibid.*, 281.

[32]*Ibid.*, 279.

[33]Folie et déraison, ix.

into productive and rational pathways. It is this taming of untamed forces that undermines sovereign being.

To say that for Foucault madness embodies unlimited vital powers is not to say that he did not recognize that madness was, on the other hand, a mental state. Rather, in invoking vitalism he seeks to invest madness with the qualities that vitality implies: a potentially boundless, ever renewed, indeterminate generative power arising from within the organism. Thus the sovereignty of madness, for Foucault, resides not only in the fact that the madness is untamed, but in its inward and solitary character. Before all conceptions of self, before all socialization, madness is the "night" in which "man communicates with what is deepest in himself, and what is most solitary."[34] "All that is present" in Goya's figures "is the most internal, and at the same time the most savagely free, of forces."[35] The freedom of these forces consist in the emptiness from which they proceed: "nothing can assign them their origin, their limit, and their nature."[36]

Madness is sovereign, then, insofar as it is beyond all measure: it proceeds from the depths of a limitless void and it is possessed of a vital and "primitive savagery"[37]

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[34]Madness and Civilization, 280.

[35]*Ibid.*, 281.

[36]*Ibid.*, 280.

[37]*Ibid.*, 281.

unrestrained by any sense of proportion or reason. Madness calls into question reason's attempts to plumb its depths or direct its energies towards the achievement of reasonable ends. Madness is sovereign because it is beyond all limits.

Sovereignty, for Foucault, is not exhausted by the form it takes in madness. It is also revealed in the limitless desire of Sade. For him, the rejection of a given social order, the rejection of the limits imposed by constituted morality and religion do not result, as in Rousseau, in a return to a natural order which guarantees the happiness of men. For Sade, there is no "natal terrain." The sovereign subject of Sade is the one who rigourously pursues his sovereignty, in the guise of desire, against any conception of a natural order. Sovereignty consists in nothing less than a desire which seeks to overcome the limits of the world without exception. This limitless desire is not unnatural by any means in its opposition to a natural order. Indeed, "what desire can be contrary to nature," Foucault asks, "since it was given to man by nature itself?"

> Everything that morality and religion, everything that a clumsy society has stifled in man, revives in [Sade's] castle of murders. There man is finally attuned to his own nature; or rather, by an ethic peculiar to this strange confinement, man must scrupulously maintain, without deviation, his fidelity to nature: a strict task, a total enterprise.[38]

For Sade, and for Foucault, our sovereignty resides in a desire completely devoid of proportion or regard for com-

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[38]*Ibid.*, 282.

munity, a desire which constitutes the "possibility of transcending ... reason in violence."[39]

This unreasonable violence, present in the mad of Goya's paintings and central to Sade's enterprise, finds its voice, Foucault argues, in "the lightning-flash of works such as those of Hölderlin, or Nerval, of Nietzsche, or of Artaud," works which contest "the gigantic moral imprisonment" of what has come to be called the liberation of the mad by Tuke and Pinel.[40] As with the madman in the tricorne hat, as with the insatiable desire of Sade, the works of art that proceed from the madness of Nietzsche or Van Gogh call into question the world of reason. Madness does not speak through these works, rather the works are simply "those words hurled against a fundamental absence of language, ... that space of physical suffering and terror which surrounds or rather coincides with the void...."[41] Such works, insofar as they open upon the void that is madness, oblige the world "to order itself by its language." The world is compelled by the work of art "to a task of recognition, or reparation, to the task of restoring reason from that unreason and to that unreason."[42]

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[39]*Ibid.*, 284, 285.

[40]*Ibid.*, 278.

[41]*Ibid.*, 287.

[42]*Ibid.*, 288.

Having spent so much time in Madness and Civilization showing how the rational subject was constituted by the discourses and social practices of the modern world, Foucault concludes by arguing that this constitutive power was not the final word as regards subjectivity. In madness, in the limitless desire of Sade, and in those works of art which proceed out of madness, there persists a sovereign subjectivity that bears all the signs of Nietzsche's Dionysos. The sovereignty of these experiences consists, for Foucault, precisely in their ability to contest the limits that discourse and social practice put upon subjectivity in the modern world. In part this contestatory power derives from experiences in which a primitive vital power is unrestrained. In part it derives from the depths of a "night" out of which delirium speaks. In the modern age, Foucault argues, it is the experience of the creation of the work of art which maintains contact with these forces.

While some have viewed Madness and Civilization as evidence of a concern with the question of power that would emerge with greater clarity in Foucault's works of the early 1970s, I think this is only true to the extent that the discourses and techniques of power deployed in the asylum are portrayed by him as the foil of a mode of subjectivity that is not ultimately subjected and which continues to contest the logic of this power. Indeed, if one puts this work within the context of his other works of the period, it

becomes apparent that he is more concerned with articulating this contestatory conception of subjectivity than with the question of power.

As I pointed out above, for Foucault it is the experience of artistic creation, that is, in the modern age, the primary manifestation of this mode of subjectivity. As a result, in the aftermath of Madness and Civilization one finds him writing about Mallarmé, Hölderlin, Pierre Klossowski, and Gérard de Nerval.[43] He wrote a book about Raymond Roussel, a little known avant-garde writer of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries who was, nonetheless, highly regarded by such figures as Gide, Cocteau and Duchamp.[44] He also wrote several short pieces on less well known French writers and specific aspects of literature. He was also a participant in discussions on poetry and the novel with leading French literary critics of the day.[45]

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[43]"Le Mallarmé de J.-P. Richard," Annales 19, no 5 (September-October, 1964): 996-1004; "The Father's 'No'," Donald F. Bouchard Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977): 68-86; "La prose d'Actaeon," La Nouvelle Revue Francaise 135 (March, 1964): 444-459; "L'Obligation d'écrire," Arts (November 11-17, 1964): 7.

[44]For a brief biography of Roussel see the introduction to Death and the Labyrinth.

[45]"Le cycle des grenouilles," La Nouvelle Revue française 114 (June, 1962): 1159-1160; "Un si cruel savoir," Critique 182 (July, 1962): 596-611; "Guetter le jour qui vient," La Nouvelle Revue Francaise 130 (October, 1963): 709-716.; "Débat sur la poésie," Tel Quel 17 (Spring 1964): 69-82; and "Débat sur le roman," Tel Quel 17(Spring, 1964): 12-54.

What concerned him in literature was not so much the work as the author's experience, which, to him, paralleled that of the mad. At the heart of madness, he argued, there spoke a "language which was delirium,"[46] a language that psychoanalysis could neither hear nor transcribe. Reason was deaf to this language, he argued, both because the delirium of the mad was a subjective reality fundamentally at odds with objective reality and because the imaginings of delirium knew no limit, least of all that imposed by a reasonable attitude. Neither could literature, any more than psychiatry, transcribe delirium. It is, as he suggests above, only "words hurled against a fundamental absence of language." But whereas psychiatry seeks to impoverish madness, seeks to reduce it to a symptom of a faulty reason, literature (or at least the literature he writes about), as the outer limit of madness, "inaugurates the time of its truth."[47]

The literature to which Foucault refers is the subject of his article, "La folie, l'absence d'oeuvre," which arises out of the conclusion to Madness and Civilization. The language of Nerval, Hölderlin, etc., he argues,

> unfolds at its interior: it says what it says, but it adds a mute surplus which enunciates silently that which it says and the code according to which it says it. This is not a secret code [*un langage chiffré*] but a structurally esoteric language. Which is to say that it

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[46]Madness and Civilization, 286.

[47]*Ibid.*, 289.

> doesn't communicate ... a hidden meaning; it installs itself ... in an essential and innermost recess of speech [parole].... It is this liberation, obscure yet central, of speech at its heart, its uncontrollable flight towards a space always without light, that no culture can immediately accept. Not in its meaning, not in its verbal matter, but it is in its play that such a language is transgressive.[48]

This literature is important, for Foucault, because, like madness, it contests the limits of culture. It is a literature of absolute sovereignty, a literature that arises out of the same void and the same forces as madness and which is beyond all possible assimilation by a culture. It is not that this literature is synonymous with madness. Madness "neither manifests nor recounts the birth of a work [*oeuvre*] .... [Rather] it designates the empty form from whence this work came, which is to say the space where it never ceases to be absent, where it is never found because it never was there."[49] Foucault's concern in his analysis of literature is the sovereign experience, so close to madness, that this literature arises from and to which it addresses itself.

It is no coincidence that Foucault focuses his attention on authors who went mad (such as Hölderlin, Nietzsche, Roussel), although he also concerns himself with those who did not. In either case, the works of the figures he addresses have common characteristics. In the first instance, all the literary works Foucault discusses he views

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[48]"La folie, l'absence d'oeuvre," La Table Ronde 196 (May, 1964): 16.

[49]*Ibid.*, 19.

as transgressive. Secondly, on the far side of the limit which these works trace is revealed that which gives them their transgressive character - a "language" which insistently, under a force of its own, erupts upon the horizon of our consciousness. Thirdly, while this "language" comes through in these works, it is not given in them. Indeed, it is a "language" which cannot be rendered at all in prose or discourse. These works are also important for Foucault, then, to the extent they contest the power of rational discourse or the work of art to render the experience out of which they arise.

In his study of Gérard de Nerval, "L'Obligation d'écrire," Foucault argues that what is significant in his work is the sovereign experience out of which it arises. Nerval's work, he argues, tell us "that the only way to get to the heart of literature is to maintain oneself infinitely at its limit."[50] But such a stance is not a consciously applied literary device. It is, at its heart, an experience beyond the will of the author. For Nerval, Foucault argues, was possessed, outside any conscious choice, by an "empty obligation to write." "The texts of Nerval have not left us with the fragments of an oeuvre," he argues, "but the constantly repeated theme, that it is necessary to write, that one only lives and one only dies by writing."[51] In this way,

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[50]"L'Obligation d'écrire," 7.

[51]*Ibid.*

Nerval's writings reveal to us the interconnection of being and writing - insofar as Nerval's very writing was a function of a blind urge to write that took hold of him at the very core of his being - and the kinship, at the same time, of death and writing - insofar as Nerval as an author and his work as that of the author were reduced to nothing before this very same urge. Nerval's works, then, form the limit not only of his being but of its dissolution (its figurative death) in madness, revealing the "twin possibility and impossibility of writing and being."

For Foucault, what is sovereign in the writing of Nerval is a force, an "empty obligation," before which the rational, individual, meaning-giving entity that is Nerval is reduced to nothing. Nerval's writings attest not to his own creative genius, but to the fact that Nerval had failed to harness what was most internal, most savagely free, and most human within him. The significance of Nerval, for Foucault, is that his writings bear witness to the same sovereign subjectivity that is obliterated in the asylum. Whereas in the asylum the mad lose their sovereignty in assuming an identity, Nerval's writing reveals a sovereignty that is constituted in the very overcoming of the limits imposed by the identity of the author.

We find Foucault pursuing this void which is the space of madness and literature in the work of other writers as well. In a review of <u>La Veille</u> by Roger Laporte he argues that Laporte shows plainly that the

> possibility of writing ... leads finally and without concession to an absence of a work, but [one] rendered so pure, so transparent, so free of any obstacle and of the dullness of words which would dim its radiance, that it is this absence itself[52]

The absence at the heart of literary experience, he argues, parallels the experience of death and unreason: it transgresses those limits of identity and rational calculation that impede sovereignty.[53] It is in this sense, he continues, that Laporte's work finds itself situated in the "general space" occupied by Nietzsche, Bataille, Artaud, Klossowski and Blanchot.[54]

In Foucault's analysis of the work of Hölderlin, similar themes arise. Hölderlin's work, too, reveals a "region where language is most unlike itself and where signs no longer communicate." This "lyric expression" becomes a delirium at which point his work reveals "the absence of a work."[55] This "dissolution of a work in madness" reveals the "void to which poetic speech is drawn" and reveals, as well, that language "comes to us from elsewhere, from a place of which no one can speak, but [that] it can be transformed into a work only if, in ascending to its proper discourse, it directs its speech toward this absence."[56]

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[52]"Le cycle des grenouilles," 713.

[53]*Ibid.*, 715.

[54]*Ibid.*, 716.

[55]"The Father's `No'," 83.

[56]*Ibid.*, 85, 86.

Foucault also sees a "transgressive speech" as being central to the works of Pierre Klossowski.

> Gide and many others with him wanted to transcribe an impure silence into a pure language, no doubt not seeing that such a speech [parole] retains its purity in a more profound silence that it doesn't name and which speaks in it, despite it.... We know now since Bataille and Blanchot that language owes its power of transgression to a pure silence, and that it is in the space indefinitely run through with this language that speech can address itself to such a silence.[57]

Foucault's most concerted work of literary analysis is his least well known book, Raymond Roussel (1963). Foucault recalled shortly before his death that he stumbled upon the work of Roussel quite by accident rummaging through a Paris bookstore while visiting from Uppsala. "Had I remained within that limited horizon of my student days," he said, "it seems likely I could have opened Roussel's book and slammed it shut with a good laugh."[58] But having escaped the limits of existentialism and phenomenology, Foucault found Roussel's work compelling.

For Foucault what was most compelling about Roussel's work was that it was the interiority of the experience that gave rise to it. When writing, Roussel would closet himself up in a darkened room to be left alone with his thoughts. He would work for days and nights on end, oblivious to the everyday world of things. His novels and

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[57]"La Prose d'Actéon," 457.

[58]"An Interview with Michel Foucault," in Death and the Labyrinth, 174.

poems, then, are about themselves. They are pure process, they refer to nothing, least of all to a supposedly real world. "Roussel's experiment," Foucault argued

> is located in what could be called the 'tropological space' of vocabulary. It's not quite the grammarian's space, or rather it is this same space, but treated differently. It is not where the canonical figures of speech originate, but that neutral space within language where the hollowness of the word is shown as an insidious void, arid and a trap.[59]

Just as Foucault argued that madness arises in a void, a night of non-being, so, too, he finds in Roussel an awareness that it is not the author who is engaged in a purposeful and calculated effort at composition, but that the limits of the author as subject are transgressed in the act of writing. Roussel, Foucault argued,

> felt there is, beyond the quasi-liberties of expression, an absolute emptiness of being that he must surround, dominate, and overwhelm with pure invention....[60]

As with Nerval who was possessed by an empty obligation to write, Roussel, too, reveals that "language comes to us from the depth of a perfectly clear night and is impossible to master."[61]

This void Foucault described as an "enclosed sun," a phrase suggestive of the intensity he attributed to Roussel's inner vision. This inner vision he also described as

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[59]Death and the Labyrinth, 16.

[60]*Ibid.*

[61]*Ibid.*, 39-40.

"the underground force from which his language springs."[62] Yet our attempts to disinter the force that gave rise to Roussel's language are foiled by the fact that there do not exist the words by which one could transcribe it. "This illuminating flaw of language," Foucault argued, "was experienced by Roussel as an anguish, as an obsession if you will."[63] Like Nerval it compelled him to write.

Foucault, then, is not so much attracted by the literary inventiveness of Roussel but by the mode of being to which Roussel's works refer but which they cannot adequately render. It is a range of experience that is always in excess of language. It is this experience that is important for Foucault in his examination of literature. He sought to champion that mode of being from which these works arose and to which they - imperfectly - spoke. He sought to explore not simply the works of Hölderlin but "Hölderlin and his madness," in which the work is co-extensive with and the "extreme limit" of his madness.[64] Roger Laporte's La Veille is not simply the recounting of an experience, a mere representation, it is a palpable form of that experience.[65] For Foucault, these writers and their works are exemplars of a rather more generalized form of experience that he seeks to

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[62] *Ibid.*, 7.

[63] *Ibid.*, 164-5.

[64] "The Father's `No'," 71.

[65] "Guetter le jour qui vient," 710.

expose. "The problem of poetry," he argued, "is a problem of experience,"[66] for "the being of literature ... takes its place in the same region as the experience of madness."[67] As Foucault stated plainly:

> What is it that interests me, me, a naïve man with my great philosopher's clodhoppers? I am struck by one thing, that ... in the novels I could read, there is constant reference made to a certain number of experiences - if you wish, I will call them, in inverted commas, spiritual experiences (but in the end the word spiritual isn't sufficient) - like dream, madness, unreason, repetition, the double, the detracking of time, the return, etc. These experiences form a constellation which is probably coherent.[68]

What my analysis of Foucault's work in this early period makes apparent is that his discussion of the asylum, in Madness and Civilization, and medical practice, in The Birth of the Clinic, while clearly important in the later development of his theory of power, are not the central aspects of his work in the early 1960s. Rather, it is the question of the grounds of a sovereign being that are central. For him, the subject who can resist power and thus attain to sovereignty is not the one who is the individual, meaning-giving subject - the "world-constituting, world-surpassing, and world-nihilating" subject of Sartrean existentialism. While Foucault attributes an important contestatory power to the Dionysiac subject, its sovereignty

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[66]"Débat sur la poésie," 72-73.

[67]"La folie, l'absence d'oeuvre," 20.

[68]"Débat sur le roman," 12-13.

does not reside in the world-constituting powers of a subject that Sartre conceives as pure intentionality. The sovereignty of the Dionysiac subject resides precisely in the absolute breach it makes with the world, not in the links it establishes with it in the intentional activity of consciousness. To this extent, Foucault must also reject Merleau-Ponty's more complex portrayal of a subject who is always already in the world. Nor, of course, does he share with Sartre or Merleau-Ponty a conception of sovereignty that derives from the individual's power to transcend her situation through the intentional activity of consciousness. For Foucault, the sovereignty of the Dionysiac subject resides in its radically indeterminate nature, a product of primitive vital forces that have not been tamed by socialization or individuation. The Dionysiac subject contests the world not by any intentional power it may have, but by the fact that the inner world of the subject, traversed by these primitive forces, is one that is beyond the ability of a reasonable world to penetrate. The world is called into question, then, because its reason, its freedom is a manifest unfreedom from the perspective of the Dionysiac in all of us.

As I argued above, these conceptions of sovereignty and subjectivity derive from the work of Georges Bataille,[69]

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[69]Bataille was born in Reims in 1897. He was trained as a medievalist librarian at the Ecole des chartes, and later held a librarian's post at the Bibliothèque Nationale. He left this position in 1942 due to ill health. In 1946 he founded the review Critique which he edited until his death

whose influence, as I will point out in more detail below, Foucault himself attested to many times in these years. As with Foucault's work in this period, Bataille's work is grounded in a Nietzschean dichotomization of the Apollonian and the Dionysiac. For Bataille, as for Foucault, any authentic sovereignty derives from the Dionysiac mode of subjectivity and it was his life's work to draw our attention to the manifestations of this mode of sovereign subjectivity.

An important insight into Bataille's conceptions of sovereignty and the sovereign subject are provided by the criticisms he makes of existentialism. He plainly states in his criticisms what is only implied by Foucault. Bataille's attack on Sartre centres on the aspect of choice which is central to the latter's notion of freedom. While Sartre argued that the original choice of pre-reflective consciousness was "without antecedent reason or necessity," he did admit that "[e]very choice ... presupposes elimination and selection; every choice is a choice of finitude."[70] This original choice at the pre-reflective level of consciousness also determines, to a certain extent, the choices that are possible at the reflective level of consciousness and which are, for Sartre, crucial to his notion of freedom. The

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[70]Thomas Flynn, Sartre and Marxist Existentialism, 8-9.

choices made at the reflective level of consciousness are made from amongst alternatives established in original choice.

For Bataille, all these choices upon which the existentialist conception of freedom was predicated served only to introduce a certain servitude into existence. "[I]nstantaneous existence," he argued, was subordinated in existentialism "to some *ulterior* goal. It is a servitude without end."[71] In other words, there was no room in existentialism for a sudden, overwhelming passion, which was, he argued, a central, if often overlooked, aspect of human being. Existentialism, he argued, was "a boundless intellectual game, in which passion is reduced to the intelligible level of choice...."[72] While Bataille makes no direct reference to it, he could well have been referring to "Existentialism is a Humanism," where Sartre argued that man "is responsible for everything he does. The existentialist," Sartre continued,

> does not believe in the power of passion. He will never agree that a sweeping passion is a ravaging torrent which fatally leads a man to certain acts and is therefore an excuse. He thinks that man is responsible for his passion.[73]

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[71]Georges Bataille, "Le Surréalisme et sa différance avec l'esitentialisme," Critique I, 2 (July 1946): 109.

[72]Georges Bataille, "Vue d'ensmble: L'existentialisme," Critique VI, 41 (October 1950): 85.

[73]Sartre, Existentialism, 27-8.

For Bataille, sovereignty "is of the order of passion - which has no other perspective than the immediate present [*l'instant présent*]." It is precisely the necessity of choice central to existentialism and "which envisages the time to come" which enslaves the individual.[74]

Bataille's criticism of existentialism reveals the nature of his own conception of sovereignty. Existentialism failed, in his eyes, to provide for human freedom insofar as the choice neccesary to existentialist freedom circumscribed what Bataille conceived as a natural freedom that consisted precisely in not limiting subjectivity by making such choices. The choice of a project served only to fragment human existence. "I cannot exist entirely," Bataille argued,

> except when somehow I go beyond the stage of action. Otherwise I am a soldier, a professional, a man learning, not a 'total human being'. The fragmentary state of humanity is basically the same as the choice of an object. When you limit your desires to possessing political power, for instance, you act and know what you have to do. The possibility of failure isn't important - and right from the start you insert your existence advantageously into time. Each of your moments becomes useful....[75]

To give oneself an object in life - to be someone, to get something, to do good, even to struggle for one's own freedom - serves only to alienate the individual from herself.[76]

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[74]Georges Bataille, "Sade et Morale," Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 7: 446.

[75]Georges Bataille, On Nietzsche. Trans. Bruce Boone. Introduction by Sylvère Lotringer.(New York: Paragon House, 1992), xxvii.

[76]*Ibid.*

In assuming a project, Bataille argues, one subordinates the present to the time to come, subordinates a life of limitless possibility to specific ends.

Sovereignty for Bataille, then, consists in "the possibility of life without limits."[77] Impediments to sovereignty include individuation (which is to say, attempting to define ourselves as individuals by the projects we assume), work, and notions of truth and good which we are socialized to obey. The possibility of overcoming such impediments to sovereignty resides in what Bataille calls "inner experience," experience which "responds to the necessity which I find in myself - human existence within me - of challenging everything." The primary forms of inner experience are laughter, heroism, ecstasy, sacrifice, poetry, eroticism, and death.[78] All of these experiences reveal sovereign being insofar as they transgress the limits of individuality, utility, and the moral law and thus clear the way toward a mode of being without limits.[79]

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[77]Georges Bataille, The Accursed Share, vol. 3, Sovereignty, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1993): 198.

[78]Georges Bataille, Inner Experience, trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 3, xxxiii.

[79]Elsewhere Bataille defines "the entire human" as "*the life of 'unmotivated' celebration*, celebration in all meanings of the word: laughter, dancing, orgy, the rejection of subordination, and sacrifice that scornfully puts aside any consideration of ends, property and morality." Georges Bataille, On Nietzsche, trans. Bruce Boone (New York: Paragon House, 1992), xxxii.

These experiences, Bataille argues, all have in common "*the subject at its boiling point*,"[80] which is to say the point at which vital energies have built up within the individual to the point of crisis. "The living organism," he argues,

> in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of a system (e.g. an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically.[81]

It is precisely useless expenditure in the form of eroticism, laughter, "states of ecstasy, [and] of rapture,"[82], Bataille argued, which represented the possibility of sovereignty for the individual. The individual loses himself in erotic experience. Laughter and tears "are always related to some kind of violence which interrupt the regular order of things."[83] The individual is transported beyond himself and the world of utility in such useless expenditure of energy.

It was the question of the expenditure of vital energy, then, that was of the utmost philosophical and prac-

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[80]Georges Bataille, The Accursed Share, vol I, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 10.

[81]*Ibid.*, 21.

[82]Inner Experience, 3.

[83]Georges Bataille, The Tears of Eros, trans. Peter Connor (San Fransisco: City Lights Books, 1989), 32.

tical importance to Bataille. This was all the more the case for him because, he argued, in the modern world - both capitalist and communist - we have lost the social forms in which such a useless expenditure of this energy might take place. There are no forms through which this "essential" aspect of human being can be accomplished. With the rise of market economy and its attendant demands of productivity, the "need for limitless loss which exists endemically in a social group" and to which potlatch, for instance, responded had "become atrophied."[84] While the bourgeoisie had become a new ruling elite, it did not take up the corresponding obligation for spectacular social expenditure. Amongst the bourgeoisie "wealth is ... displayed behind closed doors, in accordance with depressing and boring conventions" in a fashion which "debases ostentatious expenditure."[85] Such unproductive expenditure as exists under capitalism, he argues, remains subordinate to classical notions of expenditure. While "potlatch is the opposite of the principle of conservation," while "it puts an end to the stability of fortunes as it existed within the totemic economy," in capitalist society, it "is only to the extent that stability is assured and can no longer be compromised by even con-

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[84]Georges Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure," in Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939, ed. Alan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 125.

[85]*Ibid.*, 124.

siderable losses that these losses are submitted to the regime of unproductive expenditure." "Everything that was generous, orgiastic, and excessive," he argued, "has disappeared,"[86] and men are constrained to pursue only that which is profitable.

The notion of useful expenditure to which we have been socialized, then, represses what Bataille sees as the "tropic"[87] need for useless expenditure of vital energies. But it is not only through useful activity that this mode of expenditure is repressed. It is also aborted in the "intellectual movement ... which leads to the idea."[88] In bourgeois society, consciousness of the "most vigorous and vital instincts,"[89] which threaten to disorder society and which compel men to useless expenditure, results in a predilection to create values and ideas so abstract from "the order of real things"[90] that man is alienated from that which is most human within him. A plant, Bataille argues, "thrusts its obscene-looking roots into the earth in order to assimilate the putrescence of organic matter, and a man

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[86]*Ibid.*, 124.

[87]*Ibid.*, 128.

[88]Georges Bataille, "The Lugubrious Game," in Stoekl ed., 24.

[89]Georges Bataille, "The 'Old Mole' and the Prefix *Sur* in the Words *Surhomme* and *Surrealist*," in Stoekl, ed., 33.

[90]*Ibid.*

experiences, in contradiction to strict morality, urges that draw him to what is low, placing him in open antagonism to all forms of spiritual elevation."[91] But these urges are frustrated by abstract ideas of truth, beauty, and morality. The idea (as an abstraction from man's most basic impulses and the world of facts) "has over man the same degrading power that a harness has over a horse...; it brutalizes all men and causes them to be docile."[92]

The end point of useful activity and of those ideas which constrain us to act in accordance with the demands of utility and docility, that which unites both impulses is the conscious self, a construct of prohibitions by which the individual can be usefully integrated into productive society. For Bataille, it is the "prohibitions which men believe themselves constrained to observe" that account for the transition of man from the animal state to the human state.[93] It is nature alone, he argues, that "fixes the animal's limitations; [but] in no instance does [the animal] limit itself." It is prohibitions which are the "cornerstone of humanized patterns of behaviour" and without which human life is "unthinkable."[94]

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[91]*Ibid.*, 36.

[92]"The Lugubrious Game," 25, 27.

[93]Georges Bataille, Lascaux or the Birth of Art, trans. Austryn Wainhouse (Switzerland: Skira [n.d.]), 31.

[94]*Ibid.*

For Bataille, basic human prohibitions fall into two groups: death and sexuality. The bodies of the dead, he argues, become sacred objects which it is prohibited to profane by touching or, in some cases, even looking upon. Similarly, sexuality has become by and large a private matter. Sexual intercourse occurs behind closed doors. Certain sexual acts are prohibited. What unites prohibitions regarding death and sexuality is that in both experiences we encounter and transgress the limits of being and, as well, the law of utility that dominates and organizes our experience in the everyday world.

> Disruptive of the routine order of things essential to work, unassimilable into the world of stable and distinct objects, that unpredictable part of life, now ebbing, now surging up again, had quickly to be set aside, fenced round and, depending upon circumstances, sometimes considered baneful, sometimes troublesome, sometimes sacred.[95]

Death and sexuality, then, threaten the stable individual, the author of useful projects, the well-behaved social being. It is no coincidence, Bataille argues, that orgasm is colloquially known, in French, as the "little death."[96] It is through experiences linked at a fundamental level to death and sexuality, to the transgression of the prohibitions which define (or limit) the human in the everyday world, that being in a sovereign manner is opened up to us.

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[95]*Ibid.*, 33.

[96]The Tears of Eros, 20.

For Bataille, as for the Foucault of Madness and Civilization, sovereignty is related to the freeing of that in humans which is most internal and most free. As Bataille describes it, it is that "which is not subordinated to anything other than its primary impulse and which is indifferent to every external consideration."[97] To a certain extent what he (like Foucault) is referring to is vital in character. Prohibitions, he argues, are erected to "spread oil on the sea of insurgent animal passion and unruliness," what he describes elsewhere as the "energy of animal life."[98] He identified it with Nietzsche's Dionysos, who betrayed "the destructive exuberance of life."[99] But he also refers to it as a "free sensibility," which is at the heart of religious ecstasy, poetic imagination, and the "uncontrollable desires" of the Marquis de Sade.[100] Quoting William Blake he shows that this free sensibility was not divorced from the primary energy of animal life: "Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy."[101] To this extent, these vital and completely unsubordinated impulses arising within the individual con-

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[97]Georges Bataille, Literature and Evil, trans. Alistair Hamilton (London: Calder and Boyars, 1973), 43-44.

[98]Lascaux, 37, 22.

[99]Georges Bataille, "Nietzschean Chronicle," in Stoekl ed., 206.

[100]Literature and Evil, 32, 98.

[101]*Ibid.*, 71.

test reason (which is to say the ideal of society, the organizing principle of those prohibitions and notions of utility and morality which subordinate human behaviour) and thereby introduce the possibility of a sovereign existence.

The problem for Bataille was both to create the conditions in which these primary human impulses could be set free and to establish the importance of the Dionysiac in man as regards the question of sovereignty. In the 1930s, Bataille had sought to lay the groundwork for a social revolution that would involve the useless expenditure of energy that characterized sovereign being. While he envisaged a working class revolution, it was not to be a socialist revolution *per se*, for to have limited the revolution to clearly defined objectives would have undermined his conception of sovereignty. Rather, he hoped "to use the exclusion of one class by another to realize a mode of expenditure as tragic and as free as possible." For him, the aim of revolution was to endow the workers' movement with the type of ecstasy and delirium that had convulsed Christian communities eighteen hundred years before.[102]

Later, he drifted away from the idea of a specifically working class revolution yet he remained committed to the task of fomenting some form of grand, useless, social expenditure. This he attempted through the College of

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[102]"The Notion of Expenditure," in Stoekl ed., 128.

Sociology and the journal Acéphale.[103] The purpose of the College was the "development of an understanding of the vital elements of society" and the foundation of a "moral community ... bound, precisely, to the virulent character of the realm studied."[104] For Bataille, then, the College presented the opportunity to release vital elements present, if subordinated, within the social body, vital elements that would form the basis of a collective movement that would break the bonds of utility that constrained them. It was through myth that he hoped to achieve this release:

> Only myth enters the bodies of those whom it binds together and requires them to have the same expectations. It is the precipitance of every dance; it brings existence to 'its boiling point'; it communicates to existence the tragic emotion that makes its sacred innermost recesses accessible.... Myth ritually lived reveals no less than true being.[105]

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[103]The College was an informal gathering of people with similar concerns to those of Bataille. It met fortnightly between July 1937 and July 1939 in the Galeries du Livre bookstore in Paris. Its founders included Bataille, the novelist Roger Caillois, who was later admitted to the Académie Francaise, and the poet, novelist and painter, Pierre Klossowski. Among those who gave papers at the College meetings were Alexandre Kojève, one the leading interpreters of Hegel in the 1930s, and Michel Leiris, an anthropologist who had early in his life been associated with the surrealist movement and who later became director of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. See Denis Hollier, ed., The College of Sociology (1937-1939), trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 3-5.

[104]*Ibid.*, 5.

[105]*Ibid.*, 22. To the extent that Bataille wanted to use myth to spark a social revolution there are clear affinities with the work of Georges Sorel. While the influence of Sorel on Bataille seems to have been relatively minor, Bataille did put himself and Sorel in the tradition of those "men on the left who are interested in Nietzsche." Georges Bataille, "Nietzsche and the Fascists," in Stoekl ed., 195. n. 7.

Bataille hoped that the work of the College would reintroduce into the modern world the excessive and orgiastic aspects of life so central to sovereign being but which had been forgotten. But Bataille's aims were not necessarily those of the College's other members. The College broke up in July 1939, in part over a lack of agreement on the aims and purposes of the College, in part because Bataille's notion of a mythically inspired revolution seemed far too similar for some to the doctrines of Nazism dominant in Germany at that time.[106] After 1939 Bataille abandoned the idea of revolution as the route to sovereign existence.

From this point forward the bulk of Bataille's work was devoted to describing the characteristics of the sovereign Dionysiac subject and examining the types of experience in which this mode of sovereign subjectivity is revealed. For both Foucault and Bataille, the experience of literary creation is a primary manifestation of sovereign subjectivity, specifically insofar as it represents the dissolution of the individual, meaning-giving subject and because of the challenges it poses to the world of reason.

I have pointed out above how this was so for Foucault. But it was just as true for Bataille. For Bataille, what was revealed in the literary experiences of

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[106] *Ibid.*, 12-13. See also the letters exchanged between Bataille and Michel Leiris and Roger Caillois, *Ibid.*, 548-556.

Blake, of Baudelaire, of Emily Brontë, and of Sade was an "irreducible element" a "sovereign violence" at the heart of poetry and literature. He also described it as Evil. [107] This Evil in literature was evil because it was the opposite of the Good (which is to say that which obeys the moral law or the injunctions of reason and is thus subordinate) and because it is that which is the opposite of a controlling will. For Bataille, as for Foucault, what was attractive in certain literature was its transgressive character, both as regards the subject and social prohibitions.

Wuthering Heights was significant for Bataille, for instance, because it showed "that there is an instinctive tendency towards divine intoxication which the rational world of calculation cannot bear." Cathy and Heathcliff die because of their transgression (in spirit, if not in body) of the moral law of the world of rational calculation, because they refuse to subordinate this Evil within them (which is "essentially human") to the arbitrariness of prohibition.[108] To this extent Wuthering Heights contests the rational world of calculation. Yet Brontë's portrayal of Cathy and Heathcliff also calls into question the "isolation of the ego." When Cathy proclaims, "I am Heathcliff" she testifies to her commitment to experience the Evil element within her even to the point of death. Bataille finds

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[107] Literature and Evil, 62.

[108] *Ibid.*, 9.

similar challenges to the world of reason and the ego in the poetry of Blake and Baudelaire and in the limitless desire of Sade.

But what is primarily important for Bataille about these authors - and what links his work with that of Foucault - is their experience of literature, an experience that was sovereign insofar as in the experience of literary creation the subjectivity of the author that they assumed was effaced. It was their very being as individual, meaning-giving subjects that was threatened in the experience of literary creation. In writing his poetry, Bataille argues, Baudelaire "had no will power, but an instinct animated him in spite of himself."

> Evil, which the poet does not so much perpetrate as he experiences its fascination, is indeed Evil since the will, which can only desire Good has no part in it.... [Baudelaire's] poetry turned away from extrinsic requirements, from the requirements of the will, in order to satisfy one single intimate requirement which connected it with that which fascinated, which made it the opposite of will.[109]

For Bataille, then, literary experience is itself an example of that possession, that divine intoxication, so hostile to the world of rational calculation, that he saw Brontë portray in Wuthering Heights. Poetry, he argued, like religious ecstasy, "never fail[s] to propel us outside ourselves, in great bursts in which death is no longer the

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[109] *Ibid*, 41.

opposite of life."[110] To that extent poetry is a sovereign experience insofar as it transgresses the limits of the author-subject. The poet does not create, but she is possessed by an inner force far exceeding the ability of any will to control it.

It was in this capacity of literary experience to transcend the bounds of subjectivity that Bataille saw it being linked to other experiences, just as Foucault saw an intimate connection between literary experience and madness. For Bataille what he called eroticism (a state of intense physical or emotional ecstasy) was just such an experience. In the sexual act, he argues, the sex organs "are animated by a violence outside the control of reason.... The urges of the flesh pass all bounds in the absence of controlling will."[111] The same is true of those moments of intense emotion associated with erotic excitement. "Whether it is a matter of pure eroticism (love-passion) or of bodily sensuality, the intensity increases to the point where destruction, the death of the being, becomes apparent."[112]

What unites these experiences is that they contest the limits of subjectivity, a form whose ultimate function is to subordinate the raw, violent energy of inner experi-

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[110] *Ibid.*, 65.

[111] Georges Bataille, Death and Sensuality: A Study of Eroticism and the Taboo (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 92.

[112] Literature and Evil, 4.

ence. Bataille's description of the contestatory powers of inner experience bears close resemblance to Foucault's conclusion to Madness and Civilization. In part what gives inner experience its sovereignty is that, as Foucault argued about madness, there is always a silent residue in this experience that words, and thus the powers of reason, cannot grasp. "Although words drain almost all life from within us," Bataille argued, "there subsists in us a silent, elusive, ungraspable part. In the region of words, of discourse, this part is neglected."[113] Inner experience reveals a region that is foreign to knowledge. Just as Foucault argues that madness proceeds out of a "night" in which "man communicates with what is deepest in himself, and with what is most solitary,"[114] so Bataille argues that inner experience reveals the "night of non-knowledge" which is furthest from any worldly considerations.[115] Just as Foucault spoke of a silent language of delirium that the work of art interrupted but never fully rendered, so Bataille argues that Emily Brontë "lived in a sort of silence which, it seemed, only literature could disrupt."[116] Poetry, he argued, "is no less silence than language."[117] And just as Foucault argued

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[113]Inner Experience, 14.

[114]Madness and Civilization, 280.

[115]Inner Experience, 25-26.

[116]Literature and Evil, 3.

[117]Inner Experience, 29.

that the "life of unreason" could only manifest itself "in the lightning flash of works such as those of Hölderlin, of Nerval, of Nietzsche, or of Artaud,"[118] so Bataille argued that the nature of poetry "obliges one to express oneself through rapid flashes."[119]

Inner experience is what Foucault described as this void, this night, this nothingness that made reason powerless. The sovereign power of this "non-being," he argues, is its "power to annihilate,"[120] its possibility of transcending reason in the violence of an inward vision that is far beyond the power of reason to reconcile with its limits. As I pointed out above, for Foucault, the work of art, madness, the unlimited desires of Sade all arraign the world of reason. The world is obliged to "order itself by [the language of the work of art], compelled by it to a task of recognition, of reparation, to the task of restoring reason *from* that unreason and *to* that unreason."[121] Bataille makes a very similar argument. What eroticism reveals, he argues, is the "difficulty of harmonizing reason's calculations" with states of rapture and ecstasy. Eroticism "brings us to the forgetting of the puerility of reason! Of a reason that

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[118]Madness and Civilization, 278.

[119]Inner Experience, 28-29.

[120]Madness and Civilization, 285.

[121]*Ibid.*, 288.

was never able to measure its limits."[122] The limits of reason are called into question by an inner force which, if it finds a temporary outlet in the work of art, will always recover its native violence.

What this evidence has shown is that Bataille and Foucault shared a conception of sovereignty and of the sovereign subject. For both, sovereignty consisted in the absence of limits, especially those limits imposed by reason and by the individual, meaning-giving subject that both believed to be a construct imposed upon human beings by social practice. The sovereign subject, then, was not the world-constituting subject of Sartrean existentialism. It was rather the world-contesting subject. For Bataille and Foucault, the sovereign subject was the one in whom primitive, vital forces raged unrestrained by the demands of a project or the limits of being a reasonable and responsible subject, that subject most reconciled with the rational order of things. It is for this reason that I have described it as a Dionysiac subject, a subject consumed by vital forces so opposed to the world of reason. This subject was sovereign because what both Bataille and Foucault regarded as its most inward and most human elements had not been subordinated to any end. To this extent, the Dionysiac was far freer than, for instance, the reasonable beings who sought to liberate the mad. This subject was sovereign because the

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[122]Tears of Eros, 20.

vital forces which traversed it could never be the object of a rational, scientific discourse. This subject was sovereign because these vital forces which gave rise to limitless imaginings and endless desire contested reason's attempts to have the final word, to know everything and to explain its ordering. In his earliest work, then, it was just such a Dionysiac subject that held out the possibility of resistance to power.

There is no doubt that Foucault was intimately aware of Bataille's work, if only due to the fact that he joined the editorial board of Bataille's journal, Critique, shortly before the latter's death. But as he neared the end of his own life Foucault attested to the significance of Bataille for him, recalling that Bataille posed for his generation an alternative to that "perspective dominated by Marxism, phenomenology, and existentialism,"[123] that it was through Bataille that his generation came to Nietzsche.[124] Nor was it only in retrospect that Foucault gave Bataille his due. Throughout his writings between 1961 and 1964 Foucault points to the importance of Bataille in his work. He said at one point that Bataille's work had forced himself and others to ask "What is it to think?", "What is this extraordinary

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[123]"An Interview With Michel Foucault," in Death and the Labyrinth, 174.

[124]"Critical Theory/Intellectual History," 24.

experience of thought?"[125] At another point he claimed that Bataille had taught us that most serious thought took place outside the dialectic and that language owes its power of transgression to a pure silence that is at its core.[126] For Foucault, Bataille was the central figure in the rediscovery "of a thought that cannot be reduced to philosophy because it is, more than philosophy, originary and sovereign."[127]

Elsewhere Foucault argued that the work in which Bataille had been engaged was central to his own efforts. In a panel discussion on poetry in the early autumn of 1963 he argued that, in part, what he had been trying to do in his work was to deal with the "problem of poetry, which is a problem of experience," that he was trying "to put back at the heart of poetry that something which is experience and which is defined by notions such as contestation, limit, return, etc." While admitting the validity of the criticism that he could not speak precisely of this experience central to poetry and madness, (this experience which is "at the same time transgression and contestation"), he was still "preoccupied" with the "meaning that one could give to this

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[125]"Débat sur le Roman," Tel Quel 17 (Spring, 1964): 12, 13.

[126]"La prose d'Actéon," La Nouvelle Revue française 135 (March, 1964): 448, 457.

[127]"Guetter le jour qui vient," La Nouvelle Revue française 130 (October, 1963): 716.

very important notion of contestation that one finds in the work of Bataille."[128]

An even clearer indication of Bataille's influence on Foucault is to be found in "A Preface to Transgression," which originally appeared in a special issue of Critique, "Hommage à Georges Bataille." It might be assumed that the work is only a recapitulation of Bataille's contribution to the elucidation of a "language in which transgression will find its space and the illumination of its being."[129] But at a certain point it becomes clear that Foucault is also revealing a clear affinity between his work and Bataille's. "The sovereignty of these [transgressive] experiences," he wrote,

> must surely be recognized some day, and we must try to assimilate them: not to reveal their truth - a ridiculous pretension with respect to words that form our limits - but to serve as the basis for finally liberating our language. But *our task for today* is to direct our attention to this non-discursive language, this language which, for almost two centuries, has stubbornly maintained its disruptive existence in our culture; it will be enough to examine its nature, to explore the source of this language that is neither completely nor fully in control of itself, even though it is sovereign for us and hangs above us, this language that is sometimes immobilized in scenes we customarily

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[128]"Débat sur la poésie," Tel Quel (Spring, 1964): 73. Bataille used the phrases "transgression" and "contestation" interchangeably. See, for example, Inner Experience, 14.

[129]"A Preface to Transgression," in Language, Counter-memory, Practice, ed. Donald Bouchard, trans. Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 33.

> call 'erotic' and suddenly volatized in a philosophical turbulence, when it seems to lose its very basis.[130]

"Our task for today"? One could easily pass over this remark in this context, dismissing it as a certain form of the hommage to which the larger piece is devoted. One could do this were it not for the fact that I have shown above how much this task that Foucault lays out was the one that he himself pursued in his work of the early sixties and how much he had borrowed from Bataille in conceiving and achieving that task.

For Foucault, Bataille's thought represented a way out of the analytic of finitude which, on the one hand, had been the basis of society's dividing practices (and as a homosexual these practices may well have had a more poignant significance for him than for others) and which, on the other hand, had led philosophy and the human sciences into a dead end, a ceaseless and inachievable reflection on "man." At the conclusion of his introduction to Kant's Anthropologie, Foucault asked,

> Is it not possible to conceive of a critique of finitude which would be liberating as much as regards man as regards infinity, and which would show that finitude is not final, but is that moment in time [*cette courbure et ce noeud du temps*] when the end is commencement? The trajectory of the question, *Was ist der Mensch?*, in the realm of philosophy points to the reponse which challenges and disarms it: *der Uebermensch*.[131]

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[130] *Ibid.*, 38-9. My emphasis.

[131] "Introduction," 128.

Bataille's work fulfilled these demands. Bataille's work focussed on those experiences in which the bounds of subjectivity are transgressed by inner forces, forces which continually call into question man's finitude. Bataille's work, then, opened the possibility for Foucault of escaping the latest incarnations of the analytic of finitude on the French intellectual scene, existentialism, phenomenology, and Marxism.

There is no doubt that Bataille was not the only figure in France at the time whose work was influential for Foucault in achieving this end. Maurice Blanchot's work, in particular, addressed these same issues in a similar fashion - so much so that his work is often identified with Bataille's and, as we have seen, was invoked by Foucault himself.[132] For Blanchot, as for Foucault and Bataille, the experience of literature was one which witnessed the effacement of the author as subject. It is an experience in which the author's finitude is overcome by a force which breaks down the limits of subjectivity. As opposed to Bataille,

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[132]Blanchot (b. 1907) has long been one of France's leading novelists and literary critics. Like Bataille he was politically active in the 1930s, although, in his case, in the cause of the political right. Since the war he has worked in self-imposed seclusion.

On the question of the links between his work and Bataille's see Ann Smock's introduction to Maurice Blanchot, The Space of Literature, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 1-15. As for Foucault's invocation of Blanchot see page 102 above and his article "Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside," in Foucault/Blanchot, trans. Brian Massumi (New York: Zone Books, 1987), 7-58.

however, Blanchot views this force as something akin to Hegelian Spirit, a transcendental creative force that expresses itself through the artist and the work of art. For Blanchot, the aim of literary criticism was to "recapture in the work of art" this force, this "urge, the "voice of art and literature."[133]

Foucault, then, was attracted to Blanchot's work for the same reasons he was attracted to Bataille's: because of the challenge it poses to the humanist conception of subjectivity. "Art," Blanchot argues,

> requires that he who practices it ... should become other, not another, not transformed from the human being he was into an artist with artistic duties, satisfactions and interests, but into nobody, the empty, animated space where art's summons is heard.[134]

In Blanchot's work, as in Bataille's, Foucault found a critique of subjectivity that paralleled his own. Blanchot, too, seeks to show that the humanist conception of subjectivity involves a self-mastery that discounts other modes of being. He seeks to show that subjectivity is not the foundation of endless human possibility, but is fundamentally a limit imposed upon human being.

This is what Foucault saw in Blanchot and it is what constitutes Blanchot's influence upon him. Foucault found

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[133]Maurice Blanchot, The Song of Sirens: Selected Essays by Maurice Blanchot, ed. Gabriel Josipovici, trans. Sacha Rabinovitch (London: The Harvester Press, 1982), 50-51.

[134]*Ibid.*, 197.

similar things in the work of Klossowski, Mallarmé, and Hölderlin[135] and this helps to explain what one might call a "literary turn" in his work after the publication of Madness and Civilization.

So in arguing that Foucault's work was influenced predominantly by Bataille, I recognize that he was also influenced by many others, and that he sought to identify with a literary tradition in France that begins with Lautréamont and extended down to his own day. Before the "arrival" of structuralism, this tradition was a leading force in anti-humanism.

Yet I think there remain strong grounds for assigning Bataille a far greater influence on Foucault's work. For despite any "turn" toward literature in Foucault's work in these years, he was still keenly concerned with the questions, dealt with in Madness and Civilization, of the interrelation of discourse and social practice in the constitution of subjectivity. This is clearly evident from his discussion in The Birth of the Clinic.[136] Bataille's work, far more than that of any of the literary figures referred to above, dealt with these questions. Bataille's work showed

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[135]Blanchot, too, identified with their work.

[136]In the main, this book is a work of historical epistemology. In it, Foucault describes the changes in medical epistemology that gave rise to modern medical perception. Nonetheless, he situates this analysis within the context of the development of the modern hospital and within the context of the legal, social and political changes brought about by the French Revolution.

that resistance to the socialization of subjectivity was possible on the basis of vital, Dionysiac forces native to all of us and which it was the object of the rational subject to control. Bataille's work, then, allowed Foucault to deal with questions of power and resistance. While Bataille's influence on Foucault may have been obscured by Foucault's turn towards literature and his later flirtation with structuralism, as I will show in Chapter 7, his work remained important to Foucault for over two decades.

Chapter 4

Structuralism and Subjectivity

As I noted in the Introduction, this chapter will be necessarily brief, for in his work between The Order of Things and The Archaeology of Knowledge, Foucault seemingly abandoned any notion of a subject of resistance. He abandoned his earlier romanticization of the Dionysiac element in madness, eroticism, and in literary experience. Whereas in Madness and Civilization the Dionysiac was that mode of being which called into question the discourses and practices of which the mad, for instance, were the object, beginning with The Order of Things he seemingly could not conceive of a mode of being capable of contesting these conditions. Rather, they took on in his thought an autonomy they previously lacked.

This shift in his conception of the subject is evident in his work between 1963 and 1966. He had formerly argued that "our task for today" is to "direct our attention to" and explore the source of the "non-discursive language" that shone through in madness and in the works of Nietzsche, *et al.*[1] He now argued that

> The task of current philosophy and of all ... theoretical disciplines ... is to bring back to the light of day

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[1] "A Preface to Transgression," 33.

> this [anonymous] thought before thought, this system before all systems.[2]

In so conceiving his philosophical agenda, Foucault alerts us to the development in his thought of what I will call the "structuralist" conception of subjectivity.

While Foucault denied ever being a structuralist,[3] his consistent denial of the humanist conception of a sovereign subject and his attempts to reveal instead the sovereignty of the system before all systems (be it the *episteme* or discursive regularities), certainly allied his work, at least at a superficial level, with that of those thinkers commonly taken to be structuralists (Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, and Louis Althusser). Moreover, in interviews and

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[2]Michel Foucault, "Entretien," La Quinzaine Littéraire 5 (May 16, 1966): 15. By "system" Foucault seems to be referring to the *episteme*, a concept he introduced into his work in The Order of Things and which will be discussed in more detail below.

[3]In the Foreward to the English edition of The Order of Things (1971) he denounced those "half-witted 'commentators' [who] persist in labelling me a 'structuralist'. I have been unable to get it into their tiny minds that I have used none of the methods, concepts, or key terms, that characterize structural analysis" (The Order of Things, xiv). Here, as elsewhere, Foucault distances himself from structuralism on the basis of its specificity as a method, one, he would later claim, that was pioneered by Fernand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson and N. Troubetzkoy (Remarks on Marx, 87). Yet, as I will show below, he, along with many other (presumably half-witted) commentators, described the work of Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, Althusser as structuralist. On his disavowals of being a structuralist see also "Monstrosities in Criticism," Diacritics 1, 1 (Fall 1971): 58; Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 204; Foucault Live, 25, 55, 60; and Michel Foucault, "History, Discourse, Discontinuity," Salmagundi 20 (Summer-Fall 1972): 235.

other writings he often paid homage to the importance of the work of these so-called structuralists in relation to his own work (if not in direct line of influence, at least insofar as they sought to decentre the subject by intellectual routes very close to his own). Foucault's work in this period was also greatly influenced by the methods of historical epistemology of Georges Canguilhem, methods similar in some respects to structuralism.[4]

Despite Foucault's denials of being a structuralist, he and the leading French structuralists of the 1960s were preoccupied with decentering the subject by recourse to the analysis of those "structures" in which subjectivity was constituted as opposed to those forms of analysis which portrayed subjectivity as socially constitutive. The notion that subjectivity was constituted rather than constitutive was, of course, not an invention of the French structuralists. Indeed, such a conception of subjectivity had been the point of departure of the social sciences since their inception in the nineteenth century. Yet, French structuralism, borrowing from the work of Saussure, extended this notion of the social constitution of subjectivity in

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[4]The relation between the work of Foucault and Canguilhem insofar as Foucault's work of this period is concerned has been well established by Gutting and Lecourt. I will not dwell on this well established connection, but I think it worthwhile to summarize it here both because it is relevant to the issues discussed in this chapter and because it sets the stage for my re-interpretation in Chapters 5 and 6 of the relation between the two.

such a way that the subject became a prisoner of external imperatives, as it never had been in most social scientific analysis up to that point.

Structural analysis of the sixties was built upon two theses. First, that the meaning, or identity, of any sign "is given neither by the object to which it refers, nor by the intention of its user, but only by the system of differences and oppositions which constitutes" the language or the symbolic order to which that sign belongs.[5] The second thesis is that the language, which is to say the rules for the combination of signs, is also arbitrary and that the possibility of communicating a message depends upon one's adherence to these rules. Both theses serve to dislocate the meaning-giving role of the subject proposed by existentialism and phenomenology. For structuralism, meaning is a function of the differences and oppositions between signs and arises only to the extent that the individual subject has internalized the complex rules that constitute the symbolic order and which govern the combination of signs.[6] While these theses derived from the linguistic structuralism of Saussure, French structuralists of the sixties applied them to systems of signification not purely linguistic in character.

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[5]Ted Benton, The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism: Althusser and His Influence (London: Macmillan, 1984), 11.

[6]*Ibid.*, 10-15.

I have already summarized in Chapter 2 how these theses were applied in the work of Lacan and Lévi-Strauss. They were also applied in the work of Althusser. For instance, in Reading Capital he attacked the naïveté of bourgeois empiricism, according to which "the real is immediately present in the phenomena accessible to our observation."[7] For him

> Knowledge working on its 'object'... does not work on the *real* object but on the peculiar raw material which constitutes, in the strict sense of the term, *its 'object' (of knowledge)* and which, even in the most rudimentary forms of knowledge is distinct from the *real object*. For that raw material is ever-already, in the strong sense Marx gives it in Capital, a *raw material*, i.e. matter already elaborated and transformed, precisely by the imposition of the complex (sensuous-technical-ideological) structure which constitutes it as an *object of knowledge*, however crude, which constitutes it as the object it will transform, whose *forms* it will change in the course of its development process in order to produce knowledges which are constantly *transformed* but will always apply to its *objects*, in the sense of the *object of knowledge*.

We see at work here the structuralist thesis that significance is not a function of the sign's relation to real objects or of the intent of the speaking subject, but of a "complex structure." Implied in this passage, as well, is the notion of a constituted subjectivity. And, indeed, Althusser was overtly committed to the idea that subjectivity was constituted. "Every human," he argued,

> that is to say social individual, cannot be the agent of a practice until he takes *the form of a subject*. The `subject form' is in fact the form that the historical

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[7]Alex Callinicos, Althusser's Marxism (London: Pluto Press, 1976), 32.

> existence of every individual, every agent of social practices, takes: for the relations of production and reproduction necessarily involve, as the *integrating* element, what Lenin called `*[juridico-] ideological social relations*', which, in order to function, impose on every individual-agent the form of a *subject*.[8]

While Althusser drew a sharp distinction between necessarily ideological bourgeois philosophies and Marx's scientific socialism, the distinction was not made on the basis of the notion that under socialism subjects would not be constituted or that they would be able to perceive with absolute clarity the real objects of the world. Even under socialism objects would still be the objects of a knowledge that was not a function of a meaning-giving subject.

While Foucault's work did not emerge in the same fields as that of Althusser, Lévi-Strauss, and Lacan, and while he may not have applied the same methods (he was no anthropologist or psychoanalyst), he did identify with their efforts to dislodge the subject from its privileged place in philosophy. After the publication of The Order of Things, Foucault often noted the affinity he shared with these figures commonly taken to be (and seemingly taken by Foucault to be) French structuralists. "I think that structuralism is inscribed today within a great transformation of knowledge in the human sciences," he argued in 1969,

> and that this transformation is directed less toward the analysis of structures than toward putting into question the anthropological status, the status of the subject, and the privileges of man. And my method is inscribed

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[8] *Ibid.*, 70.

> within the framework of this transformation in the same way that structuralism is - along side of the latter but not in it.[9]

Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, and Althusser, he argued elsewhere, had helped to rid the human sciences of a conception of man as the transcendent and absolute subject of history, "of the Subject in capital letters, of the subject as origin and foundation of Knowledge, of Liberty, of Language and History."[10] Lèvi-Strauss and Lacan had shown in the case of societies and the unconscious "that 'meaning' was probably only a sort of surface effect, a gleaming, a froth" produced not by the sovereign subject but by "the system."[11] Thus we can see that despite his desire to dissociate himself from structuralism, even if we accept his claims, he nonetheless saw an affinity between it and his work as regards the nature of subjectivity. This being the case it might be legitimate to speak of his work incorporating a structuralist conception of the subject.[12]

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[9]Michel Foucault, "The Archaeology of Knowledge," in Foucault Live, 55.

[10]Michel Foucault, "The Birth of the World," in Foucault Live, 61.

[11]Michel Foucault, "Entretien." La Quinzaine Littéraire 5 (May, 16, 1966), 15.

[12]Dreyfus and Rabinow argue that insofar as Foucault's work resembles structuralism in its "rejection of all recourse to the interiority of a conscious, individual, meaning-giving subject," it also resembles "many other movements (psychoanalysis, ethnology, linguistics, Heideggerian existential phenomenology, Wittgensteinian `behaviourism'," and that, as such, this resemblance is one "to the general movement beyond anthropology of which structuralism is merely one manifestation" (p. 57). And, indeed, Foucault paid tribute to many others whose work, in a variety of dis-

At the same time, it is clear that Foucault's work was developing more and more under the influence of that of Georges Canguilhem and that, as he would not do later, he read Canguilhem's work in a structuralist light. In the 1960s, Canguilhem was France's leading philosopher and historian of science, having succeeded his mentor, Gaston Bachelard, to the chair of history and philosophy of science at the University of Paris, Sorbonne, and to the Directorship of the Institute of the History of Science and Technology.[13] Canguilhem, who had entered the Ecole Normale Superieure in 1924 with Sartre, Paul Nizan, and Raymond Aron, had played a peripheral though significant role in Foucault's early academic life as one of the jurors of the admission committee that allowed Foucault into the Ecole Normale and, in his capacity as inspector general of secondary education, as vice-president of the jury which allowed Foucault to pro-

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ciplines, aided this "general movement": Fernand Braudel, Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, François Furet, Denis Richet, and E. Leroy Ladurie of the *Annales* school of history (Michel Foucault, "The Discourse of History," in Foucault Live, 11; "The Archaeology of Knowledge," 47; "The Birth of a World," 59-60); Alain Robbe-Grillet, Malcolm Lowry, Borges, and Maurice Blanchot in literature (Michel Foucault, "L'Homme, est-il mort: Un entretien avec Michel Foucault," Arts et Loisirs 38 (June 15, 1966): 9); and Deleuze, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Russell and Heidegger in philosophy ("Ariane s'est pendue," Le Nouvel Observateur 229 (March 31, 1969): 37; Michel Foucault, "Foucault Responds to Sartre," Foucault Live, 41-2; and "L'Homme, est-il mort," 8). Yet Foucault's work as part of this "general movement" paid particular attention to a "structure" anterior to consciousness that not all the foregoing figures did.

[13]Gutting, 32.

ceed to the oral exams for the *agrégation de philosophie* in 1951.[14] But Foucault's sustained association with Canguilhem began only in 1960 when Foucault, in Hamburg as Director of the French Institute, began searching for a research director for his principal thesis for the *doctorat d'état*. He approached Canguilhem on the advice of Jean Hyppolite. While Canguilhem, after reading Foucault's work, agreed to act as research director, their relations were strained by the former's renowned gruffness and the latter's refusal to make any changes to the already completed draft of what would become Folie et déraison.[15] Their relations quickly improved, however. Canguilhem was singled out for special thanks by Foucault when Folie et déraison appeared.[16] In a letter to Canguilhem in June 1965 Foucault confided that in 1960 he was only mildly familiar with his works. But now, he continued, it was Canguilhem's work, especially the "epistemological eidetics that [he] invented," that made "possible" Foucault's own method. The Birth of the Clinic "and what follows it derive from this and, perhaps, are completely contained within it."[17]

As Foucault would later note, Canguilhem's method was tied up with that larger "crisis [of] the status and

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[14]*Ibid.*, 18, 36.

[15]Eribon/Wing, 101-2.

[16]*Op. cit.*, x.

[17]Eribon/Wing, 103.

role of knowledge" of the 1960s, of which structuralism was an integral part. Like structuralism and all those other forms of analysis and scholarly endeavour within whose range Foucault situated his work of the late 1960s, Canguilhem's work stood in opposition to the work of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Both were "modalities" of phenomenology. But while the phenomenology of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty took the form of "a philosophy of experience, of sense and of subject," Canguilhem's was "a philosophy of knowledge, of rationality, and of concept."[18] Such a philosophy could address itself to

> a rationality which makes universal claims while developing in contingency; which asserts its unity and yet proceeds only by means of partial modifications when not by general recastings; which authenticates itself through its own sovereignty but which in its history is perhaps not dissociated from inertias, weights which coerce it, subjugate it.[19]

In other words, the aim of Canguilhem's historical epistemology was an understanding of the historical specificity of truth claims and of the production of knowledge.

Canguilhem's history of science, then, was an inquiry into the *historicity* of science, which is to say the norms of truth and objects of inquiry which were purely internal to a given, historical conceptual configuration. For Canguilhem, "a theory ... finds its aspect of truth,

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[18]Michel Foucault, "Introduction" to Georges Canguilhem, The Normal and the Pathological. trans. Carolyn Fawcett and Robert S. Cohen (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 8.

[19]*Ibid.*, 12.

which is to say its logical coherence within an ensemble of other concepts."[20] Thus, the history of science was the history of the conditions of appearance of a given theory, concept, or discovery and the condition was precisely the ensemble of other concepts and the logic of the relation of a given theory, concept, or discovery to it.

The "discovery" of iodine in 1812, for instance, was a development determined by the "theoretical and technical context" of the time, where chemistry was directed toward the identification of the active substances in organic compounds in response to demands from industry. Which is to say that iodine was a "necessary" discovery within the historical context in which it actually was discovered.[21] Similarly, in The Normal and The Pathological Canguilhem pointed out that the development in medicine of a concept of the pathological as a quantitative variation from the normal in the thought of the biologist Claude Bernard and in that of the philosopher Auguste Comte was a function of the "cultural milieu" in which they both operated and was a

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[20]Georges Canguilhem, La formation du concept de réflexe aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955), 5.

[21]Georges Canguilhem, "Pathologie at physiologie de la thyrõide au XIXe siècle," in Etudes d'histoire et de philosophie des sciences (Paris: Vrin, 1968), 283. See also Lecourt, 169.

development that was only partially voluntary on their part.[22]

In many ways, then, Canguilhem's work seemed to parallel that of French structuralism. In linguistic structuralism meaning is a function of the arbitrary rules of combination of signs which constitute the language and of the similarly arbitrary relations of given sounds to the ideas they signify. For Canguilhem the objects of a given science, its validity and its norms of truth are a function of the logical coherence of its concepts within a given historical configuration of concepts in the broader cultural field. Canguilhem's thought, like Althusser's, undermines both epistemological empiricism and existential phenomenology.[23] Truth is neither given in "real" objects themselves, nor is it a function of the activity of the meaning-giving subject. For both structuralism and Canguilhem's historical epistemology, the subject becomes a "prisoner" of pre-given meanings determined by a system of signification anterior to thought.

Quite apart from the question of whether Foucault was a structuralist, his work of this period can be said to incorporate a structuralist conception of the subject

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[22]The Normal and the Pathological, 43.

[23]This ought not to be surprising since Althusser himself acknowledged the importance of Canguilhem in the development of his thought. Reading Capital (London: ,1970), p. 16n.

insofar as something akin to a structure displaces the conscious, individual, meaning-giving subject. Despite occasional lip-service to the sovereignty of the subject, Foucault did not describe how the subject could retain any sovereignty in the context of his work at this time. Nor did he describe or leave room for a type of subjectivity akin to the Dionysiac form that he had dwelt upon in earlier writings. In both The Order of Things and The Archaeology of Knowledge, it is the "system before all systems" that determines subjectivity.

As I pointed out in Chapter 2, The Order of Things is a study which shows the analytic of finitude to be the condition of possibility of the appearance in the nineteenth century of the disciplines of economics, biology, and philology. It was the analytic of finitude which defined the discourse of modern philosophy and the human sciences. The analytic of finitude was the "archaeological" mutation that made possible the evolution of biology from natural history, of economics from the analysis of wealth, of philology from the reflection on language. The analytic of finitude was the defining characteristic of what Foucault called the modern *episteme*. "[W]hat I am trying to bring to light," he argued,

> is the epistemological field, the *episteme* in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a

> history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility.[24]

The *episteme* was the "middle region" "between the already 'encoded' eye and reflexive knowledge," a region which "liberates order itself."

> This middle region ... in so far as it makes manifest the modes of being of order, can be posited as the most fundamental of all: anterior to words, perceptions and gestures, which are taken to be more or less exact, more or less happy, expressions of it...; more solid, more archaic, less dubious, always more 'true' than the theories that attempt to give those expressions explicit form, exhaustive application, or philosophical foundation. Thus, in every culture, between the use of what one might call the ordering codes and reflections upon order itself, there is the pure experience of order and of its modes of being.[25]

In 1971, writing in response to critics of The Order of Things, Foucault argued that in it he had tried

> to explore scientific discourse not from the point of view of the individuals who are speaking, nor from the point of view of the formal structures of what they are saying, but from the point of view of the rules that come into play in the very existence of such discourse: what conditions did Linnaeus ... have to fulfill, not to make his discourse coherent and true in general, but to give it, at the time when it was written and accepted, value and practical application as scientific discourse ....[26]

In conceiving his task along these lines Foucault seems to eschew any relation to structuralism. The *episteme*, as it is described here, is not a condition of possibility of knowledge insofar as it is an internalized representation of an

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[24]The Order of Things, xxii.

[25]*Ibid.*, xxi.

[26]*Ibid.*, xiv.

external order that constitutes the subject. Rather, it is, as he says a few lines later, a "discursive practice."[27] This theory of a discursive practice certainly characterizes his later work, particularly his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France. But to look back from 1971 and argue that this is what he had meant in his conception of the *episteme* in 1966 does not hold water (although this analysis was more true of The Archaeology of Knowledge).

For, as he writes almost apocalyptically of the imminent disintegration of the "fundamental arrangement" of knowledge that the analytic of finitude constitutes and which "has governed and controlled the path of philosophical thought from Kant until our own day,"[28] he despairs of the possibility of thinking a new thought at the present time. While he believes that a new configuration of knowledge is almost upon us, it is "something we only glimpse as a thin line of light low on the horizon...."[29] The current *episteme* is a "stubborn obstacle standing obstinately in the way of an imminent new form of thought."[30] While we may make inquiries as to the nature of this new configuration of knowledge, "they are at most questions to which it is not possible to reply; they must be left in suspense, where they

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[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *Ibid.*, 342.

[29] *Ibid.*, 384.

[30] *Ibid.*, 342.

pose themselves, only with the knowledge that the possibility of posing them may well open the way to a future thought."[31] Indeed, the current configuration of knowledge plays the role of limit and foundation of all that can be said and thought and, at a certain moment, despite Foucault's evident desire for a reorganization of these foundations beyond the analytic of finitude, nothing can be said to assail it:

> To all those who still wish to talk about man, about his reign or his liberation, to all those who still ask themselves questions about what man is in his essence, to all those who wish to take him as the starting-point in their attempts to reach the truth, to all those who, on the other hand, refer all knowledge back to the truths of man himself, to all those who refuse to formalize without anthropologizing, who refuse to mythologize without demystifying, who refuse to think without immediately thinking that it is man who is thinking, to all these warped and twisted forms of reflection we can only answer with a philosophical laugh - which means, to a certain extent, a silent one.[32]

For Foucault, then, what could be said was limited by the *episteme*. The *episteme* was a basic determination of the articulable and the imaginable. As such, the subject was constituted by the episteme.

That this was the case was confirmed by Foucault in interviews conducted after the publication of The Order of Things. The book itself, he argued was

> a pure and simple 'fiction': it is a novel, but it's not I who invented it; it is the relationship between our period and its epistemological configuration and this

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[31] *Ibid.*, 386.

[32] *Ibid.*, 342-343.

> mass of statements. So much so that the subject is indeed present in the totality of the book, but he is the anonymous 'one' who speaks today in all that is said.[33]

Elsewhere he argued that he was only able to describe the "system" he did in The Order of Things because "a system behind the system" permitted him to do so.[34] It was here that he argued that the task of contemporary philosophy was "to bring back to the light of day this thought before thought, this system before all systems."[35]

In The Archaeology of Knowledge, however, Foucault's task is somewhat different. His concern here is not to unearth the mode of being of order which determines and speaks through various forms of discourse. Rather, it is to account for the appearance of discourses and their inter-relation with one another. "What we are concerned with here," he argued,

> is not to neutralize discourse, to make it the sign of something else, and to pierce through its density in order to reach what remains silently anterior to it, but on the contrary to maintain it in its consistency, to make it emerge in its own complexity.... To substitute for the enigmatic treasure of 'things' anterior to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse. To define these *objects* without reference to the *ground*, the *foundation of things*, but by relating them to the body of rules that enable them to form as objects of a discourse and thus constitute the conditions of their historical appearance. To write a history of discursive objects that does not plunge them into the common depth of a primal soil, but deploys

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[33]"The Discourse of History," 20.

[34]"Entretien," Quinzainne Litérairre (May 16, 1966).

[35]*Ibid.*

> the nexus of regularities that govern their dispersion.[36]

Here, then, Foucault takes as his field of inquiry discourse and its rules of formation viewed as an autonomous realm, set apart from things.

In the Introduction to this work Foucault criticizes The Order of Things for not having made clear the level of analysis at which he aimed and, thereby, for at least giving the impression that he was engaged in a form of structuralist analysis. In that work, he argued, "the absence of methodological signposting may have given the impression that my analyses were being conducted in terms of cultural totality." His aim in The Archaeology of Knowledge, by contrast, was "most decidedly not to use the categories of cultural totalities ... in order to impose on history, despite itself, the forms of structural analysis."[37] Foucault was also at pains to alert the reader to the implications for subjectivity of his now more assiduous avoidance of anything smacking of structuralism:

> If I suspend all reference to the speaking subject, it was not to discover laws of construction or forms that could be applied in the same way by all speaking subjects, nor was it to give voice to the great universal discourse that is common to all men at a particular period. On the contrary, my aim was to show what the differences consisted of, how it was possible for men, within the same discursive practice, to speak of different objects, to have contrary opinions, and to make contradictory choices; my aim was also to show in what

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[36]The Archaeology of Knowledge, 47.

[37]The Archaeology of Knowledge, 16, 15.

> way discursive practices were distinguished from one another; in short, I wanted not to exclude the problem of the subject, but to define the positions and the functions that the subject could occupy in the diversity of discourse.[38]

As he said in an interview published in May 1968

> Nothing ... is more foreign to me than the quest for a constraining sovereign and unique form .... Nor have I described either the emergence and eclipse of a formal structure which might reign for a time over all the manifestations of thought.[39]

For Foucault in The Archaeology of Knowledge, then, the question of the subject is clearly peripheral. To the extent that the subject is at question, though, the differences between The Order of Things and The Archaeology of Knowledge (while, for Foucault, methodologically important) are few. We see in The Archaeology of Knowledge that while no structures prescribe directly the thought of subjects, the formation of discourses is both an authorless process and one which specifies certain roles for the subject. The "subject of the statement," he argued,

> should not be regarded as identical with the author of the formulation - either in substance, or in function. He is not in fact the cause, origin, or starting-point of the phenomenon of the written or spoken articulation of a sentence; nor is it that meaningful intention which, silently anticipating words, orders them like the visible body of its intuition; it is not the constant motionless, unchanging focus of a series of operations that are manifested, in turn, on the surface of discourse through the statements. It is a particular, vacant place that may in fact be filled by different individuals; but, instead of being defined once and for

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[38] *Ibid.*, 200.

[39] "History, Discourse, Discontniuity," 229.

> all, and maintaining itself as such throughout a text, a book, or an *oeuvre*, this place varies....[40]

Thus, when Foucault argues that he wanted to show how it was possible "for men, within the same discursive practice, to speak of different objects, to have contrary opinions, and to make contradictory choices," he explains it by the vehicle of the autonomous regularity governing the formation of statements. So, even if Foucault does not conceive of a sovereign form that determines what men say in a prescriptive sense, for him subjects are not sovereign, meaning-giving subjects. Meaning is ultimately constituted from without by the "positivities" in which discourses are situated.

That this is so becomes clear in the Conclusion to The Archaeology of Knowledge where the question of subjectivity comes most to the fore. Here Foucault constructs a fictionalized dialogue between himself and a composite of all those critics who have taken issue with his efforts, over the previous eight years, to decentre the subject. Human freedom is, of course, a central issue. To his fictional interlocutor Foucault responds at one point

> 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, in accordance with which that practice gives rise to partially or totally new statements, and in accordance with which it can be

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[40]The Archaeology of Knowledge, 95.

> modified. These positivities are not so much limitations imposed on the initiative of subjects as the field in which that initiative is articulated..., rules that it puts into operation..., relations that provide it with a support.[41]

The phrase "the field in which that initiative is articulated" is crucial. For while Foucault suggests that the subject maintains a certain initiative, he immediately depicts this initiative as already subjected, thus it hardly counts as an initiative on the part of the subject. This is made clear in his remarks immediately following the foregoing passage. His description of the positivities, he argues,

> is an attempt to reveal discursive practices in their complexity and density; to show that to speak is to do something - something other than to express what one thinks; to translate what one knows, and something other than to play with the structures of a language...; to show that to add a statement to a pre-existing series of statements is to perform a complicated and costly gesture, which involves conditions (and not only a situation, a context, and motives), and rules (not the logical and linguistic rules of construction); to show that a change in the order of discourse does not presuppose 'new ideas', a little invention and creativity, a different mentality, but transformations in a practice, perhaps also in neighbouring practices, and in their common articulation. I have not denied - far from it - the possibility of changing discourse: I have deprived the sovereignty of the subject of the exclusive and instantaneous right to it.[42]

While it is clear that it is the individual subject who engages in the acts of speech, writing, and thinking, it is the regularities of discourse that speak through him and make of him the subject of speech.

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[41] *Ibid*, 208-209.

[42] *Ibid.*, 209.

In The Order of Things and The Archaeology of Knowledge the subject is relentlessly subjected. Despite the distinctions Foucault draws between the *episteme* and the system of discursive regularities, both appear as limits beyond the reach of any Dionysiac overcoming. Indeed, Foucault gives no consideration at all to the power of an inward passion that had characterized his work in the early 1960s. Little wonder. By the late 1960s structuralism had become the dominant intellectual trend in France. However ill-defined as a methodology, "structuralism" was the tool applied by most serious scholars tired of the old, worn out humanist truisms of existentialism. It had become the dominant form of French anti-humanism. The romanticism of Madness and Civilization quite simply seemed ill-suited to the temper of the intellectual times. Thus, Foucault had come to develop those aspects of his work which were "structuralist" in temperament - elements present, to a certain extent, in Madness and Civilization and clearly present in The Birth of the Clinic. Even if we accept that Foucault never did apply the methods of formal structuralism, in response to it he re-oriented the nature of his anti-humanism by conceiving of the subject in structuralist terms. The events of May `68, however, would re-introduce to intellectual life the notions of individual autonomy, creativity and freedom and Foucault would re-orient his conception of subjectivity yet one more time.

Chapter5

Disciplined Bodies, Disruptive Forces

The events of May `68 radically altered both the political and intellectual landscape of France. The events gave the impetus to the development of a new political left, one which saw the Parti Communiste Français displaced as the leading vehicle of left-wing politics by a number of leftist movements that operated within and outside traditional political structures. Intellectually, structuralism fell out of fashion to be replaced by a heterogeneous body of thought that has come to be defined as post-structuralism (a label applied to such widely diverse thinkers as Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, and Jean-François Lyotard) and by a renascent liberal humanism that achieved its greatest currency in the 1980s.[1]

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[1]This change in the temper of political and intellectual life in France in the early 1970s was furthered by the revelations about the nature of Soviet Communism contained in Aleksander Solzhentisyn's The Gulag Archipelago. Dominique Schnapper, the daughter of Raymond Aron and a professor at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes, argued that the publication of Solzhentisyn's book was "*the great event*" that gave rise to the final split between Parisian intellectuals and communism and opened the door to the "new philosophers" - André Glucksmann and Bernard-Henri Lévy - whose work attacked the great systematizing philosophers and their intellectual descendants. By the early 1980s a liberalism in the tradition of 1789 had become the dominant tendency in intellectual politics. As Schnapper argued, intellectuals had reached a liberal consensus. They "are fighting for the rights of man" and "criticize totalitarianism" of whatever stripe (Dominique Schnapper, "The Politics of French Intellectuals," Partisan Review, 5

In the wake of May `68 Foucault, too, began to reconceive his role as an intellectual and to alter his intellectual agenda in keeping with this new role. While having previously remained aloof from politics, he now became actively engaged in a variety of "struggles." Throughout the 1970s and until his death, his name regularly appeared on petitions and manifestoes denouncing a range of abuses of state power. As well, he became particularly active in such "local struggles" as G.I.P. (*Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons*) and G.I.S. (*Groupe d'Information sur le Santé*). Intellectually, he began his work on power for which he is most famous. In focussing on what he described as the "carceral society" constituted by modern power, Foucault seemed to be returning to concerns he first addressed in Madness and Civilization and to be abandoning the epistemological turn in his work that had resulted in The Order of Things and The Archaeology of Knowledge.

Yet neither his reconception of himself as an engaged intellectual nor his new found concern with the question of power were simple reversions to familiar territory. Foucault coined the term "specific intellectual" to

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(1988): 222). Alain Besançon argues, "In France's new philosophical generation we find a return to the Enlightenment and to Kant: and a real distrust of all-embracing systems" (Alain Besançon, "Hélas! The Spirit of `68," Encounter (July/August 1986): 33).

describe his own role as an engaged intellectual. Intellectuals, he argued, had traditionally played the role of both conscience and consciousness of revolutionary struggles, devising strategies and programmes as well as articulating a vision of a new political order while leaving others to do the actual struggling (a role assumed by Voltaire, Hugo and Sartre). The role of the specific intellectual,

> is no longer to place himself 'somewhat ahead and to the side' in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of 'knowledge', 'truth', 'consciousness', and 'discourse'.[2]

As I pointed out in Chapter 2, this new conception of the role of the intellectual, led Foucault into a new activism in aid of prisoners' rights, amongst other causes.

Nor in taking up the question of power did he simply return to his work of the early 1960s or to traditional conceptions of power and subjectivity. Rather, he rejected the idea that power was repressive and alienating, that it repressed a *homo natura*. Instead, he argued that power was a productive force that, far from repressing subjects, constituted them. He rejected, as well, the idea that power was a thing possessed and controlled by groups or individuals. While power may have served the interests of certain classes or groups within society, it was, nonetheless, non-

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[2]Michel Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power," Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, 207-8.

subjective. For him power was also immanent, so much so that he could not conceive of a place or an instance where the effects of power might not be observed.

As I pointed out in Chapter 1 this depiction of power seemed to run against the grain of the radical politics with which he was becoming engaged at this time. Indeed, as I also pointed out, for some political and social theorists this conception of power undermined the possibility of resistance to power. Yet, in his life as an engaged intellectual and as a philosopher and historian he consistently held out the possibility of resistance to power. The question I will examine is how it was possible for Foucault to conceive of resistance - and of a subject that could resist - within the context of his reconception of power.

In this chapter I will discuss the emergence of Foucault's new conception of power. I will argue that Foucault overcame the seeming contradiction of a power that cannot be dissociated from subjectivity and the prospect continually held out of effective resistance to power by reconceiving the subject in vitalist terms. Foucault, in the 1970s, conceived of the subject of resistance as a living being, in whom vital forces give rise not only to heterogeneous patterns of thought but to differing ways of living. While power seeks to direct these forces into productive and regular channels (creating particular forms of

subjectivity such as soldiers, students, homosexuals), these forces constitute the very possibility of resistance to power insofar as they manifest radically diverse avenues of thought and ways of living over and against the regularity demanded by power.

Foucault's reconception of power and subjectivity was conditioned by his own personal development as an engaged intellectual in the wake of May `68. Whether or not his work before May was structuralist, its structuralist overtones seemed ill-suited to the temper of the French intellectual and political setting after May. The very fact that so many had taken to the streets and had contested the power of the existing system suggested that human agents were not constrained to confront systems of power simply with a silent, philosophical laugh.[3] Yet by no means did this reconception emerge fully formed after the events. Rather, from approximately 1969 to 1973 one can read in his works a not always successful attempt to deal seriously with the question of power and the issues of freedom and repression at its heart without at the same time reverting to a humanist position (any traces of which had been expunged from his work in the late 1960s). As well, one can see his attempts to adapt the theoretical perspectives of The Order of Things and The Archaeology of Knowledge, which seemed to

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[3]The Order of Things, 343.

preclude the possibility of any independent action by the subject, to his reconception of power.

In May 1969, shortly after the publication of The Archaeology of Knowledge (which had been written before the events of May), Foucault appears not to have been affected by May '68. He argued, very much in line with the argument of his recent book that

> The death of man is nothing to get particularly excited about. It's one of the visible forms of a much more general decease, if you like. I don't mean by it the death of god but the death of the subject, of the Subject in capital letters, of the subject of origin as foundation of Knowledge (*savoir*), of Liberty, of Language and History....
>
> In the rumbling that shakes us today, perhaps we have to recognize the birth of a world where the subject is not one but split, not sovereign but dependent, not an absolute origin but a function ceaselessly modified.[4]

Similarly, in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in December 1970 he continued to speak not of the author but of the "author function," whose role "is to say *finally*, what has silently been articulated *deep down*. It must ... say, for the first time, what has already been said and repeat tirelessly what was, nevertheless, never said."[5]

The seeming continuity of the themes of his work, and particularly of his conception of the subject, both before and after May `68 is apparent as well in a 1971 debate on Dutch television with the American political

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[4]Michel Foucault, "The Birth of a World," Foucault Live, 61.

[5]Michel Foucault, "Orders of Discourse," Social Science Information, 10, 2 (April 1971): 13.

activist and linguist Noam Chomsky. In opposition to Chomsky's liberal humanist critique of power he discounted the personal experience of individuals, "their capacity for creation ... and their aptitude for inventing by themselves, for originating concepts, theories or scientific truths by themselves."[6] Rather, he asked rhetorically, "what if understanding the relation of the subject to truth were just an effect of knowledge? What if understanding were a complex, multiple, non-individual formation, not 'subjected to the subject', which produced effects of truth?"[7] If this were true then one ought to conduct the type of analyses that Foucault did, replacing "individuals and their 'knowledge' in the development of a knowledge" with an analysis of the epistemological and linguistic rules that make knowledge possible, an analysis of its "choices" and "exclusions", of "its own inner logic, its parameters and its blind alleys."[8] By such an analysis Foucault hoped to "efface ... the dilemma of the knowing subject."[9]

In this debate, however, Foucault expresses his growing political radicalism as he had not in previous works. Whereas before he had argued that there existed an

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[6]Michel Foucault, "Human Nature: Justice versus Power," in Reflexive Water: The Basic Concerns of Mankind, ed. Fons Elders (London: Souvernir Press, 1974), 154, 148.

[7]*Ibid.*, 149.

[8]*Ibid.*, 149, 154, 150.

[9]*Ibid.*, 150.

anonymous system which gave rise to discursive regularities, he now asked "whether one cannot discover the system of regularities, of constraint, which make science possible ... in social forms, in the relations of production, in the class struggles."[10] At one point he forthrightly asserted that this system was an aspect of "a dictatorship of class, of a power of class which imposes itself by violence" through institutions, constitutions, through "all the relationships of political power which actually control the social body and oppress or repress it."[11] In many ways, Foucault appears to take a Marxist position, despite the distance he had always maintained from Marxism or any leftist ideologies.

This debate stands out because the tensions between Foucault's epistemological work and his politics are so starkly contrasted in it. On the one hand, he seems to carry on in the direction of his pre-May '68 work in challenging the sovereignty of the subject. On the other hand, by introducing notions of class power and of repression he seems to imply that the *episteme* is "imposed from the outside on the thought of individuals"[12] and that its overcoming is a ques-

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[10]*Ibid.*, 160.

[11]*Ibid.*, 170, 171.

[12]Foucault argued in The Archaeology of Knowledge that 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...." The Archaeology of Knowledge, 208.

tion of political and social struggle. Here, the *episteme* is conceived not so much as primarily a discursive formation, but as a secondary manifestation of the social, political and economic power of the bourgeoisie.

This rather traditional conception of power as repressive is evident in many of his works between 1970 and 1973. In a 1970 article on the function of philosophy in the education system, Foucault argues that "society" has limited the access of students to the study of philosophy because it challenges bourgeois Catholic morality. Insofar as one is permitted to study philosophy, he continued, one is limited to "a philosophy of conscience, of judgment, of freedom ... a philosophy of the subject ... the supremacy of individual conscience...."[13] Similarly, in a 1971 discussion with *lycée* and university students Foucault argued that the education system operates a "double repression" not only in terms of limiting access to education, but in the creation of the philosophical canon.[14] Thus, the philosophical "knowledge" passed along to students "implies a certain political conformity in its representation", a conformity which reveals

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[13]Michel Foucault, "Le piège de Vincennes." Le Nouvel Observateur 274 (February 9, 1970): 34-5.

[14]Michel Foucault, "Revolutionary Action: `Until Now'," Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, 219.

"the power of a certain class (which determines this knowledge)."[15]

There are, nonetheless, hints in these works of the vision of a productive (rather than repressive) power that would emerge in his work in the mid-1970s. In his aforementioned discussion of the function of the university, he argued that the university had a dual role - first, a repressive role: "to put students out of circulation. Its second function, however, is one of integration."

> Once a student has spent six or seven years of his life within this artificial society, he becomes `absorbable': society can consume him. Insidiously he will have received the values of this society. He will have been given socially desirable models of behaviour, so that this ritual of exclusion will finally take on the value of inclusion and recuperation or reabsorption.[16]

Similarly, he argued elsewhere that the historical role of the penal-judicial system was to constitute those non-proletarianized portions of the masses as marginal or dangerous classes and to maintain a contradiction between the non-proletarianized masses and the proletariat by forcing the latter to see the former as dangerous.[17]

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[15]*Ibid.*, 219, 221. See also Michel Foucault, "Rituals of Exclusion" in Foucault Live, 64, 65-6.

[16]"Rituals of Exclusion," 65-6.

[17]Michel Foucault, "On Popular Justice: A Discussion with Maoists," in Colin Gordon ed., Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977 (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 14-16. Foucault returns to this theme in "Michel Foucault on Attica: An Interview," Telos 19 (1974): 159-161; and "Table Ronde," Esprit 413 (April-May, 1972): 698.

But while there are foreshadowings in these writings and discussions of power as a productive, constitutive force, Foucault's early attempts at such a formulation bear the mark of what he would later call "the repressive hypothesis," an hypothesis which could not accommodate the idea of power as being consitutive. For instance, as regards the role of the university, Foucault went on, in a very humanistic fashion, to argue that its function was to turn students away from their "true origins."[18] Despite early foreshadowings of a new conception of power - a conception that would incorporate the non-subjective, immanent, decentred functioning that he attributed to the *episteme*, one which would hold out the possibility of a resistance to power not founded in a traditional humanist commitment to the subject - it was not until 1975-1976 with the publication of Discipline and Punish and the first volume of The History of Sexuality that Foucault truly succeeded in articulating his new conception of power and of the subject.

Both works take up questions of social and intellectual history addressed almost fifteen years before in Madness and Civilization and they focus on the local and regional operation of power that had become the focus of Foucault's political activity. But while both were serious and important contributions to the history of the prison and the history of sexuality, they were received and intended as

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[18]"Rituals of Exclusion," 67.

vehicles by which he could explore and elucidate his emerging reconception of power, which he was also exploring in a variety of other works at that time.

In his mature conception of modern power, then, Foucault abandons the "repressive hypothesis" - the notion, common to liberal and Marxist political thought, and evident and in some of his own earlier writings, that power "represses nature, instincts, a class, individuals."[19] For him, power's function was positive and productive. As he argued in Discipline and Punish

> we must show that punitive measures are not simply 'negative' mechanisms that make it possible to repress, to prevent, to exclude, to eliminate; but that they are linked to a whole series of positive and useful effects which it is their task to support.[20]

Chief amongst these effects was the constitution of identities, of subjectivities:

> The man described for us, whom we are invited [by purveyors of the repressive hypothesis] to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself. A 'soul' inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body.[21]

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[19]Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures" in Power/Knowledge, 88, 90.

[20]Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1979), 24.

[21]*Ibid.*, 30.

Which is to say that there is no human nature, no individual that is not itself a product of power in the supposed repressive relation between power and the subject.

While this conception of power directly challenged previous conceptions of power that viewed existing social, political, economic, and cultural forces as impediments to human freedom, Foucault was not blind to the effects of these structures. Indeed, in Discipline and Punish and in The History of Sexuality, volume I, he made it plain that his concern was to describe the functioning of modern power within the context of modern social, economic, political and cultural structures that emerged in European society around 1789. For him, modern power was indissociable from these structures. The "political investment of the body," he argued, "is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination."[22] This investment, then, served the interests of modern capitalism, although it took varied forms. For instance, a standing army of criminals served the interests of capitalism insofar as its very existence "constitute[d] the populace as a moral subject and ... [broke] its commerce with criminality," thereby introducing a contradiction within the masses and forestalling popular upris-

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[22]*Ibid.*, 25-6.

ings against capitalism.[23] The "sexualization of children, the hysterization of women, the specification of the perverted, and the regulation of populations" served to ensure the reproduction of the labour force and to ensure a "channelling" of sexuality "into the controlled circuits of the economy."[24] Indeed, for Foucault, all the attention paid to sexuality is "motivated by one basic concern: to ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative...."[25] At the close of the eighteenth century, Foucault argued, "biological existence" became intertwined with "political existence." Because of the needs of capitalism, power "could no longer be dealing with simply the legal subjects over whom ultimate domination was death, but with living beings...."[26] Thus Foucault does not deny the role played by material interests, for instance, in the relations of power. But he wants to show that power is not used (and could not be used) by social, political and economic elites to serve their interests and that power does not repress.

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[23]Michel Foucault, "Prison Talk," in Power/Knowledge, 41.

[24]Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 114.

[25]*Ibid.*, 36-7.

[26]*Ibid.*, 142-3.

It is in the sometimes gruesome opening pages of Discipline and Punish that Foucault highlights the specific nature of modern power and its integration within particularly modern forms of social and economic life. Here Foucault detailed the execution in 1757 of the regicide Damiens, a process that involved burning his right hand with sulphur, tearing the flesh from his breasts, arms, thighs and calves with red-hot pincers, pouring molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, wax, and sulphur on the exposed flesh, to be followed by his being drawn and quartered - a process that was extended by the fact that, even under the strength of four horses each pulling on a limb, Damiens would not come apart without the aid of his executioner's knife.[27] For Foucault such an execution could only occur within a specific, pre-modern configuration of power. The execution of Damiens

> is a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted. It restores that sovereignty by manifesting it at its most spectacular. The public execution, however hasty and everyday, belongs to a whole series of rituals in which power is eclipsed and restored;... over and above the crime that has placed the sovereign in contempt, it deploys before all eyes an invincible force. Its aim is not so much to re-establish a balance as to bring into play, as its extreme point, the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength.[28]

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[27]Discipline and Punish, 3-6.

[28]*Ibid.*, 48-9.

As Foucault points out, however, this "excessive" exercise of power arose within a system of production in which labour power "has neither the utility nor the commercial value that are conferred on [it] in an economy of an industrial type" and at a time when death was made familiar by the prevalence of disease and famine and "gave rise to rituals intended to integrate it."[29] Under capitalism, by contrast, labour power becomes far more valuable and the requirements imposed upon it far more complex. Concurrently, individuals as consumers take on a correspondingly important role within capitalism. These demands for the preservation, expansion, and organization of populations were reflected in the new strategies and techniques of power that emerged in the nineteenth century.

The function of modern power, then, was not to eradicate the individual but to harness the individual, to transform the individual, to channel the body's "forces" into productive avenues. The "systems of punishments" in our societies "are to be situated in a certain 'political economy' of the body: even if they do not always make use of violent or bloody punishment ... it is always the body that is at issue - the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and submission."[30] In a word, modern power was "normalizing."

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[29] *Ibid.*, 54-5.

[30] *Ibid.*, 25.

Normalization was the process of harnessing the body's forces so that they might serve the interests of "the system," be it capitalism or Soviet communism. Normalization thus implies the constitution of subjectivity in the transformation of individuals. Again and again Foucault returns to this aspect of modern power, that it does not repress, but transforms and constitutes. The important question is how this is achieved.

Foucault's work focussed on what he called the "medico-legal complex," the institutions of justice, the police, medicine, and psychiatry (those institutions charged with reforming (or re-forming) individuals) and the knowledges, or discourses, that arose within these disciplines. Within this complex the emphasis is not upon punishment for a crime committed, but upon a punishment "in order to correct, to modify, to redress; for we are dealing with deviants and the abnormal."[31] Nor is the emphasis within this complex on the application of physical constraint. Rather, the power at work in penality, for instance, is a combination of techniques applied to and discourses about the individual, both equally necessary to one another. In the internal geography of the prison, in the increased

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[31]Michel Foucault, "The Anxiety of Judging," in Foucault Live, 166. In Discipline and Punish (p. 17), he argues that in modern penality, it is not so much the crimes and offences that are tried, but the "passions, instincts, anomalies, infirmities, maladjustments, effects of environment or heredity."

regimentation of prison life, one finds a technique whose aim is directed at subduing the dangerous individual. Yet these techniques and their application are only possible in light of the concurrent elucidation of a variety of disciplines such as psychiatry, criminology, and anthropology, which "by solemnly inscribing offences in the field of objects susceptible of scientific knowledge ... provide the mechanisms of legal punishment with a justifiable hold not only on offences, but on individuals."[32] It was on this basis that Foucault could speak of power/knowledge in relation to modern power. "[W]e should admit," he argued,

> that power produces knowledge ... that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any field of knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.[33]

Modern power was also defined by its scale (it was "an infinitesimal power over the active body," its "movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity"), its object ("the efficiency of movements, their internal organization") and its modality ("it implies an uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result, and it is exercised according to a codification that partitions as closely as possible time, space, move-

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[32]Discipline and Punish, 18.

[33]*Ibid.*, 28.

ment").[34] This constant supervision and correction of the least of the body's movements was achieved through a variety of techniques manifested in a variety of contexts (e.g. the prison, schools, factories, the army).

1. *Hierarchical Observation*. Foucault argued that urban development, the construction of working-class housing estates, hospitals, asylums, prisons and schools were all undertaken according to the principle of maintaining a "general visibility". In the observability achieved, these places came to function as mechanisms for the "progressive objectification and ever more subtle partitioning of individual behaviour."[35]

> By means of [such hierarchized, continuous and functional] surveillance, disciplinary power became an 'integrated' system, linked from the inside to the economy and to the aims of the mechanism in which it was practiced. It was also organized as a multiple, automatic, and anonymous power....[36]

2. *Normalizing Judgment*. Within institutions there also emerged a

> micropenality of time (lateness, absences, interruptions, of tasks) of activity (inattention, negligence, lack of zeal), of behaviour (impoliteness, disobedience), of speech (idle chatter, insolence), of the body ('incorrect' attitudes, irregular gestures, lack of cleanliness), of sexuality (impurity, indecency)....

Such penality ensured that "the slightest departure from correct behaviour [would be] subject to punishment" and that

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[34] *Ibid.*, 137.

[35] *Ibid.*, 171, 173.

[36] *Ibid.*, 176.

"each subject [would] find himself caught in a punishable, punishing universality."[37]

This normalizing judgment (and modern power as a whole) achieves its success especially insofar as it individualizes. The "art of punishing" in modern power "brings five quite distinct operations into play:" i) "it refers individual actions to a whole;" ii) it "differentiates individuals from one another";" iii) it "measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes in terms of value the abilities, the level, the 'nature' of individuals;" iv) by thus measuring each individual according to his/her value, it "introduces ... the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved;" and v) "it traces the limit that will define difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal." This "perpetual penality" "compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*."[38]

3. *The Examination* "combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgment."[39] It achieves this insofar as it "situates [individuals] in a network of writing" and "engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them."[40] Thus the individual,

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[37]*Ibid.*, 178.

[38]*Ibid.*, 182-3.

[39]*Ibid.*, 184.

[40]*Ibid.*, 189.

through these documents about him/her, becomes the object of a constant surveillance. But this network of writing is not neutral. Rather, the individual becomes the object of a "disciplinary writing" which makes "it possible to classify, to form categories, to determine averages, to fix norms."[41] Through the examination the individual becomes a "case." "The case is ... the individual as he may be described, judged, measured, compared with others, in his very individuality; and it is also the individual who has to be trained or corrected, classified, normalized, excluded, etc."[42]

For Foucault, Bentham's plan for the "Panopticon" constituted the ideal form of modern power, incorporating a mechanism for putting the prisoner and his conduct under constant visibility so that the prisoner would internalize the specular relation and would come to correct his own conduct in conformity with the codes that govern the institution. At the same time, however, Foucault spoke of "panopticism" in regard to modern society as a whole, "[n]ot because the disciplinary modality of power has replaced all others; but because it has infiltrated the others ... making it possible to bring the effects of power to the most minute and distant elements." Which is to say that a power that "normalizes" has invested all aspects of modern society.[43]

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[41]*Ibid.*, 190.

[42]*Ibid.*, 191.

[43]*Ibid.*, 216.

Certainly the prison itself was an important locus of this normalizing power. The function of imprisonment in the modern age is not a simple deprivation of liberty. Rather, "the prison is required to be 'useful'." The "deprivation of liberty ... must, from the outset, have exercised a positive technical role, operating transformations on individuals."[44] That this transformation is not always "successful" in eliminating the aberrant behaviour of individuals by no means constitutes a failure of the prison or of normalizing power. For a delinquency that is "irreducible" is also a "secretly useful" product of normalizing power.[45]

Yet the prison also constituted a place "for the formation of clinical knowledge about the convicts,"[46] a task that was central to normalizing power.

> The overall aim was to make the prison a place for the constitution of a body of knowledge that would regulate the exercise of penitentiary practice. The prison was not only to know the decision of the judges and to apply it in terms of the established regulations; it has to extract unceasingly from the inmate a body of knowledge that will make it possible to transform the penal measure into a penitentiary operation, which will make of the penality required by the offense a modification of the inmate that will be of use to society.[47]

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[44] *Ibid.*, 248.

[45] *Ibid.*, 277.

[46] *Ibid.*, 249.

[47] *Ibid.*, 151-2.

This same concern for the identity of the criminal, "what he is by nature, according to his constitution, character traits, or his pathological variables" gave rise to the school of Criminal Anthropology in the 1890s which sought to draw a distinction between "absolutely and definitively dangerous subjects and those who can cease to be dangerous provided they receive certain treatment."[48]

This same need to specify the individual within a disciplinary knowledge was evident as well in the development of health care in the eighteenth century. Like other institutions of modern power, health care served the larger needs of the emerging system of capitalism. This "medical edifice," Foucault argued, "cannot be divorced from the concurrent organization of a politics of health, the consideration of disease as a political and economic problem for social collectivities which they must seek to resolve as a matter of overall policy."[49] Of particular interest to him, though, was the fact that the problems of health and disease were addressed through a "considered noso-politics." Yet, he argued, "the eighteenth-century problematisation of noso-politics does not correlate with a uniform trend of State intervention in the practice of medicine, but rather with the emergence at a number of sites in the social body of

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[48]Michel Foucault, "The Dangerous Individual," in Politics, Philosophy, Culture, 150, 143-4.

[49]Michel Foucault, "The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century," in Power/Knowledge, 166.

health and disease as problems requiring some form or other of collective control measures."[50]

Foucault also argued that this characteristic of modern power to seek a "new *specification of individuals*"[51] was behind what he described as "a veritable discursive explosion"[52] about sexuality in the nineteenth century - an explosion that confounds accepted notions that it was a century of repressed sexuality and the assiduous avoidance of any discussion of sexuality. In The History of Sexuality he pointed to the various "centres" of discourses on sex:

> First there was medicine, via the "nervous disorders"; next psychiatry, when it set out to discover the etiology of mental illnesses, focussing its gaze first on "excess," then onanism, then frustration, then "frauds against procreation," but especially when it annexed the whole of the sexual perversions as its own province; criminal justice, too, which had long been concerned with sexuality, particularly in the form of "heinous" crimes and crimes against nature, but which, toward the middle of the nineteenth century broadened its jurisdiction to include petty offenses, minor indecencies, insignificant perversions; and lastly, all those social controls, cropping up at the end of the last century, which screened the sexuality of couples, parents and children, dangerous and endangered adolescents -

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[50] *Ibid.*, 167-68. The other "sites," to which Foucault refers, at which medical problems assumed importance include religious groups (i.e. the Quakers); charitable, benevolent and philanthropic associations and societies "which operated somewhat like organs of surveillance of one class over those others which, precisely because they are less able to defend themselves, are sources of collective danger;" and eighteenth-century academies and nineteenth-century statistics societies "which endeavour to organize a global, quantifiable knowledge of morbid phenomena." (*Ibid.*, 166).

[51] The History of Sexuality, v. 1, 42-3.

[52] *Ibid.*, 17.

> undertaking to protect, separate, and forewarn, signalling perils everywhere, awakening people's attention, calling for diagnoses, piling up reports, organizing therapies.[53]

Indeed, "[a]ll the possible deviations were carefully described."[54]

Nor was this proliferation of discourses a development confined to those institutions traditionally seen to be instruments of state or class power. One finds it as well in erotic literature of the nineteenth century, such as the anonymous My Secret Life, the detailed record of one man's sexual life. But what made this work particularly significant for Foucault was that the author "speaks of this task of writing the mundane details of his pleasure as a pure obligation to which he could not avoid submitting: *it is necessary to say everything*."[55] As such, the work was indicative of erotic literature as a whole, which seeks "its effects not only in the intensity or the rarity of the scenes which it imagined, but also in the relentless search for a certain truth of pleasure. An erotics of truth."[56] Even "underground" literature such as My Secret Life and

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[53]*Ibid.*, 30-31.

[54]*Ibid.*, 36.

[55]Michel Foucault, "The West and the Truth of Sex," Sub-Stance, 20 (1978): 5. The obligation to say everything that he speaks of in this passage is one that is imposed by power and is clearly different from the obligation to write that he attributed to Nerval, an obligation that was, in this case, a matter of an irresistible inner impulse.

[56]*Ibid.*

erotic literature as a whole manifested that same "will to truth," the same necessity of specifying individuals, as was manifested in the prison and on the psychiatrist's couch.

Nor are so-called sexual liberation movements immune from this modern compulsion to talk about sex. Rather, Foucault argued, they inadvertently serve the ends of that society which they claim represses sexuality:

> The affirmation of a sexuality that has never been more rigourously subjugated than during the age of the hypocritical, bustling, and responsible bourgeoisie is coupled with the grandiloquence of a discourse purporting to reveal the truth about sex, modify its economy, and change its future. The statement of oppression and the form of the sermon refer back to one another; they are mutually reinforcing.[57]

Such movements do not liberate sexuality, rather, they are part of a larger social apparatus in which sexuality is constituted.

Despite those deep cultural roots behind our compulsion to speak of our identity in terms of our sexuality, its modern incarnation reveals its integration within that particularly modern form of normalizing power. The host of discourses about "peripheral sexualities" referred - directly or indirectly - to the "legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality." The legitimate couple "tended to function as a norm" within a society that sought "to ensure population, to reproduce labour capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations." In other words this norm "constitutes a sexu-

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[57]History of Sexuality, v. 1, 8.

ality that is economically useful and politically conservative."[58]

Discourses about peripheral sexuality served two functions. On the one hand they were the basis for a variety of therapies and practices, both in institutions and within the family that, beginning with the close observation of behaviour, sought to alter those behaviours which, even in the most infinitesimal way, suggested deviancy. It was a matter of correcting, or normalizing, behaviour. On the other hand, and more insidiously, all this talk about sex made it an object of desire and that thing through which "each individual has to pass in order to have access to his own intelligibility":

> By creating the imaginary element that is "sex," the deployment of sexuality established one of its most essential internal operating principles: the desire for sex - the desire to have it, to have access to it, to discover it, to liberate it, to articulate it in discourse, to formulate it in truth. It constituted "sex" itself as something desirable. And it is this desirability of sex that attaches each one of us to the injunction to know it, to reveal its law and its power; it is this desirability that makes us think we are affirming the rights of our sex against all power, when in fact we are fastened to the deployment of sexuality that has lifted up from deep within us a sort of mirage in which we think we see ourselves reflected - the dark shimmer of sex.[59]

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[58]History of Sexuality, v. 1, 38, 36-7.

[59]*Ibid.*, 155, 156-7. See also, Michel Foucault "Body/Power," Power/Knowledge, 56-57, where Foucault argues that "sexuality, through thus becoming an object of analysis and concern, surveillance and control, engenders at the same time an intensification of each individual's desire for, in, and over his body."

Sexuality even deviant sexuality, becomes the law of our own intelligibility. Just as the internal geography and the regimentation of the prison invests the prisoner with a "soul" which constitutes his subjectivity, so "sex" achieves the same end. The aim of power is not to repress human nature, but to construct it.

Foucault reconceives power, then, by showing how it acts not upon a fully formed human subject (with an identity and a consciousness of herself), but how it creates such a subjectivity by inscribing itself upon the body. "What I want to show," he argued, "is how power relations can materially penetrate the body in-depth, without depending even on the mediation of the subject's own representation."[60] He wants to "show how deployments of power are directly connected to the body - to bodies, functions, physiological processes, sensations and pleasures...."[61] Power, he argued, grips an individual at "the depths of his soul in order to transform him."[62]

> [I]n thinking of the mechanisms of power, I am thinking ... of its capillary forms of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives.[63]

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[60]Michel Foucault, "The History of Sexuality," in Power/Knowledge, 186.

[61]History of Sexuality, v. 1, 151-2.

[62]"The Anxiety of Judging," Foucault Live, 164.

[63]"Prison Talk," Power/Knowledge, 39.

It is not that a subjectivity is being repressed. Rather, it is "what is most vital in [bodies that] has been invested."[64]

When Foucault spoke of power he contemplated a force that could not only penetrate deeply into the body (to use a vertical metaphor) but whose effects were apparent across the body politic (to use a horizontal metaphor). Power, for him, did not emanate from a centre (such as the state or the bourgeoisie) nor was it exercised, purposefully, by anybody. For him, the analysis of power "should not concern itself with power at the level of conscious intention or decision...." Rather, "it is a case of studying power at the point where its intention, if it has one, is completely invested in its real and effective practices."[65] On the other hand, he argued that power was omnipresent. It was, he wrote, "a fine, differentiated, *continuous* network" which "exercised itself at the level of everyday life."[66] Such was its pervasiveness he could argue that "power *is* `always already there'... one is never `outside' it ... there are no

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[64]History of Sexuality, v. 1, 152.

[65]"Two Lectures," Power/Knowledge, 97.

[66]Michel Foucault, "The Life of Infamous Men," trans. Paul Foss and Meaghan Morris, in Power, Truth, Strategy, ed. Paul Foss and Meaghan Morris (Sydney, Australia: Feral, 1979), 88-89.

`margins' for those who break with the system to gambol on...."[67]

A power which is "always already there," a power which constitutes subjects by investing their bodies with a "soul" - such a conception of power would seem to validate the criticisms of Habermas, Taylor, and Rorty that Foucault's mature conception of power eliminated the grounds for resistance to power. Yet Foucault did not see it this way. After arguing that one can never be outside power he hastened to add, "To say that one can never be 'outside' power does not mean that one is trapped and condemned to defeat no matter what."[68] In fact, at one point he claimed that all his studies of power were directed toward fostering the possibility of resistance to it and revolution against it.[69]

But how is this possible? How, without horribly contradicting himself, could Foucault argue, virtually in the same breath, both that one cannot be outside power and that one is not trapped by power? How can he possibly conceive of an effective form of resistance to power as he conceives it?

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[67]Michel Foucault, "Power and Strategies," in Power/Knowledge, 141-42.

[68]*Ibid.*

[69]"I worry about comprehending the effective mechanisms of domination; and I do it so that those who are inserted in certain relations of power, who are implicated in them, might escape them through their actions of resistance and rebellion, might transform them in order not to be subjugated any longer." Remarks on Marx, pp. 173-74.

For Foucault, I will argue, resistance is possible precisely at that point where he claims power is effective, at the level of the body and its forces. More precisely, I will argue that it is the "forces" that arise naturally within the body that make resistance possible. I will further argue that when he invokes the body's "forces," what he has in mind is a certain conception of life itself. As such, one can argue that it is a vitalist subject that is the subject of resistance for Foucault.

While Foucault never directly spelled out the character of what I have called the vitalist subject of resistance, that he did predicate resistance on the notion of such a subject becomes apparent through a close reading of his work. To begin, it is important to remember that, for Foucault, what distinguished modern power was that it was concerned with the individual as a living being. What was at stake in modern power was "the body and its forces, their utility and their docility."[70] The aim of power was not to repress individuals but to harness and direct the forces within them. Discipline, he argued,

> produces subjected and practiced bodies, "docile" bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body .... it reverses the course of the energy.[71]

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[70]Discipline and Punish, 25.

[71]*Ibid.*, 138.

At one point he claimed that he was writing "a 'history of bodies'."[72]

But it is apparent, as well, that Foucault draws a distinction between the body and the life within it. As we've just seen, he writes of "the body *and its forces*" [italics added]. Discipline aims to make the body's forces docile and useful. Thus, for Foucault, we might conclude that what is important in power relations is not the body alone, but its forces. Elsewhere what he calls "force" appears under various labels, such as "energy" or "power." But one can with reason identify this force, no matter what name it goes by, with life. For as Foucault argues, this force is what is "most vital" in bodies.[73]

Despite Foucault's limited discussion of the whole issue of resistance, we might also conclude that this vital force is the ground of any possible resistance to power. To a certain degree, this is a logical necessity. If power is effective at the level of the body and its forces, then it is at this level that resistance must occur.[74] Speaking in particular of the question of resistance, he argued that there is

> always something in the social body, in classes, in groups and individuals themselves which in some sense

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[72]History of Sexuality, 152.

[73]*Ibid.*

[74]Gilles Deleuze makes a similar point, arguing that "Life becomes resistance to power when power takes life as its object." Foucault, 92.

> escapes relations of power, something which is by no means a more or less docile or reactive primal matter, but rather a centrifugal movement, an inverse energy, a discharge.

He made it plain in the context of this quote that what he was speaking of was not something that was a universal human essence, the same in all of us. Rather, it was "a quality or aspect" that is apparent "in bodies, in souls, in individuals, in the proletariat, in the bourgeoisie, but everywhere in a diversity of forms and extensions, of energies and irreducibilities."[75] He argues elsewhere that resistances inflame "certain points of the body, certain moments in life, certain types of behaviour."[76] All this seems to lead us to the conclusion that he is referring to the vital forces of the body when he speaks of resistance in terms of an energy, a discharge, a quality or aspect of bodies, something that can inflame points of the body or types of behaviour.

Yet the question remains as to how this vital force resists power. To a certain extent the answer follows logically from the evidence I've already presented. As I showed earlier, for Foucault, modern power seeks to normalize, to specify, to discipline, to utilize, to regularize the body and its forces. These vital forces, as the material upon which power works, must present itself to power as

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[75]"Power and Strategies," Power/Knowledge, 138.

[76]History of Sexuality, v 1, 96.

inherently abnormal, unspecified, undisciplined, irregular. Resistance, then, seems to be constituted in the very fact of the indeterminacy and the radically protean character of the body's forces.

Yet one need not rely on logical deduction to come to this conclusion. Foucault, more or less directly, leads us to this conclusion. Power, he argued,

> is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable. The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. And "Power," insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities, the concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movement.[77]

As regards resistance, he argued that

> one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds.[78]

What Foucault seems to be describing is the relations between a force (which can be called power) which seeks inertia or normality, in the form of unity, regularity, specificity, and utility, and a force of resistance (which he seems to associate with life) which seeks endless mobil-

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[77]History of Sexuality, p. 93.

[78]*Ibid.*, 96.

ity and multiplicity of form. The subject of resistance for Foucault, then, appears to be that same subject that is the object of power - the living being. However readily power can discipline the life within us, it is the natural disposition of life to be abnormal and undisciplined that presents the possibility of resistance.

In practical terms, such a conception of resistance held out the promise of, at best, temporary victories or tactical advantages over power.[79] Nor should this surprise us, given Foucault's comments about the complicity of utopian schemes in the operation of modern power.[80] But if Foucault did not see life as he conceives it here as the ground of a new regime, he was fascinated by those instances in which life seemed to extend its disruptive character into the political and social order. For instance, in a 1972 debate with Maoist students about the concept of "popular justice," Foucault juxtaposes the idea of the people (in the French Revolution, for instance) setting up courts to dispense popular justice, with that of the dispensation of justice in a moment of spontaneous brutality. For him, the court, along with the police and the prison, is part of a "complex system" one of the ultimate aims of which is to

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[79]On the whole this is the case for Foucault. As I will point out in Chapter 7, however, the Iranian Revolution seemed to hold out to him the prospect of a more thoroughgoing vitalist revolution in politics.

[80]See "Revolutionary Action: 'Until Now'," 230.

contain "the most mobile, the most excitable, the 'violent' elements among the common people: those who were most prepared to turn to direct armed action."[81] While Foucault does not invoke a vital force that motivates the people, one can find a rhetorical link between his comments in this debate and his more theoretical discussions of resistance: what is important to him here is the mobility, the excitability, the inherent violence of a segment of the population.

A similar rhetorical continuity is to be found in Foucault's introduction for a work that was to have been edited by him, but which never appeared, entitled The Life of Infamous Men. It was to have been an "anthology of existences," a reflection by Foucault on the lives of various, virtually unknown figures, from a "sodomite friar" to a "fantastic usurer" whose lives appealed to him simply by dint of their intensity.[82] In defining what he means by intensity, he argues that the figures he chooses to study "should have been traversed with a certain ardour, that they should have been animated by a violence, an energy, an excess...."[83] As in The History of Sexuality Foucault seems

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[81]"On Popular Justice: A Discussion with Maoists," in Power/Knowledge, 14-15.

[82]"The Life of Infamous Men," in Power, Truth, Strategy, trans. Paul Foss and Meaghan Morris, ed. Paul Foss and Meaghan Morris (Sydney: Feral, 1979), 78.

[83]*Ibid.*, 79.

to be referring to a force that, in keeping with the title of this unfinished work, we might call the "life" of infamous men.

Foucault was also fascinated by the violence and the excessiveness of the young parricide Pierre Rivière and, as we will see in Chapter 7, by a vital force that motivated the Iranian revolutionaries. I would argue that, by whatever label, Foucault is referring to a certain conception of life which, as I will show in the next Chapter, derives from the vitalist philosophy of Georges Canguilhem.

Before turning to this task of establishing the roots of Foucault's conception of resistance in the vitalism of Canguilhem, it is worth asking: if a certain conception of life is the ground upon which Foucault predicates resistance, why did he not say so in plainer terms? Why is it necessary to engage in a close reading of his work to discover this conception of resistance?

The answers to these questions, I believe, resides in Foucault's nominalism. Power, he argued,

> is not an institution, not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.[84]

In other words, there was no substance to power, there was no essence of power, and, for Foucault, the same could be said of "truth," "reason," the "subject," and "sexuality."

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[84]History of Sexuality, 93.

Such nominalism was an essential aspect of Foucault's historical and critical enterprise. So even if he could speak of the materiality of the body, it would be difficult to make a convincing argument about the materiality of the body's forces, that there was a certain vital essence that traversed the body.

These obvious difficulties probably prevented Foucault from making a more forthright statement about the nature of the force upon which he predicated resistance. Yet his whole conception of power, let alone resistance, is inconceivable without a conception of a vital force with which the body is endowed. Such a conception of force he derives from the work of Georges Canguilhem.

CHAPTER 6

Canguilhem's Vitalism

As we have seen in Chapter 4, Canguilhem's historical epistemology exercised a decisive influence on Foucault's early work. This influence, as I pointed out above, has been well documented and is very familiar to those who are concerned with Foucault's intellectual development. Yet, I will argue in what follows that Canguilhem's work exercised a decisive influence as well on Foucault's later conception of power and resistance. On the one hand, we find in Canguilhem's work a philosophical vitalism which seeks to understand life as a force with certain specific characteristics. It is just such a conception of life that seems to have allowed Foucault to conceive of resistance to power on the basis of the body and its forces. On the other hand, Canguilhem's analysis of the relations between the living organism and its environment parallels Foucault's analysis of power as the relations between a force which seeks regularity, uniformity, and stability, and another force which seeks mobility, abnormality, irregularity.

The ideas that would exercise this influence on Foucault are to be found in Canguilhem's most important

work, The Normal and the Pathological, originally published in 1943.[1] On one level, it is a work of historical epistemology. In it he seeks to account for the appearance in medical thought in the nineteenth century of the "dogma" of "the real identity of normal and pathological phenomena."[2] In the first instance, Canguilhem argued, this dogma developed as a result of theoretical problems within medicine. He argued that while there existed a concept of the "heterogeneity of normal and the pathological states" in both the modern "germ theory" of disease (which "owed much of its success to the fact that it embodies an ontological representation of sickness"[3]) and in the notion, found in classical Greek medicine, of disease as the "alteration of the total organism"

> it proved difficult to maintain the qualitative modification separating the normal from the pathological in a [modern] conception [of disease] which allows,

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[1]I call this work his most important for two reasons. On the one hand, it was one of only two book length studies he published. (His only other book was La Formation du concept de réflexe aux XVII et XVIII siècles (Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises 1955).) Otherwise, his work has appeared as collections of articles, Connaissance de la Vie (Paris: Vrin, 1952); Etudes d'histoire et de philosophie des sciences (Paris: Vrin, 1968); Idéologie et rationalité dans l'histoire des sciences de la vie (Paris: Vrin, 1977). The Normal and the Pathological derives its importance, too, from the fact that it went through four editions, not only because of its popularity but also because it seemed to consistently reflect the basic concerns of Canguilhem's work despite its age.

[2]The Normal and the Pathological, 43.

[3]*Ibid.*, 43.

> indeed expects, man to be able to compel nature and bend it to his normative desires.[4]

In order to conceive of the eradication of pathological phenomena in the organism and the reappearance of normal phenomena through medical practice, there arose, Canguilhem argued, a "theoretical need ... to establish a scientific pathology by linking it to physiology."[5] Which is to say that it became necessary to understand the pathological and the normal not as polar opposites but as "quantitative variations greater or lesser according to corresponding physiological phenomena."[6]

Canguilhem also points out that this notion of "the real identity of normal and pathological vital phenomena" arose within a broader intellectual environment. He points out that it "was expounded in France by Auguste Comte and Claude Bernard, each working under very different circumstances and with very different intentions."[7] His aim is to show how they took up the role of "standard bearers" for this dogma "half voluntarily":

> The history of ideas cannot be superimposed perforce on the history of sciences. But as scientists lead their lives as men in an environment and social setting that

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[4] *Ibid.*, 41.

[5] *Ibid*, 42.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*, 43.

> is not exclusively scientific, the history of science cannot neglect the history of ideas.[8]

As such, it is important, for Canguilhem, to understand the role of "cultural milieu" in the parallel yet seemingly coincidental exposition of this dogma by Comte and Bernard.

Yet this work is more than just an exercise in historical epistemology. Canguilhem clearly saw that the conclusions of his work had important philosophical implications beyond epistemology. Indeed, in the preface to the 1950 edition of his work he argued that the work left "the philosophical door open," and laid the "groundwork" for a "future thesis in philosophy."[9]

His work, then, was perhaps only secondarily concerned with epistemology. What was of primary importance to him was to sketch out a certain philosophy of life that made possible the historical epistemology that he chronicled. For him, the philosophy is grounded in the notion of life as a normative activity - "[n]ormative, in the fullest sense of the word," being that activity "which establishes norms."[10] Which is to say that according to Canguilhem the medical definition of the normal state of the human body is a secondary manifestation of a primary vital impulse. Medicine, he argued, "exists as the art of life because the living

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[8]*Ibid.*, 46.

[9]*Ibid*, 32.

[10]*Ibid*, 126-7.

human being himself calls certain dreaded states or behaviours pathological (hence requiring avoidance or correction) relative to the dynamic polarity of life, in the form of a negative value." To say that medical norms are a function of states which the living being himself calls pathological or healthy is somewhat facile. But Canguilhem goes beyond this. For him, in designating certain states pathological "the living human being, in a more or less lucid way, extends a spontaneous effort, peculiar to life, to struggle against that which obstructs its preservation or development taken as norms."[11] He goes even further than this in arguing that "human technique extends vital impulses, at whose service it tries to place systematic knowledge which would deliver them from much of life's costly trial and error."[12] Canguilhem rejects the notion that "vital prehuman activity pursues goals and utilizes means comparable to those of men."[13] He also believes that he is being "as careful as anyone as far as the tendency to fall into anthropomorphism is concerned." Nonetheless, he wonders "how normativity essential to human consciousness would be explained if it did not exist in embryo in life."[14]

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[11] *Ibid*, 126.

[12] *Ibid.*, 130.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] *Ibid.*, 127.

In the midst of an ostensible work in historical epistemology, then, we find, much to our surprise, a peculiar vitalist philosophy. For Canguilhem, medical norms are only secondary to life's own normative activity. They are not the function of a purposeful, scientific calculation but of the relation between the living organism and its environment. For Canguilhem, even if we reject "a panegyric of vitalism,"[15]

> we are still free to think that no living being would have ever developed medical technique if the life within him - as within every living thing - were indifferent to the conditions it met with, if life were not a form of reactivity polarized to the variations of the environment in which it develops.[16]

This is what makes life a normative *activity*, that life is in a continual process of establishing norms within the context of its environment.

At a certain level, Canguilhem's vitalism is unremarkable and seems only to recapitulate Darwinian biology. He argues, for instance, that normal relations obtain between a form of life and its environment when "fertility and a corresponding variety of forms such that, should changes in the environment occur, life will be able to find the solution to the problem of adaptation - which it has

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[15]Paul Rabinow in François Delaport ed., A Vital Rationalist: Selected Writings from Georges Canguilhem (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 17.

[16]The Normal and the Pathological, 130.

been brutally forced to resolve - in one of these forms."[17] He argues as well that "the appearance of new species must be placed at the intersection of innovations brought about by mutations and oscillations in the environment."[18] These comments bear a certain resemblance to Darwin's theory of natural selection.

As regards the question of the relation between the concepts of the normal and the pathological and life itself, however, Canguilhem's vitalism goes well beyond the discoveries of biological science. For him, what is experessed in medical norms is, in the last instance, the activity of life itself. "There is no fact," he argues,

> which is normal or pathological in itself. An anomaly or a mutation is not in itself pathological. These two express other possible norms of life. If these norms are inferior to specific earlier norms in terms of stability, fecundity, variability of life, they will be called pathological. If these norms in the same environment should turn out to be equivalent, or in another environment, superior, they will be called normal. Their normality will come to them from their normativity. The pathological is not the absence of a biological norm: it is another norm but one which is, comparatively speaking, pushed aside by life.[19]

As the foregoing indicates, Canguilhem endows life with a virtual agency. In the face of environmental change, life "finds a solution" to the problems of adaptation. Life

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[17] *Ibid.*, 143-44.

[18] *Ibid.*, 143.

[19] *Ibid.*, 144.

pushes aside "pathological" norms in favour of more advantageous ones.

Nor are these phrases mere rhetorical devices used by Canguilhem to express the process of the adaptation of living beings to their environments. This becomes clear when he comes to define what constitutes health in the living being. For him, health is not a matter of the living being establishing profitable, or "normal," relations with its environment. Rather,

> What characterizes health is the possibility of transcending the norm, which defines the momentary normal, the possibility of tolerating infractions of the habitual norm and instituting new norms in new situations.[20]

Put another way, the "healthy organism tries less to maintain itself in its present state and environment than to realize its nature."[21] Thus, health is defined by life's attempts to transcend the balance it has established between itself and its environment. Life, in its healthy state, is a form of endless mobility and experiment.

In arguing that the healthy organism seeks to alter itself in order to realize its nature, Canguilhem seems to adopt a vitalist teleology *à la* Bergson. But he is quick to point out that the nature the healthy organism seeks to realize is the continual establishment of new norms. To be healthy, a living organism must engage ceaselessly in what

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[20]*Ibid.*, 196-197.

[21]*Ibid.*, 199.

Canguilhem calls "normative activity." Life, in seeking out new forms and new modes of being, must also incline, naturally, toward pathology. This natural inclination constitutes what he describes as "the power and the temptation to fall sick ... an essential characteristic of human physiology."[22]

Canguilhem, then, introduces a novel conception of life. It is not for him, as for other vitalists, a force which can account for human progress and the development of "man" as life's highest form. He never shies away from a conception of life based on its radical indeterminacy and its consistent impulse to transcend the norm.

In the earliest editions of The Normal and the Pathological Canguilhem's discussions of life and its relations with the environment were limited to a biological context. In 1966, however, he added three more chapters in which he took up a discussion of the function of norms and of the relations between the living being and its environment in the social context. It is in this discussion that one can discern a similarity between the function of the norm and Foucault's discussion of power.[23]

Crucial to an understanding of Canguilhem's discussion of social norms is his argument that society attempts

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[22]*Ibid.*, 200.

[23]In Discipline and Punish (184) Foucault described these new chapters as an "important contribution" to our understanding of the "power of the Norm" in modern society.

to replicate the type of functioning indicative of living organisms. "The life of a being," he argues, "is, for each of its elements, the immediacy of the co-presence of all."[24] Despite the fact that any society will always be synthetic, it seeks to achieve that organic co-functioning of elements that living beings naturally achieve. This it seeks to do through the invention of various mechanisms, or, what Canguilhem calls, "organs," that will regulate the social organization.[25]

Society, then, seeks to replicate the "internal environment"[26] of the living organism. Which is to say that it seeks to devise mechanisms which can duplicate the tasks of the nervous system, which informs the organism of any changes in its state, and of the endocrine system, which releases hormones to regulate the body's functioning and, if necessary, return it to homeostasis.[27]

Those "organs" by which society collects and analyses information are most highly developed in modern, industrial, "planned" societies. In these societies whole bureaucracies in government and the private sector have been devoted to the assimilation of vital, social, economic, and other statistics. For Canguilhem, the assimilation of these

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[24] *Ibid.*, 253.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] *Ibid.*, 254.

[27] *Ibid.*, 253.

statistics is analogous to the functioning of sense receptors in the living organism. The utilization of this information through computers is analogous to the functioning of the human brain in relation to the endocrine system.[28]

Yet it is not sufficient, in its attempts to replicate the living organism, for society simply to develop organs for the collection and utilization of information. To replicate effectively the functioning of the living organism, society must establish a principle of regulation, it must impose upon itself those functional norms which are immanent in the organism. As Canguilhem points out, modern industrial society in particular is characterized by its high degree of normalization. In industry, the choice of material and the dimensions of manufactured objects have been normalized to ensure consistent manufacture of objects. Norms of pedagogical method and student performance have been established in the educational system. Norms of height, weight, and life expectancy have also been established. Yet, Canguilhem argues, it is only in the "co-relativity" of norms in whatever realm that society begins to replicate the living organism. For him, what makes society and organization ("that is, a unity in itself, if not by itself, and for itself"[29]) is the "totality of reciprocally relative

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[28] *Ibid.*

[29] *Ibid.*, 249.

norms."[30] For him, the "decision to normalize" within one realm of society "assumes the representation of a possible whole of correlative, complementary or compensatory decisions:"[31]

> When we think about it carefully, the normalization of the technical means of education, health, transportation for people and goods, expresses collective demands which, taken as a whole, even in the absence of an act of awareness [*prise de conscience*] on the part of individuals, in a given historical society, defines its way of referring its structure, or perhaps its structures, to what it considers its own good.[32]

That the social organization does constantly have to work at defining its own "good" shows, Canguilhem argues, that it has no "intrinsic finality" and that one of its tasks "consists in informing itself as to its possible purposes."[33] In other words, unlike living organisms, the social organization is constantly involved in the process of informing itself as to its nature and of creating regulatory "organs" to fulfill that nature.

The social organization is consistently involved in these tasks, Canguilhem argues, precisely because it is not an organic entity, but a mechanical one. Unlike a living organism, the norms of society are "external to the adjusted multiple." Rules "must be represented, learned, remembered

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[30] *Ibid.*, 247.

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] *Ibid.*, 238.

[33] *Ibid.*, 253.

[and] applied."[34] Social norms, unlike organic ones, "impose a requirement on an existence, a given, whose variety, disparity, with regard to the requirement, present themselves as a hostile, even more than an unknown, indeterminant."[35]

That this attempt to impose a requirement on an existence is never ultimately successful is because life, for Canguilhem, never ceases to seek to transcend the normal relations established between living beings and their social environments. Which is to say that life always seeks to "dominate the environment and organize it according to [its] values as a living being." The efforts of society to constitute itself as an organization through the gathering of information and the establishment of norms (technical, juridical, economic, etc.) are frustrated by the fact of the "paradoxical pathology" of the living being.[36] Through "an unconscious search for disease, a provocation of it" the living being forces society to re-establish its normative structure, its principle of organization.[37]

Canguilhem's work, then, seems to have influenced Foucault's on two counts. His conception of the normative

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[34]*Ibid.*, 250.

[35]*Ibid.*, 239.

[36]*Ibid.*, 285.

[37]*Ibid.*, 286. Canguilhem points out that logically the "abnormal, as ab-normal, comes after the definition of the normal...." Yet, he hastens to point out that, existentially, the normal, as the negation of the abnormal, is "the correction summoned up by the abnormality." *Ibid.*, 243.

structure of society seems to have been the ground upon which Foucault built his own conception of power. (Indeed, Foucault, as we've seen, described modern power as a normalizing power.) As well, Canguilhem's conceptions of life and of the relations between the living being and its environment seem to have conditioned Foucault's analysis of the body and its forces as the locus of resistance.

As with Foucault, Canguilhem recognizes that normalizing practices are effective at a local level. While he admits that specific norms reflect "an idea of society and its hierarchy of values,"[38] he does not seek to examine normalization from the perspective of a central organization or decision-making body which establishes norms for society as a whole. Rather, judicial, medical, technical, and educational norms invest the social order without their relations with one another necessarily being brought to consciousness by those human agents who apply them. Nonetheless, "a decision regarding this or that norm," he argued, "is understood only within the context of other norms. At a given moment the experience of normalization cannot be broken down."[39] In other words, one finds in Canguilhem's analysis of the interrelation of social norms a parallel to Foucault's notion of a power that is non-subjective but which nonetheless serves specific interests within society.

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[38]*Ibid.*, 247.

[39]*Ibid.*, 246.

As I pointed out in the previous chapter, for Foucault the objects of normalizing practices are deviant behaviour, or, rather, the unutilizable expenditure of the individual's forces, and that effects of power arise precisely in response to this useless expenditure. Canguilhem makes a similar point. Social norms, he argues, "cannot be original. Rule begins to arise only in making rules and this function of correction arises from infraction itself."[40] The object of normalization, then, is "to impose a requirement upon an existence" which is, from the perspective of the social organism, abnormal.[41] Foucault's conception of normalizing power is directly parallel to this. For him, power seeks to discipline and utilize the forces of the body. In other words it seeks to impose a requirement on the existence of a living being.

As with Foucault's notion of power, one of the most important tasks of the social organization in Canguilhem's conception of normalization is the accumulation of data. This information gathering, in its turn, is the basis for the elucidation of norms and discourses in which the normal and the pathological are defined. As with power in Foucault, in this specification of individuals "the monster is natu-

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[40]*Ibid.*, 241.

[41]*Ibid.*, 329.

ralized, the irregular reduced to the rule, the prodigal to the predictable."[42]

In Canguilhem the development of "organs to look for and receive information, organs to calculate and even make decisions" constitutes the effort of the social organization to function like an organism. It also reveals that, like an organism, the social organization has "no intrinsic finality," but rather a simple need to regulate.[43] While for Foucault society's mechanistic or organic characteristics are not important, his conception of modern power is very similar insofar as he argues that modern power does not seek to eradicate pockets of abnormality, but rather to specify them and turn those forces to productive uses. Thus, while society has certain global interests (e.g. the success of capitalism), the micro-investiture of power does not demand simple, brute conformity. Delinquency, for instance, has useful purposes in constituting the populace as a moral subject. This same flexibility of social norms is evident in Canguilhem's discussion of the creation of technical norms. As he pointed out, each specific norm can be "understood only within the context of other norms."[44] Yet for all that "the norm of norms remains convergence" and any given norm

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[42]Georges Canguilhem, La Connaissance de la Vie (Paris: Vrin, 1975), 177.

[43]The Normal and the Pathological, 248, 252.

[44]*Ibid.*, 245-6.

"gradually reflects an idea of society and its hierarchy of values."[45] Thus, as with power in Foucault, there is no central decision-making body, no dominant class which conceives of a social order and directs the levers of power so as to achieve it. Rather, the "correlativity of [norms] within a social system tends to make this system an organization ...."[46]

Yet it seems to be insofar as Canguilhem articulates the grounds for a mode of subjectivity capable of resisting power that he was of central important for Foucault. This is evident in Foucault's introduction to the 1978 English translation of The Normal and the Pathological. At the outset of this introduction he seeks to locate Canguilhem within the intellectual history of modern France. He distinguishes between two schools of phenomenology: one, dominated by the figures of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, is a "philosophy of the subject," concerned primarily with meaning and experience. The other, which includes Alexandre Koyré, Jean Cavaillès, Gaston Bachelard[47] and Canguilhem, sought to inquire into the history of reason, the conditions in which

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[45]*Ibid.*, 247.

[46]*Ibid.*, 249.

[47]Koyré, Cavaillès, and Bachelard were all leading figures in the development of a uniquely French school of the history and philosophy of science of which Canguilhem is the leading contemporary exemplar.

"truth" established itself as truth.[48] Foucault then discusses briefly the methodological innovations that Canguilhem and others in this tradition brought to the history of the sciences.

In the final pages, however, he turns to a discussion of the problem of "the relation between science of life and vitalism" which had been a "constant" in Canguilhem's work from 1943 to 1977.[49] What is significant in these pages is that Foucault seems not only to relate the nature of Canguilhem's reflection on this question but to subscribe to many of the same positions as well. On the one hand, he does this by writing in what appears to be his own voice rather than Canguilhem's. On the other hand, he highlights an affinity between Canguilhem's project and his own. For instance, he underlines the importance of Canguilhem to "all those who, starting from different points of view (whether theorists of Marxism, psychoanalysis or linguistics), have tried to rethink the question of the subject."[50] Surely Foucault falls into this category.

But while many have noted the influence of Canguilhem on the "structuralism" of Althusser and Foucault, in this introduction the importance of Canguilhem to Foucault

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[48]Foucault, Introduction to The Normal and the Pathological, 9-13.

[49]*Ibid.*, 18-19.

[50]*Ibid.*, 23.

is not to have shown that the subject's autonomy is a fiction, not to have shown that the subject is determined by its environment, but rather that the diversity of form proper to living beings, their ability to transcend their "normal" relations with their environment, constitute a form of freedom on a basis far different from that offered by humanist philosophies. "Phenomenology asked of 'actual experience' the original meaning of every act of knowledge," Foucault writes. "But can we not, or must we not look for it in the living being himself?" These two sentences stand alone as a paragraph in his introduction and it seems that it is Foucault himself who demands that we philosophically come to terms with the living being and it is he who, subsequently, begins to do that.

> That man lives in a conceptually architectured environment does not prove that he has been diverted from life by some oversight or that a historical drama has separated him from it; but only that he lives in a certain way, that he has a relationship with his environment such that he does not have a fixed point of view of it, that he can move on undefined territory, that he must move about to receive information, that he must move things in relation to one another in order to make them useful. Forming concepts is one way of living, not of killing life; it is one way of living in complete mobility and not of immobilizing life; it is showing, among these millions of living beings who inform their environment and are informed from it outwards, an innovation which will be judged trifling or substantial as you will.[51]

For Foucault it is insofar as we are *living* beings that we are never immobilized, never ultimately reduced to the con-

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[51]*Ibid.*, 21.

cepts with which we locate ourselves in relation to our environment.

For Foucault the importance of The Normal and the Pathological[52] is to have introduced the concept of error - both as regards life and thought - to the problem of the relations between the normal and the pathological and to the "philosophical question of knowledge."

> At the heart of these problems is that of error. For at life's most basic level, the play of code and decoding leaves room for chance, which, before being disease, deficit or monstrosity, is something like perturbation in the information system, something like a "mistake." In the extreme, life is what is capable of error. And it is perhaps this given or rather this fundamental eventuality which must be called to account .... for this singular mutation, this "hereditary error" which makes life result, with man, in a living being who is never completely at home, a living being dedicated to "error" and destined, in the end, to "error."[53]

This is not only true of the pre-cognitive aspects of human life:

> if we admit that the concept is the answer that life itself gives to this chance, it must be that error is at the root of what makes human thought and its history. The opposition of true and false, the values we attribute to both, the effects of power that different societies and different institutions link to this division - even all this is perhaps only the latest response to the possibility of error, which is intrinsic to life. If the history of the sciences is discontinuous, that is, if it can be analyzed only as a series of "corrections," as a new distribution of true and false which never finally once and for all, liberates the truth, it is because there, too, "error" constitutes not overlook-

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[52]He argues that it "constitutes without any doubt the most important and the most significant of Canguilhem's works" (p. 21).

[53]*Ibid.*, 20, 21-2.

> ing or delaying a truth but the dimension proper to the life of men and to the time of the species.[54]

An error "intrinsic to life" is that factor which accounts both for the life of the species and for its history and thought.

In concluding this introduction Foucault describes Canguilhem as both a "rationalist" and a "philosopher of error." "I mean," he wrote, "that it is in starting from error that he poses philosophical problems, I should say, *the* philosophical problem of truth and life."[55] It was in the Critique of Judgment and the Phenomenology of Spirit, Foucault argues, that this question was given "its first great formulations." The responses to this question, he continued, have been taken up along two avenues of inquiry. One asks, "is it that knowledge of life must be considered as nothing more than one of the regions which depends on the general question of truth, subject and knowledge?" The other asks, "[i]s it that the entire theory of the subject must not be reformulated, since knowledge, rather than opening itself up to the world, is rooted in the `errors' of life?"[56] The former avenue, Foucault argues, led directly to the phenomenology of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty which, even though it could "introduce the body, sexuality, death, the

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[54] *Ibid.*, 22.

[55] *Ibid.*, 23. Emphasis in original.

[56] *Ibid.*, 23.

perceived world into the field of analysis," remained focussed on the Cogito. To "this philosophy of meaning, subject and the experienced thing ... Canguilhem has opposed a philosophy of error, concept and the living being."[57]

But was Foucault doing no more than analyzing Canguilhem's work? Did this philosophy of error have any importance to Foucault's own work? He provided an answer in a 1978 interview. He interpreted Canguilhem's influence on his work this way:

> He is the person who more than anyone else has examined thoroughly the problems of biology in general, trying to show how it was man himself as a living being who called himself into question in this experience.
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> By means of the establishment of the biological sciences, man, while establishing a certain kind of knowledge (*savoir*), was also changing himself as a living individual. Owing to the fact that he was able to operate on himself, change his own conditions of life itself, man was constructing a biology that was nothing other than the reciprocal form of the attempt of the life sciences to encompass the general history of the species. This is a very important consideration in Canguilhem who, I believe, recognizes in himself a certain affinity with Nietzsche. That is why we find around the figure of Nietzsche, in spite of the paradox, a certain affinity, a certain nexus of movement and communication between the discourse about the dissociation of the subject in "limit-experiences" (about which we spoke when we were dealing with Bataille) and the discourse on the transformation of the subject itself through the elaboration of a knowledge.[58]

It is significant here that Foucault links Canguilhem with the Nietzschean tradition that influenced Bataille and his discussion of "limit-experiences." There is an obvious

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[57]*Ibid.*, 23, 24.

[58]Remarks on Marx, 68-9.

affinity between Canguilhem, the historian of scientific reason, and Nietzsche, the genealogist. Yet Foucault clearly shows that it is insofar as "a *living* individual" can alter his subjectivity that Canguilhem has an affinity with Nietzsche and an importance for Foucault himself.

The significance of this change from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s in Foucault's perception of Canguilhem's influence on his thought cannot be underrated. In June 1965 he wrote Canguilhem to thank him for introducing him to the "epistemological eidetics" which, Foucault wrote, made possible not only his work in The Birth of the Clinic, but also his ability to take up a position against Canguilhem on the question of vitalism.[59] It seems that in 1978 he sees Canguilhem's vitalism as the basis upon which he can conceive of power and resistance without resorting to either a liberal-humanist normative or to a crude juxtaposition of Apollonian and Dionysian elements within society. In particular, I think that it is on the basis of the idea of an error intrinsic to life (life conceived both as biological life and mental life) that Foucault could conceive of the possibility of resistance to power.

As I noted above, what has made Foucault's political position so troublesome for many is that he conceived human subjectivity to be an extension of the system of power. For him, subjectivities were transformed and constituted to

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[59]Eribon/Wing, 103.

serve the larger goals of the system of power. If this is so, on what grounds does resistance become possible? Why would a subjectivity so attuned to the needs of the system of power seek to overthrow it? If individuals are the vehicles of power, how could resistance be effective?

The answer to these questions lies in the fact that Foucault introduced two modes of subjectivity - that mode constituted by power and another mode capable of resisting power by dint of its characteristics as a living being. It is clearly the living being that is at issue when, in Discipline and Punish and in The History of Sexuality he speaks of the "body's forces," or when, elsewhere, he predicates resistance on the basis of a certain "negative discharge" present "in bodies, in souls, in individuals... but everywhere in a diversity of forms and extensions, of energies and irreducibilities."[60] In arguing that these "forces" are the object of normalizing practices, in arguing that effects of power arise as a result of an inequality of forces, and in arguing that "there are no relations of power without resistances"[61] he clearly indicates that when he speaks of resistance he is speaking of this force that is akin to life as Canguilhem conceived it.

For Canguilhem, life was defined by its normative activity, its attempts to transcend the "normal" relations

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[60] "Power and Strategies," Power/Knowledge, 138.

[61] *Ibid.*, 142.

it had established with its environment, its inherent proclivity to pathology. Elsewhere, he described this "paradoxical pathology" as an inherent "error" proper to life. Man, he argued, has become what he is, he once argued, as the result of "mutation, of a hereditary error" which is ingrained in life itself. "In fact," he argued, "human error is one with errancy."[62] "Life is experiment, which is to say improvisation, the utilization of occurrences."[63]

As I argued in the previous chapter, Foucault, too, conceived of the body's forces in very similar terms. For him, these forces were what accounted for the "unbalanced, heterogeneous, unstable and tense force relations" that characterized power. Power seeks to stabilize what is mobile. It seeks to regularize and normalize what is abnormal. It prefers predictability to experiment. Perhaps nothing could sum up Foucault's conception of the relations between power and resistance better than Canguilhem's description of his own work as "a philosophical analysis of life understood as the activity of opposition to inertia and indifference."[64]

On the basis of the evidence I've presented in this chapter, it is perhaps reasonable to use Canguilhem's words

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[62]Georges Canguilhem, Etudes d'histoire et de philosophie des sciences, 364.

[63]Connaissance de la vie, 118. See also p. 99.

[64]The Normal and the Pathological, 236.

to capture the nature of Foucault's work. For not only is there a manifest similarity between Foucault's notions of power and resistance and Canguilhem's notions of normalization and life, but Foucault himself recognized the influence that Canguilhem as a philosopher of life had on his work. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Foucault made the living being both the point at which power was effective but also the point at which resistance became possible. And, as we have just seen, he identified himself with that mode of analysis, initiated by Canguilhem, which sought to reformulate the theory of the subject by conceiving of it primarily as a living being.

Foucault's treatment of Canguilhem in his introduction to The Normal and the Pathological also seems to indicate that he believed the work of Canguilhem provided him the opportunity to put his own analysis of life on firmer philosophical foundations than it had been when he was working under the influence of Bataille. He stresses the importance of Canguilhem's work for all those who have attempted to rethink the subject. He situates it within a philosophical tradition of historical epistemology. Yet, at the end of the day, Canguilhem's vitalism remained a very personal and speculative view of life. The values he attached to life could not be supported by the research of the biological sciences. In many ways, his interpretation of life, while set within an historical analysis of scientific reason,

could not make claims of scientific legitimacy. It is not surprising, then, as we will see in the next chapter, that Foucault, relying on Canguilhem's analysis of life for his own theory of resistance, found himself engaging in a rather crude romanticization of the force of life in his reflections on the Iranian Revolution.

Chapter 7

Reflections on the Revolution in Iran

Throughout the 1970s, the years when he had been working out what I have called the vitalist conception of subjectivity, Foucault was, as I noted earlier, actively engaged in a variety of local political "struggles:" the *Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons*; the *Groupe d'Information sur le Santé*; the foundation of the new daily newspaper *Libération*. His name was also to be found on petitions promoting various causes, such as the rights of immigrants. Despite the close connections of his partner Daniel Defert with the Maoist left in France Foucault kept his distance from overtly ideological movements. For him, ideological rigour, party discipline, and struggle in the name of utopia perpetuated modern power rather than undermined it. While he saw the types of local analyses he had made of the prison and the asylum as being useful in exposing the weak points in the system of power, it seems that it was only insofar as individuals were living beings that they could resist power.

Yet for all this, Foucault's commitment to the Iranian Revolution of 1978-1979 reveals that the idea of

revolution on a grand scale had not completely lost its appeal for him. Despite his professed reticence about revolutionary movements, he embraced the Iranian revolution so whole-heartedly because in the revolutionaries themselves he saw that form of vitalist subjectivity that he had come to argue held out the possibility of resistance to power. Yet his commitment to this manifest example of vitalist revolt became, after time, a romanticization of the revolutionaries and their vitality.

In his work immediately preceding the Iranian Revolution, Foucault, to the extent that he addressed the question of resistance, had predicated it on the materiality of the body and its forces. As I argued in the previous chapter, however, his assumption of the presence of these forces in the body and his positing them as the locus of resistance to power set the stage for a return to the romanticism of Madness and Civilization. This was certainly the case with the Iranian Revolution. Foucault took the religious passion of so many of the revolutionaries as an outward sign of an inner, vital agency. To a certain extent, the political context of the Revolution and the social and economic issues at play in Iran were secondary, to Foucault, to the vital outpouring manifest in the Revolution. Nor is it insignificant that at this time he began once again to point to Georges Bataille as an important influence on his

intellectual development.[1] Indeed, as I will point out below, in his reflections on the Revolution in Iran, one can discern a vision of revolution that closely parallels the one Bataille articulated in the 1930s.

Foucault's commitment to this Revolution represented the culmination of tensions that had developed in his work throughout the 1970s. As I pointed out in Chapter 5, his work was dogged by an attempt to ground his analysis of power and resistance on the materiality of the body and its forces. While he could quite plausibly and without fear of contradiction speak of the materiality of the body, it was quite another matter to speak of the materiality of its forces. This is especially true when it came to the question of resistance to power. While it was one thing to speak of the body's forces in terms of energies which power sought to utilize, it was quite another to conceive of these forces as innately disparate and indeterminate forces of resistance in the face of a power which sought to regularize and normalize.

In many ways, Foucault had overcome this problem in his work by avoiding it and not giving a thorough-going discussion of how he could conceive of resistance. But with the Iranian Revolution, he put all such reticence aside. As I will show below he boldly put his vitalist conception of resistance to the fore. But as I will also show, this

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[1]Remarks on Marx, 30, 44, 45-6, 48, 67-8.

resolution of certain theoretical tensions in his work also constituted a regression. For in response to the Iranian Revolution he conceives of vital force not as something that is possessed by bodies, but as a suprahuman force that can account for actions and the motivations of the revolutionaries. This constituted a regression to the influence of Bataille and all the romantic pathos that that entailed; a regression insofar as he had abandoned his attempts to conceive of resistance in terms of the materiality of the body; a regression insofar as he seemed to see in the Revolution a struggle of global rather than local significance. His commitment to the Revolution also gave rise to a crisis in his thought about the subject. When the mullahs ceased to be the vehicles by which the vital spirits of the Iranians were freed and became instead brutal enforcers of Islamic orthodoxy, the Revolution seemed far less radical and liberating than he had imagined and his embrace of it seemed somewhat ridiculous. In the years after the Revolution Foucault would take up a more traditionally liberal position on the question of the subject and in his critique of power. Indeed, it was in the wake of the Iranian Revolution that he completely re-oriented what had been the trajectory of his work since 1961. Increasingly he would focus on what he described as a "technology of the self" practiced in classical Greece and Rome and in late antiquity as examples of an ethical practice that made it possible to

make a subject of one's self.

As I noted before, Foucault took more interest in the Revolution in Iran than in any other contemporary political event. In terms of direct discussion it merited more of his attention than any other contemporary event, either domestic (including May `68 and his work with the *Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons*) or foreign. It was the subject of fourteen separate articles (many as special correspondent in Teheran with the Italian daily Corriere della Sera), interviews and letters. Yet, from the very outset of his reflections, it is clear that his interest in it was more than simply scholarly or journalistic. Rather, he saw in this revolution the epitome of the form of resistance to power which had been at the centre of his most recent work. As such, Foucault's reflections on the Revolution took on the tone of ardent defence as much as distanced academic inquiry.

The Iranian Revolution was particularly fascinating to him because he saw at work in it not simply the political rage of a people, but also a force or "spirit" which was expressed through the people's actions, a force which unified them and motivated them. He was amazed, for instance, by what he took to be the "perfectly collective will" of the revolutionary crowds.

> Among the things that characterize this revolutionary event, there is the fact that it has brought out - and few people in history have had this - an absolutely collective will. The collective will is a political myth

> with which jurists and philosophers try to analyze or to justify institutions, etc. It's a theoretical tool: nobody has ever seen the `collective will' and, personally, I thought that the collective will was like God, like the soul, something one would never encounter. I don't know whether you agree with me, but we met in Tehran and throughout Iran, the collective will of a people.[2]

Indeed, he would return to this theme again and again.[3] What made the Revolution even more fascinating for Foucault was that this collective will had been achieved despite the absence of the class conflicts that in the West were deemed to be essential to revolutionary situations and without "the presence of a vanguard, class, party, or political ideology."[4] This is not to say that he was blind to the influence of Shia Islam and its clerics. Indeed, he recognized that religion was central to the Revolution. Yet, for Foucault, Islam simply did not function as an ideology and the mullahs did not function as revolutionary vanguards. Rather, Islam "has been the vocabulary, the ceremonial, the timeless drama into which one could fit the historical drama of a people

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[2]Michel Foucault, "Iran: The Spirit of a World Without Spirit," in Politics, Philosophy, Culture, 215.

[3]See also, *ibid.*, 212, 222; Michel Foucault, "Il mitico capo della rivolta nell'Iran," Correrie della Sera, no. 279 (November 26, 1978): 2; Michel Foucault, "Una rivolta con le mani nuda," Corriere della Sera, no. 261 (November 5, 1978): 1.

[4]"Iran: The Spirit of a World Without Spirit," 212-213. Once again, the absence of class tensions and class politics seems to be more a figment of Foucault's imagination than anything else.

that pitted its very existence against that of its sovereign."[5]

> All this year [Foucault reported], the revolt has traversed Iran, fed by celebrations and commemorations, by rites and prayers.... And each day in mosques, the mullahs speak furiously against the Shah, the Americans, the West and its materialism, calling everyone to the struggle, in the name of the Koran and of Islam, against the whole of the present regime.[6]

But, Foucault was quick to point out, "The mullahs are absolutely not 'revolutionary,' not even in the popular sense of the term." What they preach is not an ideology, "It is much more a simple vocabulary through which is transmitted aspirations which have not found other words."[7] For Foucault, even Khomeini was, in many ways, secondary to the Revolutionary movement in Iran: he "is not there," he "says nothing," he "is not a political man." "Khomeini is the focal point of a collective will"[8] which cannot be put into words or political programmes.

Yet the rites and vocabulary of Islam had an important function in the revolution:

> There was in these demonstrations a link between collective action, religious ritual, and an expression of pub-

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[5]*Ibid.*, 214.

[6]Michel Foucault, "Teheran: la fede contro lo Scià," Corriere della Sera, no. 237 (October 8, 1978): 11.

[7]*Ibid.* When Foucault writes here of sermons indirectly transmitting "aspirations which have not found other words," he seems to echo Madness and Civilization with its suggestion of a "language of delirium," common to the mad and artists, which is rendered only crudely or obliquely in the work of art.

[8]"Il mitico capo della rivolta nell'Iran," 2.

> lic right. It's rather like in Greek tragedy where the collective ceremony and reenactment of the principles of right go hand in hand. In the streets of Teheran there was an act, a political juridical act, carried out collectively within religious rituals - an act of deposing the sovereign.[9]

Yet, for Foucault, Islam played a more significant role for Iranians in providing them with a vehicle to alter their subjectivity:

> religion for them was like the promise and guarantee of finding something that would radically change their subjectivity. Shi'ism is precisely a form of Islam that, with its teaching and esoteric content, distinguishes between what is mere external obedience to the code and what is the profound spiritual life; when I say that they were looking to Islam for a change in their subjectivity, this is quite compatible with the fact that traditional Islamic practice was already there and already gave them their identity; in this way they had of living the Islamic religion as a revolutionary force there was something other than the desire to obey the law more faithfully, there was the desire to renew their existence by going back to a spiritual experience that they thought they could find with Shi'ite Islam itself.[10]

In a similar vein, Foucault argued elsewhere that what is at stake in the Iranian Revolution and what one ought to understand by the term "Islamic government," is not obedience to a code, but "the principle of a political creation,"[11] which is to say, the continuous and active creation of a political order and individual existences.

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[9]"Iran: Spirit of a World Without Spirit," 216.

[10]*Ibid.*, 217-18.

[11]Michel Foucault, "A quoi rêvent les Iraniens?" Le nouvel Observateur 726 (October 9-16, 1978): 49.

It is important to note, once again, in Foucault's characterization of the role of religion in the process of Iranians altering their subjectivity that it did not function as a code according to which their lives ought to be lived. Rather, through its rites and vocabulary Iranians gained access to internal resources that had long remained dormant. Islam rekindled a "form of life immobilized for a millennium."[12] Once this life was mobilized, however, the revolution ran according to "the demands of the internal world."[13] What Foucault viewed as the specifically internal and vital nature of this revolution became the object of what can only be described as gross romanticization on his part. "There was," he argued, "literally a light that lit up in all of them and which bathed all of them at the same time."[14] This inner light which linked and illumined all Iranians, allowed the people to forego the necessity of coordinating their actions on the basis of political calculations and alliances. Foucault portrayed the revolutionary impulse as an "irreducible force" which overtook the people comparable in nature to that which possessed Savonarola of Florence, the Anabaptists of Münster, the Presbyterians in the time of Cromwell.[15] For Foucault it was not so much that

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[12]"Il mitico capo...," 2.

[13]*Ibid.*

[14]"Iran: The Spirit of a World Without Spirit," 219.

[15]"Teheran: la fede contro lo Scià," 11.

a people had made a revolution, but an autonomous and revolutionary force had expressed itself through them. "A phenomenon," he argued, "has traversed the entire people...."[16]

The transformation of subjectivity that this release of force entailed was simply a rejection of "a world hegemony." This revolution was "perhaps the first great insurrection against the world system, the most insane and most modern form of revolt."[17] While the revolution overthrew the regime of the Shah and the influence of the West, Foucault saw in it "a still more radical rejection: the rejection by a people, not only of foreigners, but of everything that had constituted, for years, for centuries, its political destiny."[18] "In the end," he argued,

> there is no explanation for the man who revolts. His action is necessarily a tearing that breaks the thread of history and its long chains of reasons so that a man can genuinely give preference to the risk of death over the certainty of having to obey.[19]

In throwing off the dictates of history and reason, however, Iranians, as noted above, did not merely accept a new religious code according to whose dictates they would renew their subjectivity. Rather, the revolution created an open-

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[16]"Iran: Spirit of a World Without Spirit," 219.

[17]"Il mitico capo...," 2.

[18]"Iran: The Spirit of a World Without Spirit," 215.

[19]Michel Foucault, "Is it Useless to Revolt?," trans. James Bernauer, Philosophy and Social Criticism, 8 (Spring, 1981): 5.

ing for the endless reconstruction of subjectivity. In the wake of this revolution Foucault could reflect that "it is through revolt that subjectivity (not that of great men but that of whomever) introduces itself into history and gives it the breath of life." [20]

Foucault would later argue that the importance of revolt for the question of subjectivity (and of this revolution in particular) and that thing which most profoundly contested the demands of history and reason, was the willingness of men to "risk death over the certainty of having to obey." This willingness he had witnessed again and again in Iran. After the massacres of protesters by government troops in September 1978, "there was an absence of fear and an intensity of courage, or rather, the intensity that people were capable of when danger, though still not removed, had already been transcended."[21] He had met on several occasions young Iranians almost eager to martyr themselves to the cause of the revolution, an eagerness that, he recognized, was not unrelated to the religious overtones of the revolution.[22] But for Foucault the significance of this willingness to meet death, while it was clearly related to religion, was more profoundly related to that irreducible moment when "life will no longer barter

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[20] *Ibid.*, 8.

[21] "Iran: The Spirit of a World Without Spirit," 220.

[22] See "Teheran: la fede contro lo Sciâ."

itself"[23] by submitting to coercion and violence. At a certain point, life will choose the risk of death over the certainty of truth, reason, and history.

> Since the man who revolts is, thus, 'outside of history' as well as in it, and since life and death are at stake, we can understand why revolts have easily been able to find their expression and their mode of performance in religious themes: the promise of the beyond, the return of time, the waiting for the saviour of the empire of the last days, the indisputable reign of good. When the particular religion has permitted, these themes have furnished throughout the centuries not an ideological cloak but the very way to live revolts.[24]

The foregoing passage highlights what was most striking for Foucault about the Iranian Revolution. As in modern power as a whole what was at stake in this revolution was living beings. Under the Shah's regime, people's existences were bound by the chains of reason and history. But the Revolution presented the Iranian people with the opportunity to alter their existences, to choose a new way of living. Yet, as Foucault's rhetoric makes plain, it is not simply a matter of individuals as thinking beings choosing new ways of life. Again and again he hearkens back to the idea that it is life itself, the existence of living beings, that is asserting itself in the Revolution. The people are united, he argues, not by a political programme or an ideology or even a religion, but by a collective will. What is expressed in the feverish discourse of the mullahs

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[23]"Is it Useless to Revolt?," 5.

[24]*Ibid.*, 6.

is not revolutionary dogma, but aspirations which are not adequately represented by the mullahs' words or any others. Shi'a Islam represents not a code which demands obedience, but the opportunity to renew existences by living the spiritual experience of Islam. What Islam called forth was not the people's anger, but a long immobilized form of life. And what motivated the individual revolutionary to face the Shah's armed forces was not any political commitment, but rather the life within him which refused any longer to compromise itself with coercion and violence.

In his assessment of the Iranian Revolution Foucault repeatedly emphasizes that for him the Revolution is not a political revolution, but a vital revolution. Which is to say, the agency behind the revolution was not that of the Iranian people as individual, rational, meaning-giving subjects, but it was the life within in them, it was Iranians as living beings.

In the Iranian Revolution, then, Foucault found a practical instance of the type of resistance to power that he had previously only conceived in abstract form. To use the words of Canguilhem, it seemed that Iranians sought to resist power through the normative activity characteristic of life.

But to say that Foucault found a practical instance of vitalist resistance in Iran is perhaps to say too much. For it seems at best that Foucault thought he found such an

instance. What is clear from all available literature on this Revolution is that Foucault completely misperceived that political situation in Iran at the time and completely misrepresented the nature of the Revolution. To put it bluntly, Foucault cravenly romanticized the event. Nothing signifies Foucault's abandonment of at least the attempt at an analysis of the bodily investiture of power and resistance in the context of the Revolution more than the seeming resurgence of Bataille's influence in his analysis of it.

Throughout the 1930s, Bataille had attempted to sketch out a theory of vital revolution. He envisioned religious or mythic rites giving rise to a vital release that would sweep away the bourgeois order and the dictates of reason and history. For Bataille the "idea" "brutalizes all men and causes them to be docile." Yet he saw a hope of redemption in the "sudden cataclysms, great manifestations of madness, riots, enormous revolutionary slaughters...";[25] in other words, in great, destructive moments of vital excess. Throughout the 1930s he sought to discover ways in which to spark such a release, a project which gave rise to the Acéphale group and to the College of Sociology. The object of the College was "the development of an understanding of the vital elements of society" and the foundation of a community bound to the "virulent character" of these ele-

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[25]"The Lugubrious Game," 27.

ments.[26] College members hoped to find the catalyst by which these virulent and vital elements of society might be released and sweep away a reason which enslaved humanity.

As Bataille would argue in "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" myth would serve this purpose.

> *Myth* remains at the disposal of one who cannot be satisfied by art, science, or politics.... Myth alone enters the bodies of those it binds and it expects from them the same receptiveness. It is the precipitance of every dance; it takes existence "to its boiling point": it communicates to it the tragic emotion that makes its sacred intimacy accessible. For myth is not only the divine figure of destiny and the world where this figure moves; it cannot be separated from the community to which it belongs and which ritually assumes its dominion. It would be fiction if the *accord* that a *people* manifests in the agitation of festivals did not make it a vital human reality. Myth is perhaps fable, but this fable is placed in opposition to fiction if one looks at the people who dance it, who act it, and for whom it is living *truth*.[27]

The *Acéphale* group - a secret society - hoped to facilitate the rebirth of myth and the cataclysmic social results that Bataille believed would ensue. It is important to note, however, that for Bataille the role of myth was not to lay out a programme for action nor sketch out a vision of a new society to be achieved through revolutionary activity (the *Acéphale* group never considered itself a vanguard party - *acéphale* means "headless" - and did not engage in writing a programme). Rather, myth merely served as a vehicle to loose

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[26]Hollier, The College of Sociology, 5.

[27]Georges Bataille, "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," The College of Sociology, 232.

a "violent dynamism" that would "transform the world."[28] All that was hoped in concrete terms was that men would be restored to their virility, which is to say, to be able to live not merely by being useful.

Many of these themes were evident in Foucault's reflection on the revolution in Iran. For Foucault, religion played the same role in the Iranian Revolution that Bataille hoped myth would play in his sacred revolution: it was not so much a code to which Iranians were to adhere as it was a vocabulary and a set of rituals through which Iranians expressed their desire to change their existence. For him religious ritual in the Iranian Revolution formed the basis of a popular accord that was lived as a vital reality. As with the revolution Bataille hoped to foment, for Foucault the Iranian Revolution was primarily vital in character. People were carried away by a force, by a light that lit up in all Iranians.

One can also find another important parallel between Foucault's analyses of the Iranian Revolution and Bataille's work, "The Practice of Joy Before Death."[29] For Bataille as for Foucault, it is in risking death that one achieves the most profound liberty from servitude. While in normal existence we act according to rational calculations and self-

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[28]*Ibid.*, 233.

[29]The title of an article by Bataille that orignally appeared in Acéphale 5 (June 1939). Reproduced in English translation in Stoekl (Ed.) Visions of Excess, 235-239.

interest, before death we experience a sense of vertigo because these limits of reason and the self become suddenly redundant. It is at this point, Bataille argues, that life surges within us and we find an "unhoped-for strength" to confront death, a strength that derives from the fact that, having confronted death, we no longer have a stake in the limits of reason or the self. We are suddenly more free than ever before.[30] In Foucault's own terms, the man who revolts is the one who gives "preference to the risk of death over the certainty of having to obey."[31]

Given Foucault's familiarity with the work of Bataille, the similarities in their conception of revolution are certainly more than coincidental. It is worth noting as well that, at the end of 1978, Foucault, in a series of interviews with Duccio Trombadori, for the first time in almost a decade and a half referred to the important influence Bataille had had on his thought.[32]

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[30]Georges Bataille, "The Practice of Joy Before Death," in Stoekl ed., 236.

[31]"Is it Useless to Revolt," 5.

[32]Remarks on Marx, 30, 45-6, 49, 67-8. An important portion of Foucault's works that has been left to scholars is the many interviews he gave. In them, he often cites those thinkers who he considers to have been important in the development of his work. Of particular interest, is the fact that this list of influential precursors changes with the tenor of Foucault's own inquiries. Thus it was that from 1966 to 1978 he did not mention Bataille's name in this regard. Even in the *présentation* to the first volume of Bataille's collected works in 1970, he would only go so far as to say that "We owe to Bataille a great deal for the moment we are now at...." (Michel Foucault, Présentation to Georges Bataille, Oeuvres Complètes I: Premiers Ecrits, 1922-1940. (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 5).

Perhaps this return to Bataille occasioned by the Iranian Revolution ought not to come as a surprise. With the vitalist conception of subjectivity Foucault had sought to make the materiality of the body the ground of the possibility of resistance to power without at the same time romanticizing vital impulses. Nonetheless, insofar as he could criticize a power that sought to discipline these vital impulses as being unjustly exercised or illegitimate, he invested the body and its forces with a notion of natural freedom. With the Iranian revolution, then, Foucault's attempts to base his analyses of power and resistance on the materiality of the body and its forces without at the same time idealizing them failed. One cannot help but conclude that for Foucault the Iranian Revolution was a tragic revolution insofar as it pitted, in his eyes, Dionysiac forces that possessed the Iranian people against the Apollonian culture of the West.

Foucault's response to the Iranian Revolution parallels, in many ways, his romanticization of the Dionysiac characteristic of his work in the early 1960s. This romanticization of a force that could allegedly account for the Revolution became all the more apparent when the Revolution descended into increasing violence. As the new Islamic government took retribution against supporters of the former regime, Foucault's enthusiasm for it waned. For a

time he sought to make the best of a bad situation by claiming that the violence was somehow understandable if not defensible.[33] Yet insofar as the Iranian Revolution did not turn out to be so far removed from traditional revolutions, insofar as it resorted to the most brutal uses of power once control of the state apparatus had been secured, all this constituted a profound disappointment for Foucault. This disappointment is perhaps best captured by Edward Said:

> He had been one of the first Westerners to look into what he called the `spiritual politics' of the Shi'ite opposition to the Shah. He discovered in it just that entirely collective, involuntary excessiveness which could not be herded under conventional rubrics like class contradictions or economic oppression. The ferociously murmuring and protracted energy he discerned in the Iranian revolution attracted him to it for a while, until he saw that its victory had brought about a regime of exceptionally retrograde cruelty. It was as if for the first time Foucault's theories of impersonal, authorless activity had been visibly realized and he recoiled with understandable disillusion.[34]

In the months and years that followed Foucault began to distance himself not only from the position he had taken during the Revolution itself, but also from the vitalist

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[33]In May 1979, Foucault argued that the violence following upon the Ayatollah Khomeini's injunction to "Let Iran bleed so that the revolution may be strong" in no way condemned the "ecstasy" of the early days of the protests against the Shah. There "is no reason," he continued, "to say that one's opinion is changing when one is against the punishments today, when one was against the torture of the Savak yesterday." "Is it useless to revolt?", 5, 8. See also his "Lettre ouverte à Mehdi Barzagan," Le Nouvel Observateur (April 14, 1979): 46.

[34]Edward Said, "Michel Foucault, 1926-1984," in After Foucault: Humanistic Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges, ed. Jonathon Arac (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 11.

conception of subjectivity. In politics he began to move in the direction of a traditional liberal humanism. This shift in tack was apparent even in his final reflections on the Iranian Revolution, where he argued that part of his political "ethic" was "to be intransigeant when power offends against the universal." "Against power," he continued, "it is always necessary to oppose unbreakable law and unabridgeable rights."[35] This apparent acceptance of the notion of a set of universal values in the name of which it was worth resisting power implies a move toward a more traditional liberal political ethic, although he never came to accept a liberal humanist conception of the subject. His remarks in an interview from January 20, 1984, are also indicative of his new political stance. In response to the interviewer paraphrasing Foucault as saying that "the fundamental criteria" of a new ethics would be "a question of playing [games of power] with the minimum of domination," he responded,

> I think that in fact there is the point of articulation of the ethical preoccupation and the political struggle for the respect of rights, of the critical reflection against the abusive techniques of government and of the ethical research which allows individual liberty to be founded.[36]

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[35]"Is it Useless to Revolt?," 9, 8.

[36]Michel Foucault, "The Ethic of the Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," in The Final Foucault, eds. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988), 19.

This concern for individual liberty also indicates a more humanistic and liberal political outlook than had previously been the case.

This shift did not mean a wholesale rejection of his earlier political position. After the Iranian Revolution he still resisted the temptation to struggle in the name of a specific vision of a new society. Rather, he described his politics as a "hyper- and pessimistic activism."[37] And, as before, Foucault maintained his involvement in political struggles for such causes as the Vietnamese boat people or for the Solidarity movement in Poland. Yet there was a noticeable restraint in his thought as regards the Dionysiac and the vital and the development of a concern for the liberty of the individual.

There was also a clearly visible shift in the emphasis of his academic work after Iran. In terms of periodization, Foucault turned his attention to the ancient Greeks and Romans and the early Christians, historical periods that previously found no place in his work. But, more significantly, he became much more a philosopher of the subject rather than of power and, in fact, focussed on this historical period because it was a time, he argued, in which power and subjectivity were not contiguous. In 1983 he argued

> I don't think one can find any normalization in, for instance, the Stoic ethics. The reason is, I think, that

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[37]Dreyfus and Rabinow, 232.

> the principal aim, the principal target of this kind of ethics was an aesthetic one. First, this kind of ethics was only a problem of personal choice. Second, it was reserved for a few people in the population; it was not a question of giving a pattern of behaviour for everybody. It was a personal choice for a small elite. The reason for making this choice was the will to live a beautiful life, and to leave to others memories of a beautiful existence. I don't think the we can say that this kind of ethics was an attempt to normalize the population.[38]

Foucault described the subject of his inquiry "the technology of the self," what the Greeks called *epimeleia heautou*, "taking care of one's self," that also has the meaning of "working on" one's self.[39] What distinguished this antique taking care of one's self from modern technologies of the self, he argued, was that in antiquity

> this work on the self with its attendant austerity is not imposed on the individual by means of civil law or religious obligation, but is a choice about existence made by the individual. People decide for themselves whether or not to take care of themselves.... It was a question of making one's life into an object for a sort of knowledge, for a *techne* - for an art.[40]

Yet in Foucault's later work it is clear that the lesson of the ancients' technologies of the self were not without significance for our own time and in our own struggles. The "political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days," he argued,

> is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us

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[38]Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 230.

[39]*Ibid.*, 243.

[40]*Ibid*, 244-45.

> both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.[41]

One can see in this many parallels with his earlier writings on the relations between the individual and power - a rejection of the traditional forms of political struggle conceived of as repression, a rejection of traditional notions of individuality. Yet gone from this notion of the technology of the self is the conception, that had repeatedly manifested itself in Foucault's work over two decades, of an excessive Dionysiac or vital force that could contest power. For Foucault, the technology of the self is a considered practice undertaken by subjects aware of themselves as independent subjects:

> The problem is not of trying to resolve [relations of power] in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication, but to give one's self the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the *ethos*, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination.[42]

If in the technology of the self the individual can, for Foucault, still break with the system of power it is because of the practices undertaken by the individual in a self-conscious way, not because of any un-self-conscious vital or Dionysiac characteristic of the individual.

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[41]Michel Foucault, "Why Study Power: The Question of the Subject," in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 216.

[42]"The Ethic of the Care for the Self...," 18.

Foucault's response to the Revolution in Iran revealed that he had not been able to refrain from attributing to the body and its forces a metaphysical value. As such, this chapter of his work represents a regression, the collapse of the nominalism with which he claimed to approach the study of power. As a politically engaged intellectual this collapse and regression is hardly surprising. Being a politically engaged intellectual and having grounded the possibility of resistance in the vital forces proper to living beings, he could hardly fail to identify these forces with freedom itself.

Conclusion

What I have sought to do in this thesis is to cast light upon Michel Foucault's conception of the subject of resistance. While scholars have been more than attentive to Foucault as a philosopher of power, very little has been written on his status as a philosopher of resistance. This work seeks to address this imbalance.

Foucault's philosophy of resistance is clearly not front and centre in his work. His central concern, from the early 1960s onward, was to show that subjects are constituted by power. Indeed, as I pointed out above, his conception of power seemed so broad as to exclude virtually any form of subjectivity save that which was constituted by power.

But if one looks closely one can see that, almost as an afterthought, he does lay the groundwork for the possibility of resistance to power. While his conception of the subject of resistance changed somewhat over the period under consideration here, its contours also retained a certain basic similarity. From Madness and Civilization up until the first volume of The History of Sexuality it seems that

insofar as he could conceive of resistance, Foucault predicated it upon what he perceived to be vital forces which traversed the body.

As I have shown, in his earlier works, Foucault identified these forces with a Dionysiac aspect of human being. Just as Nietzsche denounced those benighted souls who could not recognize the divinity in those afflicted with St. Vitus's dance, so Foucault, in Madness and Civilization, argues that modern rational society could not recognize the sovereignty of the mad and sought instead to put those primitive forces which constituted this sovereignty within the straight jacket of the rational, individual consciousness. Like Nietzsche, Foucault laments the suppression of this sovereign mode of being at the hands of a triumphant reason.

While there is certainly much in Madness and Civilization of the Nietzschean juxtaposition of the Dionysiac and the Apollonian - enough that I've called Foucault's conception of the subject of resistance the Dionysiac subject - I've argued that it was the work of Georges Bataille that was most influential in his work at this time. His many appeals to the work of Bataille, especially his homage to him in "A Preface to Transgression," give an indication of this influence. Yet as I've also shown, Foucault quite consciously adopted Bataille's philosophical project: to show that a vital power within us, evident in the experiences of

artistic creation, madness, and sexuality, holds out the possibility of loosing the bounds of the rational, meaning-giving subject that limits the horizons of our possible modes of being. For Bataille and for Foucault, the rational subject, Apollonian in character, represented a positive unfreedom, and an inner, vital force, Dionysiac in character, was its antithesis.

In the years between the publication of The Order of Things and The Archaeology of Knowledge he seemed to discount the possibility of a subject of resistance. Yet his concern for such a subject was rekindled after May '68, in those years when he sought to articulate a radically new conception of power. His new conception of resistance was determined by his conception of a power which concerned itself with individuals as living beings. Power, he argued, seeks to discipline the body and its forces. It was only natural, then, that resistance to power should occur at the very point where power is effective. Thus, what emerges at this time, is what I have called a vitalist subject, the subject who resists power insofar as he is a living being.

In elucidating the concept of the vitalist subject Foucault, it seems, believed that he was grounding his concept of resistance on the materiality of "the body and its forces." Yet, as I have shown, this concept of resistance relied primarily on his highly speculative analysis of the nature of the body's forces, rather than the body itself.

Resistance, he argued, was possible because of the forces which traverse the body, the energy it discharges, what is most vital in it. These forces, he argued, contest power precisely because they introduce an element of instability and mobility into the force relations that engender states of power and whose movement power seeks to arrest.

As I have argued above, such a characterization of the body's forces is almost identical to Georges Canguilhem's vitalist philosophy. For him, life ceaselessly seeks new forms. Life is, he argued, endless mobility, endless experiment, endless "error." Life always seeks to transcend the normal relations that obtain between the living being and its environment. For Canguilhem and for Foucault life is a force which introduces irregularity and abnormality into an environment which seeks to regulate and to normalize.

For Foucault, then, from Madness and Civilization through to the first volume of The History of Sexuality, it is the subject as a living being that holds out the possibility of resistance. However problematic such a conception of the subject of resistance is, it begins to lay the groundwork for a posthumous response to his liberal critics. What this thesis has shown is that Foucault does not respond to power by relying on a hidden liberal humanist normative (although, admittedly, he does use key "liberal" phrases in his denunciation of power) and that he does give an accounting of a form of subjectivity that is not a product of

power. This thesis has shown that Foucault's work does hold out the possibility of resistance to power in a truly original fashion.

Indeed, not only have I shown that Foucault can respond to his liberal critics, I would argue that his work also lays down a profound challenge to them. For the question, "What is it to live?", is at the root of his work on power and one that has not been taken up by liberals or Marxists. Liberals conceive of the individual primarily as a reasonable being and their critique aims to create those conditions in which her rational faculties can be fully developed. Marxists conceive of the individual primarily as a labouring being and their critique aims to create those conditions in which the individual is no longer alienated from the products of his labour. But Foucault conceives of the individual primarily as a living being and his critique aimed to dismantle the disciplinary barriers which held life in check.

This line of analysis and critique was fraught with difficulties, not the least of which, as we saw in the case of Iran, was Foucault's inclination to romanticize life by portraying it as a force which, like Dionysos, was the antithesis of a rational spirit that dominated western society. Despite his failings in this regard, Foucault's work will remain apposite. For, in effectively contextualizing subjectivity, he brings us back to a more primary con-

sideration of the relation of life and freedom.

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