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OCTOBER

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John Rajchman — *Foucault, or the Ends of Modernism*

Jean-Marie Alliume — *The Rivière Beast, or the Unfinished Trial of the Creature Who Tortured Birds and Frogs*

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Marc Chénetier — *Gods, Princes, and Scribes*

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Cover photo: Beth and Scott B. The Offenders. *1979.*

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F. T. MARINETTI published over twenty volumes of poetic works in both Italian and French between 1897 and 1944. The six poems translated here by RICHARD PIOLI represent a sampling of the practices of the Italian avant-garde during the first quarter of the twentieth century.

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Interview with Beth and Scott B

SCOTT MacDONALD

G-Man

MacDonald: How did your work together begin?

Beth B: We . . . fell . . . in . . . love. It's really true!

I had done a short film in super-8, but it was just an extension of other things I was working on. I worked a lot with video in Germany and did drawings and some sculpture.

Scott B: I'd been involved primarily in sculpture and, then, desiring to get into something that was more public and less object-oriented, I moved into architecture. I designed and built a house in Arizona on commission.

Beth B: We'd met before that, but were not collaborating. We knew each other for about a year while we worked on separate projects . . .

Scott B: And then we started thinking in terms of collaboration as a way of breaking down the individual star quality of most art endeavors. We did a performance piece together which was practically a ritualized marriage ceremony, although we didn't realize it at the time.

Beth B: We were very romantic . . . then [laughter].

Scott B: Both of us were moving toward a medium that wouldn't be something done in a strict art-world context. Film was the obvious thing. I'd always wanted to work with film.

Beth B: Also, film was an economical medium to use—much more so than video for us. Video equipment is difficult to get hold of. To make film all we did was pick up this silent little super-8 box Kodak camera. We'd had no training or schooling at all with fiim, but we had ideas that we felt could be directed through film to larger audiences, which was a very large part of what we wanted.

Scott B: To a certain extent our earlier films were a comment on our backgrounds in art.

MacDonald: You mean *G-man*?

Scott B: G-Man in particular was trying to break away from a heavy concern with form and style and break into something that had a real gutsy, political, content-oriented thrust that at that time we didn't think art was able to hold. Maybe in the last year or two that's becoming less true.

Beth B: There are more artists now who are working with information and trying to get messages across to people. We approached *G-Man* with the idea of putting out a lot of information. We did research on different aspects of terrorism. We tried to shape that information into a narrative. Also, we tried to combine documentary, narrative, and experimental film. We approached *G-Man* trying to bridge the gap between those three aspects of film.

MacDonald: Did you divide the labor or did you presume that both of you would work on everything?

Scott B: We both did everything. Recently we've begun to be more specialized. We've found the simplest way is to decide ahead of the shoot who's going to do what; but still, in terms of concept, writing, directing, and shooting, we've got an equal division of labor.

Beth B: With *G-Man* there might be a subject I was especially interested in, or one that Scott was especially interested in, and we would work independently on those. We collaborated on other material all the way through.

MacDonald: I know of at least three versions of *G-Man*. J. Hoberman's piece in *The Village Voice* [May 21, 1979] describes a seventy-minute version. The version I studied was thirty-seven minutes long. The version you showed at Utica College was shorter still. I presume the shortest version is the one that you now show.

Scott and Beth B: Yeah.

Scott B: We came into *G-Man* with an extremely visual sense of the film . . .

Beth B: A very broad idea of what we wanted to get across . . .

Scott B: And we found after we had shot it and completed it that it didn't hold together in a linear sense. Also, in terms of pacing, we had all this material that

was interesting, but it didn't build the way we wanted, so we started to pull things out and reshuffle the order so it would move properly.

Beth B: We ended up taking out a lot of narrative material that had to do with the life of the character Max Karl, the commanding officer of the Arson Explosive Squad—scenes with him and his family. After we had shown *G-Man* awhile, we felt that all we really needed to show to get our point across was him in his two positions: as commanding officer of the Arson Explosive Squad and as a participant in a dominance session in a whorehouse.

Scott B: We also eliminated several semisymbolic scenes of terrorism.

Beth B: We were trying to give different viewpoints on terrorism beyond what people come in contact with, like the information they get from television, the way they see police dealing with crime or terrorism, whatever.

MacDonald: Some of the reactions to *G-Man*—and *Black Box,* too—suggest that you have a love affair with violence. After looking at the film, I feel that's pretty silly, but I've presumed that one thing you're trying to suggest is that the various things that are going on in that film—the arson investigation, the terrorism, the prostitution—are integrally related in a single system.

Beth B: Sure.

Scott B: I think most of the feelings about the film's violence came out of people's perception of the new wave music scene and social atmosphere. People connected us with that.

Beth B: Also, at the time that *G-Man* was made, low-budget super-8 films weren't coming out. *G-Man* was a very distinct break from what was going on in independent film, and we did not approach it in a conventional way. Instead of showing the film in controlled situations where we'd try to hustle some institution, our idea was to get the film out to as many people as we could. I think the approach that we were taking was very different. There was a whole new crop of artists, filmmakers, musicians coming up at the time, and people had a certain fear of that. When something new is happening and there's a new surge of energy, people get confused about how to categorize it or how to understand it, and they try to stick certain connotations or stereotypes on it.

Scott B: One thing that we were trying to get at was the idea that essentially control *is* violence. Whether it's enforced with violence or with the threat of violence, that's the nature of power. We were using this arson and explosive inspector to try to show the contradictions of a structure that gives someone that

kind of power. Essentially people can't deal with all that power all the time. Some men who go to a whorehouse for dominance sessions are people who during their everyday lives have an immense amount of control. They go in wanting release, wanting to give that control to someone who will degrade them as they've been able to degrade other people during the course of their jobs. That applies to what we were perceiving about terrorist activities at the time: in a sense a terrorist takes the whip out and whips society for having too much control.

Beth B: I worked at a whorehouse as a receptionist, and I was really shocked to see the number of men who came in for dominance sessions. I had always thought that it was a rarity, a specialty thing; but actually about fifty percent of the men were coming in to be submissive. We thought that was interesting and important to get across to people. Also, a lot of the people who came in were very respectable people—judges, politicians, executives.

MacDonald: The sections on Max Karl are obviously based on the videotape *Inspector Howe.* Was *Inspector Howe* made as research for this film?

Scott B: Well, we used it for that, but we also showed it on cable television as part of a weekly news program, *All Color News.*

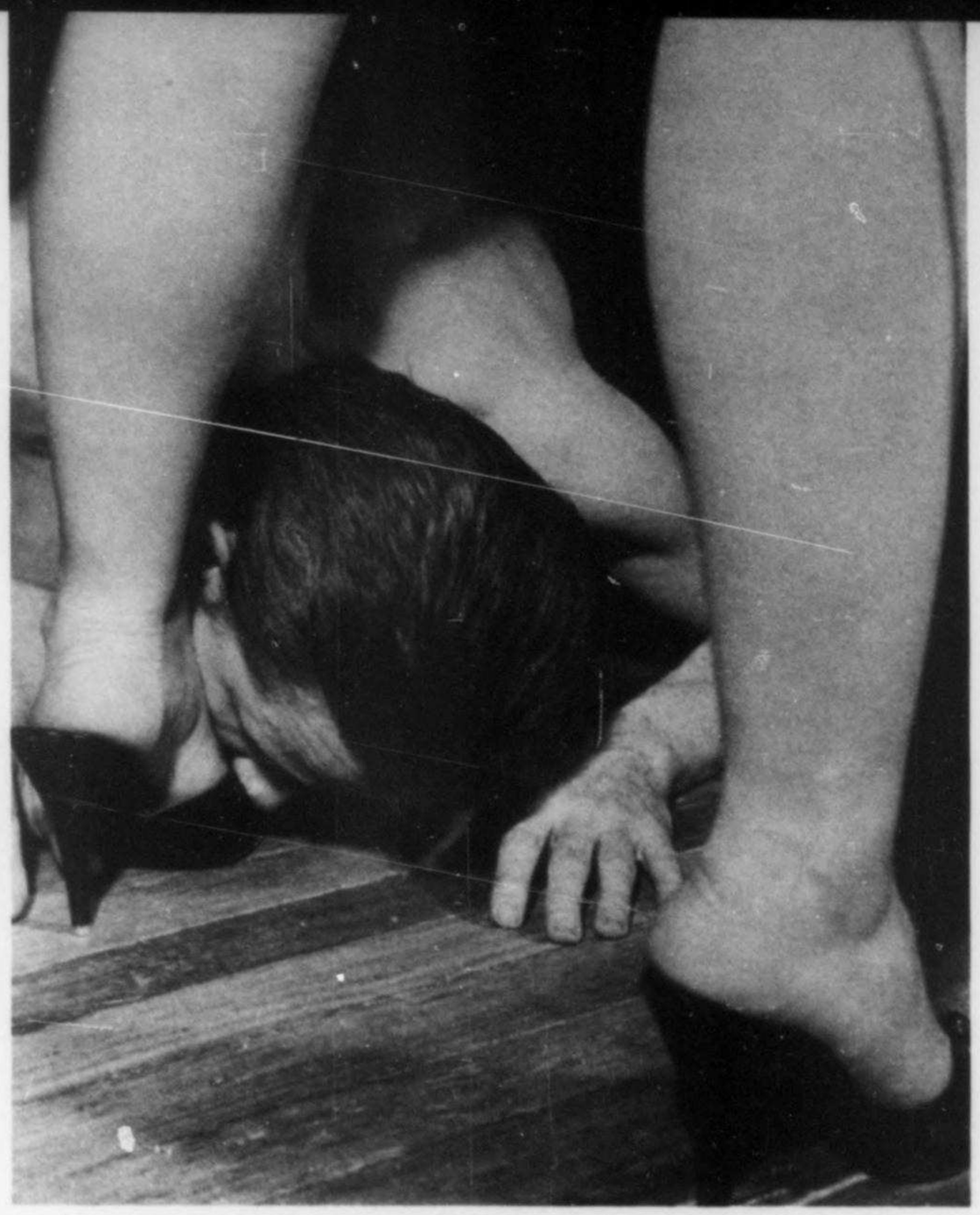
Beth B: The group of people we were collaborating with on *All Color News* was Collaborative Projects, who put together the Times Square Show and *X Magazine. Inspector Howe* was taped three years ago. We thought it would be a way for us to gain some insight into what we were dealing with.

MacDonald: One of the things that the film is about is the way in which financial success and violence feed on each other. All these aspects of society that are normally thought to be distinctive are really interlocked, part of the same thing. I got the feeling that you were using downtown New York as the location in part because it's a place where all these activities and forces exist side by side.

Beth B: The relationship is more specific than that. This man's job is dependent upon a continuation of terrorism. Without terrorism the commanding officer of the Arson Explosive Squad would not have a job. That dependency is very interesting.

MacDonald: It's one of a series of interdependencies. Without terrorism he wouldn't exist; but without money terrorism wouldn't exist.

Beth B: And without the control of the government, terrorists wouldn't exist . . .



Beth and Scott B. G-Man. *1978.*

MacDonald: And without money there wouldn't be prostitution.

Beth B: We did a scene on Wall Street. We only have the sound of it, which is at the end of the film where the guy yells "The U.S. has ten percent of the world's population and consumes sixty percent of the world's wealth. . . ."

MacDonald: When I was studying the film, the inextricability of all these different forces became more and more obvious. Even in the credits there are shots where, for example, a graph of the economic breakdown of some business is lying on top of a photo of a policeman standing over a corpse. During the scene that starts on the fire escape, we learn that the woman's book is selling well at Fiorucci's and that she's also a terrorist.

Scott B: The media vision of who would go out and bomb something is different from what we've been able to gather. Most people who are involved in terrorist activities come from very middle-class backgrounds and are educated. They are able to set up a totally separate life and be completely straight and successful at it, while on the sly, they're involved in sabotage. In the most brutal way, they're living a schizophrenia.

Beth B: But most people live schizophrenic lives on some level. Our films deal with the contradictions within people's lives and within society. One thing is

publicly professed, but privately something else is happening. We're interested in the hypocrisy that exists and why it exists, and whether it's conscious or not, and whether it's profitable to certain people. I think a lot of the reason it does exist is because of the pressures that are put on people publicly.

MacDonald: That the lust in Jimmy Carter's heart became a big issue is an example. That we could accept for a second the idea that people *don't* lust is incredible.

Beth B: As we cut *G-Man,* it came to fit into three very distinct segments with three separate climaxes.

Scott B: The first starts on the balcony and then moves to the airport, where we see the explosions. The next segment begins with the pan, which leads into the whorehouse scene. The interview is the third segment.

MacDonald: You mentioned awhile ago that you saw *G-Man* as a combination of documentary, narrative, and experimental film. One of the things that nobody seems to have noticed—or nobody that I've read has noticed—is that *G-Man* is full of formal, self-reflexive techniques. The long pan across downtown Manhattan has a formal impact that's similar in a general sense to the zoom in *Wavelength.* The first time I saw that pan, it seemed impossibly long.

Scott B: It's 180 degrees. Visually, it encompasses nearly the whole of Karl's world: the city . . .

Beth B: A billboard that says "Security right around the corner" . . .

Scott B: The harbor, the Statue of Liberty, the airport. And this world contrasts with the music "G-Man" . . .

Beth B: With the childhood Dick Tracy fantasy of a government man.

MacDonald: Almost every scene has a formal component that distances the content. As a result, I concluded that your real attitude about this film is one that's very detached from either of the sides portrayed.

Were you heavy filmgoers before you began making films?

Scott B: No.

Beth B: I hardly ever went to films.

Scott B: I always watched late movies on TV.

MacDonald: Had you seen much experimental film?

Scott B: Not much.

Beth B: Hated it!

Scott B: We still haven't seen *Wavelength.*

Beth B: We saw one of Snow's.

MacDonald: Which one?

Beth B: It was inside some school room . . .

MacDonald: Back and Forth [⟷]?

Scott B: Is that what it's called, *Back and Forth*?

Beth B: I really don't like those films. I get bored. No information is coming across, except for formalist, conceptual ideas.

Scott B: When I was still in Madison, festivals of avant-garde films came through. I saw early Brakhage and Anger and *Flaming Creatures* . . .

Beth B: Anger I like. I saw *Scorpio Rising* when I was in school.

Scott B: We saw Snow's film as being pretty much similar to the state of the art scene at the time. It was exactly what we *didn't* want to do.

MacDonald: Despite your feelings, I'm sure that your films will be seen as reactions against formalism which bring with them a lot of the same sorts of extensions of technique that formalist filmmakers explored.

Scott B: Well, I think a lot of those people were coming out of art backgrounds similar to ours. Maybe they had similar visual concerns. We had the sense, too, that the films we were able to do—shooting in super-8, shooting with our own money—could never be done in any other way.

Beth B: So you see having money as being a burden [laughter]?

Scott B: Well, in a sense, because you have a certain responsibility to make it back.

Beth B: Not just that. If you're funded by someone or backed by someone, you have to satisfy their needs and ideas as to how the film should be done and what they're going to get out of it.

Scott B: When Buñuel showed *L'Age d'Or*, the guy who backed the film invited all of his friends . . .

Beth B: Big premiere!

Scott B: And nobody would talk to him afterward, so he canned the film for years. That's what happens. We didn't feel so much limited by the lack of money as that it gave us an opportunity to deal with things that aren't dealt with in film.

Beth B: It gave us a lot of mobility. We could do and put out whatever we wanted, and we had complete control of what we were doing. We still do.

MacDonald: I presume that from the beginning you assumed that in your films sound would be more important than it normally is.

Scott B: Sound is just as important as the image. When you watch television or Hollywood films, you're empathizing with whoever the main character is. We didn't want to get our audience involved in either of those ways. We felt that we could hold the audience with the sound, by making it extremely visceral.

Letters to Dad

MacDonald: I don't know very much about the events at Jonestown, but I understand that for *Letters to Dad* you arranged for the actors to read letters written by people who had died there and choose sections . . .

Scott B: After the suicides we were really interested in the whole situation. That one person could have that much control over a thousand people! We started collecting all the material we could get, with the idea that eventually we'd be able to make a film.

Beth B: It related to material we had been dealing with before that. We wanted to take a very different approach, one that would be direct and simple, without being sensational.

Scott B: We gathered all the letters we could find (a huge number of them actually got published), and we just circled or underlined the ones we thought were the best and gave them to the people who . . .

MacDonald: The best in what sense?

Scott B: The most characteristic, or the . . .

Beth B: The ones that gave the most insight into the writers' psychological states. Some of them are just phenomenal, very childlike, like confessionals.

Scott B: They felt totally lost on their own and believed Jones had the answers.

Beth B: It's religion.

Scott B: We're still very interested in religious cults.

Beth B: We're thinking about dealing with a cult situation in one of our next films.

Scott B: One thing that was remarkable about Jonestown was not pointed out, except in one article I read. The methods that were used in getting people to believe in the structure were classic brainwashing techniques.

Beth B: Torture and brainwashing.

Scott B: Not torture.

Beth B: Torture, come on!

Scott B: Torture was used as a last resort, but it was more the classic sort of wearing people down physically by poor food, lack of sleep, and a constant battering of ideas that was developed in China after the Revolution. I'm not sure, but my guess is that those stories are inflated in terms of what actually went on.

Beth B: I doubt it!

Scott B: I think the most insidious and freakiest aspect of the whole thing was the practically scientific use of peer pressure. The American understanding of that situation is based on Western ideals which say essentially that people are individuals who have their own opinions which they will maintain, once they've been raised with them, for the rest of their lives. The Eastern concept is that the community has control over the opinions of each individual.

Beth B: It's also that you're living and working within this community, trying to further its ideals for the good of the whole community, and, as a result, for your own good. The concept within Jonestown was, "We are doing this because the rest of the world is evil and bad and our community is good and peace loving"—similar to Evangelist philosophy.

Scott B: The lack of understanding in the West of how people can be totally changed, in terms of their opinions and beliefs, is one of the reasons why I think the whole Jonestown situation was unreal for most people who heard about it. Practically anyone who would have been there would have ended up the same way. It's not as if those people were all crazy; it's the situation that was crazy. And it was powerful enough to control them.

MacDonald: A while ago you were explaining that you circled or underlined certain passages from the letters. Then what happened?

Beth B: We invited a whole bunch of people . . .

Scott B: At half-hour or twenty-minute intervals . . .

Beth B: But they all would come at the same time!

Scott B: And when they got here we'd give them the letters and they'd choose one.

Beth B: We told them to choose a line or a phrase they could relate to on some level . . .

Scott B: And we said to make it as long as you can remember.

Beth B: We didn't want them reading. We wanted them to say the lines and to repeat them as if they were trying to convince themselves as well as other people.

MacDonald: The repeating gets more evident as the film proceeds. The most heavily repeated line is, "I never realized how enslaved by capitalism I was until you freed me."

Beth B: That's Tom Otterness. Actually we had everybody repeat their lines; then we edited the film to build the way it does.

Scott B: The situation in Jonestown was very weird racially. They had eighty percent blacks and twenty percent whites. But almost all of the ruling commit-

tee of the town was white. There were some very strange racial tensions. A lot of Jones's appeal, you see, was his idea of a mixed society.

Beth B: He had adopted thirty racially mixed children.

MacDonald: By having the people in the film look at the camera, we become Dad.

Scott and Beth B: Yes.

MacDonald: We're supposed to be aware that we're all part of systems where we brainwash each other?

Scott and Beth B: Right.

Beth B: Also, we wanted it to be very direct.

Scott B: There's as little artifice as possible. The only thing that we added to the image was the lighting. We used just two lights and tried to light everybody in keeping with what they were saying. We wanted to keep the visual interest, but also to make them look like normal happy people.

Beth B: The person sitting next to you could have been involved in Jonestown. In many cases, the things they say are not that unusual. They're often very funny. We have audiences where everybody is laughing through the whole film.

MacDonald: That happened at Utica College.

Beth B: When the title card comes up at the end, and they find out where the statements come from, they're totally shocked.

Black Box

MacDonald: Black Box is pretty clearly a parable about oppression.

Beth B: There's a school in Kansas now where they have a black box.

Scott B: They're calling it "The Box."

Beth B: If a child in school behaves badly, they put him in this isolation box. They're trying to get more of them to put in different schools. That's really scary.

MacDonald: It sounds like locking a child in the closet.

Beth B: And the parents are giving permission!

Scott B: It's indicative of the direction in which our society is moving; it's becoming more authoritarian.

MacDonald: The origin of your use of the Black Box has to do with "The Refrigerator," doesn't it?

Scott and Beth B: Yes.

Scott B: We first read this article in *Skeptic,* a real interesting magazine that no longer comes out. They described this isolation device which was being used in Brazil called "The Refrigerator," which combined hot and cold, brightness and darkness, and loud noise and no noise. It's a combination of sensory overload and deprivation. I think it's probably not as effective as simpler methods.

Beth B: It was a replacement for the Tiger Cages. They thought that the Tiger Cages were too inhumane! The Refrigerator not only breaks down your physical self, but your mind, your whole system.

We were trying to build the box and at the same time make a film. We made it a generalized situation. You don't know where it's taking place. You don't know who this guy is. We wanted to relate it to people's own individual levels of understanding. We didn't want to give any relief at the end. That was very important. You don't know what's going to happen to this guy; it's not like, "Oh, he dies and don't we feel sorry for him," or, "Oh, he escapes and don't we feel great!" A lot of meaning can be lost by giving a final answer, because in my mind there is no answer. I don't want to give people answers. I want to have people continually asking themselves questions, asking other people questions, and not feeling self-satisfied.

MacDonald: As the film ends and the lights come on, the guy's still in the Black Box. We were in the black box of the theater, but the lights are coming on and we're leaving—which is our luck. Our escape is our potential for developing the awareness that the film character doesn't have.

Scott B: Essentially what got him into that position in the film was his lack of initiative.

Beth B: Even at the very beginning when he's in bed with his girlfriend, she's the aggressor.

MacDonald: He's already distracted, by the sign outside the window, by *Mission Impossible* on the TV, by his need for a cigarette. It's as though he's halfway to the torture chamber already. His whole life is a black box. He's living in this little black box bedroom and looking at a black box, and he finally turns into a character literally imprisoned in a black box.

Beth B: The film relates to the idea of control, not only on a governmental level, but also in terms of people's relationships with other people, relationships within love affairs, and so on. Mind control by authority figures does exist and will exist in the future. It's not going to be resolved by one action or a series of actions. But it's something that people need at least to be aware is happening so that they don't get sucked in like the character in the film.

Beth and Scott B. Black Box. *1978.*

Scott B: When we first started dealing with that material, we felt that it was something we hadn't come into contact with. And yet torture and very blatant mind control techniques are used not only in Communist countries but are fostered by the United States and are used as an aid to prop up regimes that support our life-style.

Beth B: To make money so that Americans can live comfortably. There was no awareness within the news, or anywhere else, of these things going on until the situation in Iran came about.

MacDonald: A general question: do you still call yourselves "B Movies"?

Scott B: Well, the company that makes our films is B Movies [laughter].

MacDonald: I presume you mean it in a double way. In one sense it obviously relates to traditional Hollywood B movies, which are often about violence and crime.

Scott B: "B movies" also implies a certain amount of creative control. The directors who made B movies generally had more control over what they were doing than the A movie directors, because the A movies had to have a much stronger commercial potential. Most of the directors we have appreciated have made B movies.

MacDonald: Like who?

Scott B: Well, like Fuller or . . .

Beth B: Huston . . .

Scott B: Also, we admire Fritz Lang and Luis Buñuel. "B Movies" was a play on our names and on the kind of films we like to watch on television.

We shot *Black Box* very quickly, whereas *G-Man* was shot over a period of almost a year. We wanted to do *Black Box* specifically for a club situation, where we'd have a good sound system and an audience that was used to rock 'n' roll . . .

Beth B: Where it was a loose open arena for people to talk, to react to film. It was our reaction against certain gallery and museum situations.

Scott B: Well, it was also what was available to us . . .

Beth B: And what was available to show super-8. But the atmosphere did influence our films at that time.

MacDonald: There's an independent film circuit in New York—Millennium, The Collective. Are those places you would not want to show or . . . ?

Beth B: We have shown there.

Scott B: Those places have good situations, but they're geared primarily toward a different kind of film, a very personal type of filmmaking.

Beth B: Audiences come there with a certain aesthetic in mind.

Scott B: They come to see Art, which is not the attitude that we want people to come to see our films with. We want them to think it's an open situation where anything can happen.

Beth B: We wanted to get away from the formal films and the formal painting, *and* from the formal spaces: the white walls, the rigid wooden chairs, No Smoking, No Drinking, No Eating; you sit and analyze; you intellectualize. There's no communication. People should use film to communicate, because these days there's not much communication between people. People watch more and more TV. All that is is manipulation. It makes them sit back after they've been working all day and, just say, "Oh, ah, feed me!"

Scott B: In a sort of Brechtian sense we want people to have fun while they're watching our films and at the same time feel a burr that will make them think. We want to encompass both the intellectual and the entertainment domains. Most films that are geared toward people who think a lot are films that can't reach people who don't really want to think. We want to be able to cross over.

Beth B: There are very distinct audiences. On 42nd Street it's just pure entertainment and raw, rough audiences going wild. The Kitchen and Millennium are the extreme opposite. That's one thing about the Times Square Show that was absolutely phenomenal. It did bridge that gap in a certain way. Here you were on Times Square and yet the material was interesting; there was a looseness there, a sort of audience participation.

Scott B: I was starting to say that *Black Box* was the first film that we did very quickly. It made us realize that with super-8 we could shoot a film and show it immediately. We had a date for the show and we just started. We figured out exactly what we wanted to do ten days before the screening, shot it in three days, got the last piece of film back the day we showed it, and did the soundtrack that afternoon. After that we realized what would be feasible, and we set up *The Offenders* to run as a serial and planned to shoot a new part every week.

Also, working in super-8 enhances the sense that film is a throwaway. You're doing it for this moment, and you're going to do the best you can, but

you can't get it perfect. There's no way in hell that you can ever get super-8 to be the way you really want it. What we've been running across recently, especially with *The Trap Door*, is trying to get it perfect and running into . . .

Beth B: He's been making me ill [laughter]!

Scott B: I'm a perfectionist, so the experience with *The Offenders* was really refreshing.

Beth B: But now you're trying to get back into your perfectionism!

The Offenders

Scott B: There were two main reasons why we thought a serial form was viable for *The Offenders*. We felt very comfortable in a cabaret situation, and we were interested in doing something that was to be continued so that we could build up an audience over a period of time. Also, it was a matter of lack of funding: we were able to pay for the next part of the film with receipts from the previous part. That was the only way we could actually do the film. We showed the original the entire time! We felt that we were using super-8 in the best way it can be used. With the possible exception of videotape, you can't work that quickly normally.

Beth B: At the beginning of *The Offenders* we really weren't that sure of how things would proceed from day to day, but after the third week, it turned into a schedule. We would usually script one day, then shoot for maybe two days, drop the film at the lab, get it back the next day, and then use the weekend to work on the music.

Scott B: We didn't have time for reshoots. Either we got it or we didn't.

MacDonald: Was there any time for rehearsal?

Scott B: We generally do rehearsals on the set. In the past we've scripted all our films the night before we were shooting; we'd give the actors the script at midnight or 1:00 A.M. so they'd be able to read it over before they had a good night's sleep [laughter]! The next day we'd walk it through, how long depended on who the performers were. There are certain advantages to the way we shot:

a feeling of spontaneity, for one thing. There are certain compromises, but we could do things you could never do with 35mm or 16mm—like the shots on the streets.

MacDonald: Is there any possibility of distributing *The Offenders* as a serial?

Scott B: It's a possibility, but we'd have to recut it again.

MacDonald: It doesn't exist as a serial anymore?

Scott B: No. It would take a lot of time and some money as well. At this point we'd rather put our energy into new projects.

Beth B: There is the possibility of blowing it up to 16mm, but unless someone else wants to do it . . .

One thing I think is interesting about *The Offenders* is that so many people think of the violence. There's actually more violence in *Starsky and Hutch* than in *The Offenders*. But because *The Offenders* is not about a police officer or a person who is traditionally placed in a position of authority, who ends up winning out, people see it in a different light. They see it as more violent and more offensive than something they would see on television which actually involves more violence.

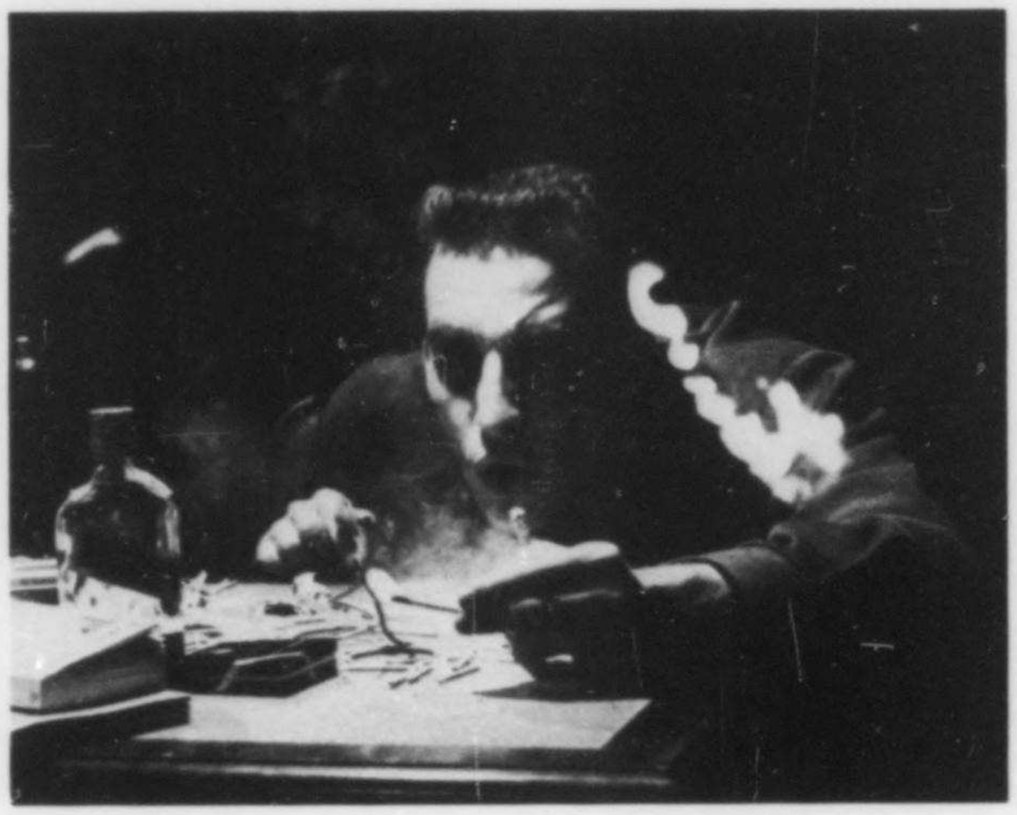
Scott B: We didn't justify the violence. In most contemporary films the violence has a reason: it's a release valve for the audience. They know exactly why this violence is occurring and why it *should* occur. The good guy is gonna do those bad guys in. The violence in *The Offenders* is less with relationship to good or evil. It just happens.

Beth B: Although it is a reaction against an economic situation, against society as a whole and the conditions within it.

Scott B: But not a specific bad guy.

MacDonald: I think the fact that the film is super-8 has a lot to do with the feeling of violence. The first time I saw the film, at the Times Square Show, the Times Square atmosphere made the film seem very threatening. Because you just carried that camera around in a real city, the film has the ambiance of being in the real place, which gives the film a feeling that things *can* happen even if we don't actually see very much violence.

The violence in *The Offenders* is funny, too. When the two guys get to the park bench and chop off the man's hand to get the briefcase—an unbelievably grotesque act of violence—the way the hand sort of bounces makes that



violence clearly unreal. It takes place in a real place and we understand the plot motivation for it, but it's like cartoon violence, rather than normal commercial film violence.

Beth B: The characters themselves are like cartoon characters.

Scott B: When we shot that scene, rather than focus on the hand, we had the one guy stand in front of the camera, so that you can't even see the chop. We used catsup for blood, rather than stage blood. We didn't want to use a visceral effect in order to sell the film, which is what most film violence today is used for. We were using it to give an idea of the conflicts within those situations or those characters. Most film violence resolves a conflict; ours . . .

Beth B: Creates other conflicts. Also it's a comment on how the oppression of one group of people becomes activated toward another oppressed group or person.

On several levels our films are reactions to television. The media presents a certain surface of images, and the people see them but often don't see what's under them, what's really going on there.

People are really attracted to the sensationalism of violence. I'm more interested in getting ideas out clearly than with hyping violence up with the sensational publicity that oftentimes makes a film or a television show attractive to an audience.

Scott B: I think people go to see violence because they want entertainment that they can't get on television. You can't see outright destruction and violence on TV—either it doesn't come across viscerally, or it isn't allowed on television.

Beth and Scott B. The Offenders. *1979.*

MacDonald: Recently I've really gotten to like horror films—and I didn't used to—because I've spent so much money seeing unexciting Hollywood films. At least with a horror film I know somebody's going to try to create some response in me.

Scott B: You go *for* the visceral. The violence in *Black Box* is turned on the audience. I think the spectator aspect of film viewing is really crucial. At this point there's really only one film that plays that for what it can be worth: *Rocky Horror Picture Show,* which I think is a movie that's going to be imitated in the future. That's one of the main directions where film can go.

Beth B: I think the strongest thing a film can do is create a reaction in an audience.

Scott B: What do you mean?

Beth B: To create a reaction the way that *Rocky Horror Picture Show* does, where you get an involvement of the audience with the film, or the way *Eraserhead* does, where people get really grossed out, or the John Waters films, or *Black Box,* where some people *run* out of the theater because they can't stand being in there. Any type of reaction which gives people an awareness of themselves and what they're feeling.

Scott B: But film should act as a catalyst for people to reassess their position, their lives . . .

Beth B: Sure! You're obviously going to reassess if you react strongly to what's

happening on the screen. But it's not often that films do that. I'm not talking about an ideal situation; I'm talking about film generally. It's valuable if a film can create a reaction in an audience. Most films don't create *any* reaction. Films that provoke a negative reaction sometimes make me think more.

Scott B: The blockbuster mentality, where you've got to make a film appeal to everybody, washes all the content right out of the film. *Nobody* is going to be offended.

MacDonald: During *The Offenders* I'm reminded of other movies. There are scenes that remind me of Godard's *Breathless,* for example. Were you commenting . . .

Beth B: We never make comments on other people's films.

Scott B: Is *Breathless* the one with Belmondo?

MacDonald: Yes, and Jean Seberg.

Scott B: Yeah, I saw that, loved it actually.

Beth B: I can't stand Godard.

We saw Jonathan Demme's early films the other day, which are actually pretty horrible. They have a lot of similarities to our films, and yet we'd never seen (and I had never even heard of) his films until recently.

Scott B: One big distinction is the cutting. I despise the kind of cutting where directors cut from this shot to that shot to this shot, and bounce all over the place in order to tell a story—where the cutting becomes the hero. Nicolas Roeg's stuff does that. To me it's just worthless.

MacDonald: Some people who make super-8 films do so because they accept, even want, to make more intimate films for small audiences.

Beth B: We want to reach the largest number of people we can. I think it's disgusting that Hollywood entertainment extravaganzas—the most surface-oriented films—are the films that reach people. The main problem with super-8 from our point of view is that you just cannot get it out to a large number of people, because there's no distribution, and its limited technically.

Scott B: Part of our reasoning in dealing with super-8 is that it's important that people who are not part of the industry, who are not part of the power structure or the economic elite in this country, can make films that do get out. With

super-8 you can make film and communicate ideas with it almost as effectively as someone who's working with 35mm. You can't reach the same sorts of audiences, but you can at least get your ideas out.

Beth B: People tend to be shocked about where we have been able to get our films shown. When people realize what can be done, I think there'll be more independents making films.

Scott B: That's really crucial. People should be making films all the time—the way writers can write all the time—not waiting around for a million dollars to make a feature in 35mm.

Beth B: Most people are afraid of making a film because they feel they have to live up to the standards of large-budget Hollywood films. I think more people are getting interested in things that are different, that are more on their level. Most people do not have a lot of money, and there's a certain connection between audiences and low-budget filmmakers.

MacDonald: I think that your films get part of their mood, at least indirectly, from the audience's consciousness of what super-8 home movies feel like.

Scott B: Particularly with *The Offenders* and *The Trap Door* we used that to our advantage. We play with the fact that we're a low-budget operation, and we make a comment on the whole nature of filmmaking by saying, "Yes, we're going to make an extravaganza out of this spaghetti."

Beth B: In terms of 35mm or 16mm, we're going one step at a time. We started off shooting film with a little silent Kodak camera where you just press a button: you don't even focus; it's the simplest way of shooting film. I see us building toward 35mm, mainly to be able to get out to larger audiences. There's no distribution where we are right now.

Scott B: Our main concern from the beginning has been maintaining the integrity of our vision, of our perception of things. By working with super-8 for as long as we have, we've been able to work out some of our ideas and create a base for ourselves. By maintaining control this far we feel we'll have more room when we do start working with greater amounts of money.

The Offenders captures the community that we were involved with at that point. Everybody was desperately broke and looking around for any way to get by without having to do a regular job. It was like taking the fantasies we all had about robbing a bank and getting some easy money, and just trying to concretize them into a film. The way the film was made, on a very low budget, plotted pretty much as it went along, reflected our situation.

Beth B: It wasn't all fantasy, though. People were seriously trying to figure out ways of getting hold of money without having to work a forty-hour week. In New York people were getting laid off; unemployment was being cut so that you couldn't get an extension on it. The economy in general was really bad at that point, and still is, but that seemed a very critical point. People were just sick and tired of it, which is probably why Reagan got elected.

A month after we finished the film there was a crime wave in New York. There were ten bank robberies a day. We filmed some of the newspaper headlines after we finished the film and, when we recut *The Offenders* into a feature, we included them. So the film flowed with the energy in New York at the time.

MacDonald: You've been filmmakers for only five years and you've made relatively few films, and yet you're rather widely known. What sorts of things have you done to get the films out? How did you develop your audience?

The Offenders.

Beth B: You can't make a film and put it in a theater and expect people to come not knowing what it's about or where it's coming from.

Scott B: We view publicity and all of the accoutrements to the film—the photographs, the press releases, the posters—as part of the film. We try to make what we're saying with the film carry through into everything that's related to it. We do our own posters and our own publicity, trying to get our ideas out that way as much as we do with the films. It's all part of the process of being filmmakers. You read a lot of interviews with directors who say that the reason their films were failures was because of the publicity involved. As far as we're concerned, that's part of our responsibility.

Our attitude is to treat super-8 professionally, which tends to make other people look at it professionally. We do let people know we're around. We didn't realize when we first started working on films that fifty percent of making the films is business.

Beth B: We never learned *that* in art school [laughter]!

Scott B: You have to be an efficient businessman or businesswoman in order to succeed on an independent level, since there's not enough money to have somebody else doing things for you.

The Trap Door

MacDonald: The Trap Door seems to involve the feeling that society's goal is to rigidify everything to such an extent that there is no room at all for even the slightest deviation.

Beth B: The main character in *The Trap Door,* played by John Ahearn, is the antithesis of the characters in *The Offenders. The Offenders* shows people who do not have the desire to fit into society and are able to find another way of surviving. It's about people who create their own values to suit their own life-styles.

Scott B: If Jeremy were only more cut-throat and a little less concerned with what was right and wrong, he'd be able to handle the situations he finds himself in. It's Jeremy's inability to get past the idea that you've got to be a good guy and follow all the rules that causes his defeat.

Beth B: But there's more to it than that. It's not just his lack of insight. The people around him really don't give a shit about the next guy.

MacDonald: The system he lives in is totally exploitive, with moral-sounding rules.

Beth B: Right. It's not only Jeremy's inability to see that; it's that the people on the other side of the desk are taking advantage of his inability to be as ruthless as they are.

MacDonald: Let me ask you about the style of *The Trap Door* as compared to the style of *The Offenders*. You were saying earlier that the shoot-from-the-hip tactic of filming *The Offenders* is a reflection of the life-styles we see in the film. In *The Trap Door* it works in the opposite way.

Beth B: Well, actually we wanted it even more stable than what we ended up with. We were limited by the 2½-minute super-8 rolls. All the shots should have been incredibly long and stable. We had wanted a situation in which you would feel as though nothing could move.

MacDonald: Also, either Jeremy's on the edge of things, or if he is in the center of the frame, there's a distraction between him and the viewer. There's a whole series of tactics that keep him from seeming to have any power.

Beth B: He's always in the wrong position in terms of the camera and of the situation itself.

Scott B: The stable camera was very much a part of the idea that these situations he comes into are already established, and he's falling away from them the entire time. We wanted the feeling that each shot is a trap in the same way that his being in those situations is a trap.

MacDonald: You seem to be moving more and more toward comedy. *G-Man* has comedy in it—all the films do—but *The Offenders* seems to include more than the first three films as a group, and *The Trap Door* is largely a comedy.

Beth B: Every film is different, depending on the subject matter. If we had done *The Trap Door* with a serious, heavy approach, it would leave people even more depressed than they are when they come to the theater, whereas if you have a sense of humor about a depressing subject, you create a more positive reaction. In each of our films we try to address the audience in one way or another. *Black Box* starts out very removed from you, but you are drawn more and more into the film until at the end you're in the box with the guy.

MacDonald: A lot of the visual situations in *The Trap Door* force you to consider what your own position is vis-à-vis the film. When the woman seems to address

us at the beginning, we're thinking, "How am I involved?" It's only later that we realize she's really talking to Jeremy, but we also realize that in another sense she really is talking to us. Or the scene where we see the angel start to shake on the table. We don't know why it's shaking, and it takes on a symbolic meaning before we realize, "Oh, it's just the subway." In both instances you raise questions and suggest meanings and then pull back so we can see what the narrative function of the situation is.

Beth B: That can create a double or a triple meaning. You realize what a detail means to you; then later you find out what it means in the film, which in turn might alter your earlier ideas.

MacDonald: Hypnotism seems to be a major motif in the film. At the end there's the long scene where Doctor Shrinkelstein, played by Jack Smith, tries to hypnotize Jeremy with the Maria Montez medallion. I assume that the casting of Jack Smith was meant to be recognized, at least by some portion of the audience, as an irony on the idea of psychoanalysis.

Beth B: Well, he always says he wished he could go to a therapist and be in psychoanalysis, but he could never afford it—so he does theater.

The whole film centers around professionals. It's difficult for Jeremy, and for people in general, I think, constantly to have to confront professionals, specialists. You can't ever get enough knowledge to get beyond where they want to keep you.

Beth and Scott B. The Trap Door. *1980.*

Scott B: Basically we wanted to deal with authority. The characters embody some of the essential authority figures in society.

MacDonald: There's a connection between the professionalism idea and the verbiage. It's language that defines the specialist.

Scott B: Part of what happens when you're watching the film is that the words create a story on their own. In earlier films— *The Offenders,* for instance— we use characters and action in order to portray conflicts between the mature, older part of society and the younger, more energetic part. The characters on the screen embody differing philosophies. In a sense, the trap of *The Trap Door* is that those conflicts and those battles aren't visual so much as verbal, and they don't become clear until the battle's already been lost. Part of Jeremy's downfall is that he doesn't quite grasp that all this verbiage is the front on which the battle's being fought.

MacDonald: In *The Offenders* your style was an expression of your identification with some of the situations in the film, whereas here your style is part of what seems to oppress Jeremy. One danger with that is that you identify yourselves with the professionals; one step more and you're professional filmmakers like professional lawyers or professional shrinks.

Scott B: Well, in a sense we were approaching the film that way, with practically no sympathy for Jeremy.

Vortex

MacDonald: Vortex seems much of a piece with *G-Man* and *The Offenders,* in terms of its crime-world aura and the way you approach composition and lighting. And like *Black Box* it has a relentless nightmare mood.

Beth B: We wanted a very isolated feeling through the whole film. You don't know where it takes place. You don't really know who these people are, or what the company they work for is.

Scott B: It all takes place in the dark, in interiors.

Beth B: There's no release.

Scott B: No feeling of open space. We were thinking of it as an amalgam of all of our earlier films.

Beth B: All the people in the film are in this pit, and the only one who climbs out of it is Angel Powers, the detective. Not that she's happy when she climbs out of it. She's the survivor. The film is about how far people will go for the sake of power.

Scott B: Right, and impose on other people's lives to get it. *Vortex* stemmed from the story of Howard Hughes and how his whole empire had been essentially taken over by his aides.

Beth and Scott B. Vortex. *1982.*

Beth B: But it had been built upon the mystique of this very powerful man, who eventually couldn't even deal with the outside world. He had to withdraw and become a recluse. Things swarm around the Fields Company in the film. It's involved in everything from surveillance techniques to brain implants and religion.

MacDonald: One of the things that struck me about your early films was that their power came not so much through the story as through the mood. What made those first films interesting to me is that you used super-8 for the subjects and approaches that super-8 was theoretically not supposed to be able to handle. It was like using the negative aspects of the gauge positively. 16mm is pretty malleable. You can do pretty much what you want. It doesn't bring with it automatically any of that homemade quality. Did you use such obvious play money to try to maintain that quality?

Scott B: More important than details like the play money is casting Lydia in that sort of a role. As soon as she walks in, she's a wrench in the works. She's never really quite believable as a detective. There's always an edge.

Beth B: Also, we set up a lot of the scenes so that they feel like theatrical settings. We used the idea of long takes, instead of doing a lot of cutting, to help build that theatrical sense.

MacDonald: Did you use a carefully worked-out script?

Beth B: We had a very tight script.

Scott B: There was almost no ad-libbing in this film. We had much freer on-set practices before.

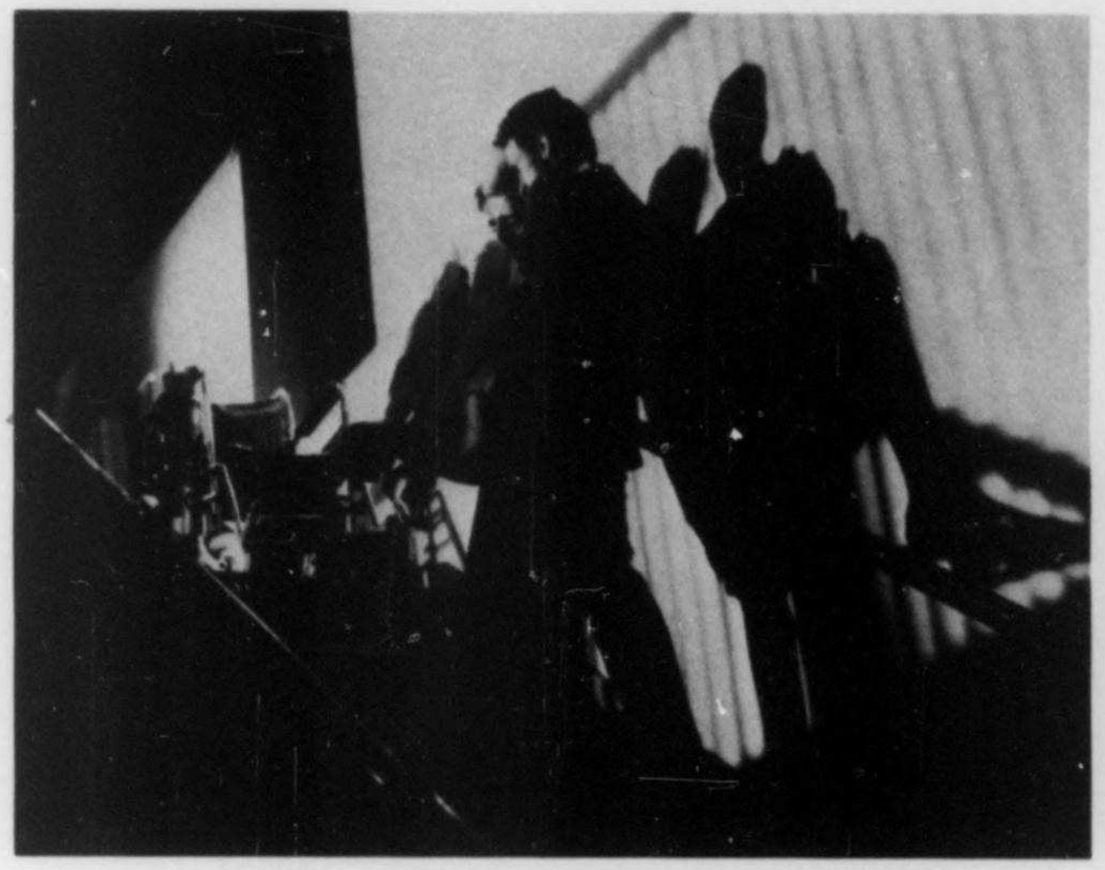
Beth B: Our past films have always been just Scott and I and the actors. It's been much more intimate, and we had much more freedom in terms of improvisation, and a more relaxed pace.

Scott B: With 16mm you have to have things worked out in advance.

Beth B: We had a big crew, too big a crew—it was ridiculous for us. The transition was horrible.

MacDonald: Where did you find the actors for *Vortex*? You've used friends in the past.

Beth B: Well, aside from Lydia and Bill Rice, Ann Magnusen was in *The*



Vortex.

Offenders. She played the bartender in the bar scene, a very short part. She ran Club 57 for a while; we've known her for a long time.

Scott B: We found Brent Collins and Russo in student films. A lot of the other characters we found through *Backstage*. We did readings with them. Haoui Montaug, the junkie, was a friend of ours, so it was a mix—different for us.

MacDonald: What were the costs?

Beth and Scott B: About $70,000.

Scott B: Our original idea for the film was much more modest. We started out figuring that we were going to be able to do it for very close to $20,000. Then we were able to get a lot of people to work on a deferred basis, very good technicians, crew, so we went for the highest quality we could get. The whole thing has really been an immense learning process.

Beth B: With super-8 we worked with everybody on a trust basis. With 16mm you're confronted with contracts and how much money will be deferred and how much money is being put in and where it is going to come from, and it's checks and balances everywhere you go . . .

Scott B: Our original motivation for getting out of super-8 was that we were spending at least fifty percent of our time distributing our films. We were getting by on it, but it wasn't enough so that we could actually fund new films. We

figured to get into 16mm so, hopefully, we wouldn't have to deal with the distribution on a booking-by-booking basis. We figured that would give us more time to make films, which is what we want to do. But now we end up spending fifty percent of our time raising money.

MacDonald: The Trap Door struck me as on one level a personal film that had to do with what I felt was a quandary for you as artists and filmmakers. Which was the more dangerous route: to be professional and a sellout, or naive and idealistic and exploited? In *Vortex* the characters, like you two, are involved in the process of dealing with the big business world. It's as though you're hoping that a certain directness of confrontation will get you through as the survivors rather than being co-opted.

Scott B: I wouldn't say that we actually identify directly with the Angel Powers character . . .

Beth B: But sure there can be a connection there. We don't want to be co-opted.

MacDonald: Do you fantasize about where you'll be in five years?

Beth B: No way!

Scott B: Yes, I fantasize about it. I'll be making films without having to deal with all the other shit—that's my fantasy, just to be able to be concerned about the artistic stuff.

Beth B: That's a ridiculous fantasy, Scott. Being a director you can't stop dealing with the technical bullshit and the people.

Scott B: I don't mean the technical side of it. I mean the aspect of having to put a package together.

Beth B: We're still going to have to put a package together.

Scott B: I know, but that's my fantasy. I'll have enough money to do what I envision. Not that I want $20,000,000 budgets. Another fantasy is to be able to make films that move very very fast. I want to get away from the slowness, the locked in feeling of this film.

Beth B: That's not a fantasy. That's just a projection about future films.

Scott B: And, I fantasize about making a film during which the audience can ac-

tually make choices, where the audience's interaction with the film affects the film.

MacDonald: There was an attempt to do that at Expo '67.

Scott B: I heard. Essentially that's why video games are popular. Whoever's playing has control over what actions the characters in the games take. Maybe it will bring a whole new structure into film. But maybe video games are it, and it'll never transfer to film.

MacDonald: At one point in your work the idea of meeting the audience in rock clubs, especially with movies like *G-Man* which dealt directly with serious issues, seemed to be to raise consciousness in a context that wouldn't allow ideas to be sloughed off as easily as people slough off conventional films. The fantasies Scott is talking about now are much more conventional.

Beth B: Well, I think that has a lot to do with the idea of being able to communicate in a film language that a large number of people can relate to and understand. A film like *G-Man* is in a language which is more obscure. Fewer people can understand it and relate to it.

Scott B: For me it's more a matter of having the audience deal with ideas in a more generalized way, so that a film has to do with the nature of the human condition.

Beth B: I don't think it's a matter of specific or generalized. I think it comes back to the language. The issues that were brought up in *G-Man* could be said to be as general as the issues brought up in *Vortex*. It's just that in *Vortex* they are dealt with in a more linear narrative, in more conventional language. *G-Man* has a language of its own which is jolting.

MacDonald: Even *Vortex* is pretty obscure.

Beth B: Right, it's still not completely conventional.

MacDonald: If by making the language of a film more understandable you enlarge your audience, how far do you go? The language you use has an impact on the kind of characters you can develop within that language and the kind of world you can show. That's the dilemma.

Scott B: I don't think that's the dilemma. The dilemma really is to make a piece that's a whole, so that the whole thing works as an integral unit and has a solid-

ity to it. I don't see it as a problem of making more homogenized products. That's what you're saying, right: in order to get bigger you have to get more homogenized?

Beth B: The question is how big do you want to get? If you want to do *Star Wars* or *Chariots of Fire,* then, yes, you have to sacrifice in terms of subject matter and social commentary. In the society we're living in the manipulation that the media works on people in promotion and in television teaches people what to like, how to see. Every step of the way people are taught how to relate to things, and you're not going to change that just by one film.

Scott B: There have been films that asked very hard questions.

Beth B: Nowadays? Name one made in the last few years.

Scott B: Well, I think things are going to change.

Beth B: [laughter].

Scott B: There are going to be bigger and bigger films, monsters . . .

Beth B: Like *Poltergeist* and *E.T.* . . . fucking disgusting entertainment. "Let's go home, mommie, we're such a happy family."

Scott B: But I think there's going to be room for stronger films. I think it's basically a problem of marketing. If you do something that hits home, that says something about trying to survive in society, people aren't going to be able to put a top on it. It's important for filmmakers and people who are involved in culture in general to open people's minds up.

Beth B: Except the problem is that most films that would do that would not be commercial. Scott, look at the films that are being made, and look at the film *Pixote.* That was an incredible statement, and what happened to it? I understand exactly what you're saying, but when you're making films saying that things should change, you've got to deal with the fact that the industry has taught people that you go to cinema to escape your horrible lives, you go to the cinema because we're going to entertain you and alleviate your problems for a couple of hours.

MacDonald: Recently I did an interview with avant-garde filmmaker, Morgan Fisher—do you know him?

Scott B: I met him once.

MacDonald: Now, he wasn't talking about you specifically at all, but he has a great suspicion of the whole new wave, punk, whatever you want to call it, movement.

Beth B: 'Cause he's not a part of it.

MacDonald: I'm sure that's very much by choice. Anyway, his suspicion, as I understand it, is that what pretends to be a reaction against the system is just a way to get attention. He's worried that "new wave" artists are less concerned with any ideological commitment than with manipulating their images so that they can work themselves into power positions in the commercial industry.

Beth B: I don't think this is terribly interesting. When avant-garde filmmakers feel that their position is threatened . . .

Scott B: That's not . . .

Beth B: Scott, let me finish! From what I've seen of artists, the art scene, and the art market—which avant-garde film is totally connected with—every time there's a new approach, a new idea of how to do something, people feel very threatened because, in a sense, they're losing their market.

Scott B: I think it's more than that.

Beth B: But that's part of it.

MacDonald: Let's say *Vortex* is an immense success and opens at theaters around the country . . .

Scott B: And Hollywood producers come to us and say, "Why don't you make a film for us?"

MacDonald: You're going to say yes, right?

Scott B: It depends on what kind of a deal it is.

Beth B: It depends *com-plete-ly*. No way we're just going to say yes to Hollywood producers.

Scott B: Getting back to the point you were making. I think that that sort of attitude has been around ever since *avant-garde* was coined as a word . . .

Beth B: That's what I'm trying to tell you!

Scott B: Beth, let *me* finish. The idea of the avant-garde is that it's something in advance of current-day trends. Essentially, to be an avant-garde artist you need to remain on the outside of current events. You're always starving, always struggling to get your statements out. Essentially, you're always powerless. That ideal has been around for over a century now.

Beth B: A complete myth.

Scott B: What that has done is make it so that the best minds, the best people, who aspire to be avant-garde, make things or experiences that very, very few people understand. Only people ensconced in that sort of discipline are going to understand. Art becomes something that has no real impact, something that doesn't reach people because it's so refined in its thrust. It's a way of saying, "The world out there is corrupt, and I refuse to take any part in it. I'm going to make this because I feel that this is pure and clean." But life *is* dirt and grunge, along with all of our ideals.

Beth B: A very important reason why both of us got involved with film was because we felt that that whole attitude was full of shit. I don't want to make something in my little closet and show it to this little art world so that a few people can see it and someone can collect it, and so a few people can pat me on the back and be my patron or whatever. That's why we got involved in the rock 'n' roll scene. There was an incredible energy, and incredible response and reaction coming from people, from young kids. To me young kids are critical; and theirs are the minds that are going to be shaping this world. I just don't see that avant-garde film or being an avant-garde artist is effective.

Scott B: The avant-garde is constantly trying to reinvent the language, whether it's in film or painting or whatever.

MacDonald: And it has immense impact that way.

Scott B: It can have immense impact that way. The problem is that often . . .

Beth B: It's like masturbation.

Scott B: I think that there are particular languages that we know are effective for constructing stories, and there are very strong things that you can say in these languages. We don't have to reinvent English to talk to other people.

Foucault, or the Ends of Modernism

JOHN RAJCHMAN

The Swansong of Literary Theory

> The whole relentless theorization of writing which we saw in the 1960s was doubtless only a swansong. Through it the writer was fighting for the preservation of his political privilege; but the fact that it was precisely a matter of theory, that he needed scientific credentials, founded in linguistics, semiology, psychoanalysis, that this theory took its references from the direction of Saussure or Chomsky, etc., and that it gave rise to such mediocre literary products, all this proves that the activity of the writer was no longer at the focus of things. . . . we are at present experiencing the disappearance of the figure of the "great writer."[1]

So Foucault declares in a 1977 interview to preface an Italian edition of a selection of his essays. He tells a little "new-class" story about intellectuals in the "political not sociological sense," that is, in terms of the uses made of knowledge and expertise in political struggles. Technical intellectuals like Oppenheimer, he explains, are replacing literary ones like Zola (the term *intellectual* originated in the Dreyfus affair). The writer-intellectual tries to become a conscience for everyone; he opposes the abuse of power and wealth with universal justice and equality. One instance is the "faded" Marxist ideal of a writer articulating the universal class consciousness of the workers. The writer-intellectual is disappearing. In his place there is the university and the "specific" intellectual—specific to the particular political struggles which involve his knowledge and expertise.

1. Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," trans. Colin Gordon, in *Power/Knowledge*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1980, p. 127. Similar denunciations are to be found in "Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze" (1972), in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1977, p. 214; and *I, Pierre Rivière* . . . (1973), trans. Frank Jellinek, New York, Pantheon Books, 1975, p. xi.

It is in this context that Foucault takes his brutal glance backwards to the "relentless theorization of writing" in the '60s, which, as we know, was to resurface in the American university in the '70s, and is still very much a topic of debate. Mediocre literary works, Foucault says, were clothed in epistemology, linguistics, and science the better to survive in a technocratic culture.

What are we to make of this denunciation? I suggest it encapsulates Foucault's participation in a dramatic cultural shift: the passing of a modernist sensibility combined with an alteration in the political self-image of the intellectual. Foucault's work constitutes a diagnosis and a version of this change, and thus it is no accident that his denunciation of the avant-garde literary culture of the '60s occurs within a story about the intellectual "in the political sense," that the crucial issue is that of knowledge and expertise (the "Enlightenment question"),[2] and that questions about "power" are said to precede those about language: "The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of language; relations of power, not relations of meaning."[3]

Flaubert (who is both Barthes's and Foucault's candidate for the first modernist writer) perhaps first exemplifies the "antibourgeois" aims of modernist literary culture, for he envisaged a new aristocracy of letters opposed to the "revolt of the masses" and to the idea of progress, to the journalism, sentimental magazines, and middle-brow culture which were ruining the language and keeping the great writer from his sovereignty over it. In a word, Flaubert was opposed to the "mass culture" which in Europe was regularly identified with America. In '77, when Foucault was announcing the disappearance of the writer, Barthes still saw the vocation of avant-garde writing in its opposition to "bourgeois language."[4]

The debate about writing (*écriture*) thus concerned the *political* culture of modernism. It was a debate about the vision of a nontechnocratic yet nonhumanist culture that would celebrate our "decentered" relation to language in sublime laughter and "transgression," about an avant-garde culture (the term comes from the '20s) presenting itself as the rupture, the threshold, the limits of our age; and about a nonpopulist or elitist culture which was nevertheless committed to the Left.

Who was thus fighting for the privileges of a political culture by theorizing about writing? Surely Barthes and the whole *nouvelle critique*. Lacan (whose *Écrits* appeared in 1966) was a central figure; it was he who transformed psychoanalysis into the great theory of modernist culture. Derrida (whose *De la grammatologie* and *L'écriture et la différence* appeared in 1967) was the philosopher.

2. See Michel Foucault, "Georges Canguilhem: philosopher of error," *I & C*, no. 7, pp. 52–59.
3. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 114.
4. "The function of the intellectual is to criticize bourgeois language under the very reign of the bourgeoisie" (Roland Barthes, *La grain de la voix*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1981, p. 187). For later hesitations on precisely what constitutes bourgeois language, see Barthes's interview with Bernard-Henri Lévy in the same volume, pp. 251ff.

He attempted to graft the question of writing onto the entire philosophical tradition, supplanting Heidegger's great "question of Being." In addition there were Leiris, Blanchot, Bataille, and even Beckett and some of the *nouveaux romanciers*. And, of course, there was the now defunct journal *Tel Quel*. Julia Kristeva's *Révolution du langage poétique* may someday seem a great summation of the movement. The title captures its spirit—a revolution emerging from avant-garde writing.

But one writer-intellectual notoriously obsessed throughout the '60s with the question of writing was none other than Michel Foucault. In the '77 interview, Foucault says that his early work was motivated by the "politics of science," the Lysenko affair, and the epistemological views of the Communist party. Yet one need only glance at his writings until *The Archeology of Knowledge* in 1969 and his assumption of his chair at the Collège de France (and it was his most prolific period) to see that no one pursued the question of writing more relentlessly than he. Everywhere there is reference to "our" thought, "our" culture—meaning not so much we Parisian, European, or Western intellectuals, as we modernists, we formalists, we who are brought together by the cultural (and therefore the political) possibilities modernist writing has opened up in our era. A typical instance in *Les mots et les choses* (1966): "The whole curiosity of our thought now resides in the question: What is language, how can we find a way around it in order to make it appear in itself, in all its plenitude. . . . "[5] In short, in the '60s, Foucault saw the emergence of a post-Enlightenment culture in modernist writing; he tried to discern the deep or archeological possibilities from which it had come and which it augured, he specified how it was articulating the modern experience, and he brought its "sovereign laughter" into philosophy.

Literary theory in the '60s may have been a swansong, but Foucault was part of it. His remarks are autobiographical. They are self-rebuke. "We" modernists did not announce a new culture; we did not even understand the politics of the old culture of which we were a part. Perhaps, then, the central questions in our era are not about commentary, language, and avant-garde art. Perhaps ours is an era of a politics of documentation, secrecy, and individuality which has made subjectivity our basic problem—our *modern* problem as political intellectuals.

Foucault's remarks in '77 about the swansong of literary theory are symptomatic of a "break" or "rupture" in his own story. But they also indicate a more general change in which modernist culture loses its hold and in which it can no longer be taken for granted that an "engaged intellectual" is automatically *de gauche,* that his enemies are the State, the corporations, and U.S. foreign policy and culture.[6]

5. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1970, p. 306.
6. Both in France and in the United States, the 1970s saw an upsurge of engaged "intellec-

It is therefore instructive to reconstruct from Foucault's own publications in the '60s the vision of a modernist culture he now disowns, and so to determine where he must think "we" went wrong.

The Literary Question

Self-reflexivity or self-reference usually figures in what has become, even in ordinary journalism, the genre or canon of modernist work. At issue in a modernist work is the constituent language of an art form. Narrative structures, realist or figurative illusions, didactic purposes are eliminated or are subordinated to this issue. Art turns to its own basic means and materials; the artist's act or gesture is addressed to no one and has no other warrant or function than itself. In some such sense, modernist works are said to be self-questioning.

But the question is why it is significant to classify works in this way, and in what sense the classification answers to a period or a culture, more precisely, to *our* period or culture; in short, in what sense they are *modern*. That, at any rate, was the question Foucault asked himself in the '60s: ". . . our task for today is to direct our attention to this nondiscursive language, this language which, for almost two centuries, had stubbornly maintained its disruptive existence in our culture. . . ."[7] Foucault's answer begins with his first main thesis on modernism: modernist art (and particularly literature) is about the very essence or source of all art. "Writing, in our day, has moved infinitely closer to its source, to this disquieting sound which announces from the depths of language—once we attend to it—the source against which we take refuge and towards which we address ourselves."[8] Self-reflexivity in modernist work is a way in which art moves closer to its sources and its essence. Modernist writing is an attempt to "reapprehend the essence of literature in the movement that brought it into being."[9]

The central premise of the *nouvelle critique* is that modernist work *does* in fact discover the essence or the sources of art and literature. It is not that modernist works are the only ones to be self-reflexive or to be "meta-works," but that they are the ones whose task it is to reveal that such self-reflexivity is the essence of art. All art would be, as it were, ontological—not about the world or about the author, but about art itself, its origins, materials, and traditions. In modernism, art would in fact approach this "essence." As Roland Barthes put it in 1959, through its various forms from Flaubert to Robbe-Grillet, modernist writing is constantly asking itself the Oedipal question,

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tuals" on the Right. For a discussion of Foucault's own political change during this period, see my "The Story of Foucault's History," *Social Text*, forthcoming.

7. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, p. 39.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
9. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 300.

"Who am I?" It is like "that Racinian heroine who dies in knowing herself, but lives in searching for herself."[10]

The *nouvelle critique* was a *modernist* criticism in which avant-garde works were held to exemplify the essence of all works, an essence which was then read back into the tradition. Hence it was assumed that all works tell of their own creation, materials, traditions, and therefore of themselves. In each literary work there is thus an "allegory of reading," a secret reflection on the nature of language and of literature, a hidden self-interpretation which ties the work to the whole fabric of literary tradition, and which criticism must ferret out. Since every work is about language and literature, since art is about itself, the laborious traditional practice of restating it, or its "meaning," in some other nonliterary meta-language loses its point, and in fact is held to be impossible in principle. Hence it appears that the "*ancienne critique*" labored under a premodernist conception of the literary tradition as being a sum of oeuvres, their authors, and their meanings. In modernist art and writing, tradition presents itself instead as an endless fabric of interlocking references, a great reserve of materials upon which art and writing draw without the obligation to represent or express anything. Criticism can no longer remain a secondary language which accredits and interprets individual works in the primary language. It, too, must take the modernist turn and invent a new style, neither critical nor literary, but "para-literary."[11] Current developments in this sort of thinking have become so labyrinthine that it is necessary to recall the modernist impulse behind the *nouvelle critique*: the aim was to underwrite modernist writing.

In the '60s Foucault practiced his own version of the *nouvelle critique*. In each work he uncovered a reference to the particular artistic tradition in which the work figured, and thus presented it as the self-referring instance of that tradition. *Las Meninas* is a painting about painting in the tradition of "illusionist space"; *Don Quixote* is the knight's tale that parodically retells all previous knight's tales; *Justine* is the *conte* in which all the moralist *contes* of the eighteenth century are inverted. Even the defensive *Dialogues* of Rousseau are presented as "a language attempting in vain to call language forth."[12]

More ambitiously, Foucault tried to construct a "formal ontology of literature"[13]—an inventory of the various forms or mirrors through which works had referred to themselves, their traditions, and their mediums. For every form there corresponded a way of identifying the work of art and a principle by

10. Roland Barthes, "Littérature et métalangage," in *Essais critiques,* Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1964, p. 106.
11. See Rosalind Krauss, "Poststructuralism and the 'Paraliterary,'" *October*, no. 13 (Summer 1980), 36–40.
12. Michel Foucault, "Introduction" to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Dialogues*, Paris, A. Colin, 1962.
13. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, p. 59.

means of which works were disseminated. Selecting works from European literature and painting, Foucault sketched the tale of a quest in which art, through many exploits, at last arrives at the "fatal space" in which it discovers its "source" and turns in on itself.

Foucault's history divides into three periods. There is an epic period, which, like the Renaissance hermeticism in *The Order of Things*, serves primarily as a defamiliarizing contrast for what follows. An epic refers to itself or its own creation by reference to the gods who desire, or who observe the spectacle it recounts. Artists remain anonymous; divinity makes what is not yet called art possible. Then there is the classical period. Language is subordinated to "discourse," to representing the world through the rule-governed concatenation of signs. Hence it is a period of preciosity, rhetoric, and style—ways of figuratively reproducing what language is taken to represent. In his *Raymond Roussel*, Foucault describes the classical conception of style as ". . . under the sovereign necessity of the words used, the possibility, at once indicated and masked, of saying the same thing, but in another way."[14] (By contrast, "all Roussel's language, style inverted, seeks to say surreptitiously two things with the same words.")[15] In the classical age, authorship becomes central to the "authenticity" of a work, and writers incur the obligation to become "authors"—to discover the style, voice, or distinctive repertoire which genius creates and which others must imitate. The classical era is the era of "classics"—works that embody the organistic form or "inner purposiveness" that genius engenders and that connoisseurship rediscovers. It is the era of the universality and objectivity of taste, of "sensibility" as a correlate of art, and thus of the basic and uplifting humanity in the aesthetic experience.

There follows the modernist period in which "literature acquires an autonomous existence . . . by forming a sort of 'counter-discourse.'"

> It breaks with the whole definition of *genres* as forms adapted to an order of representations, and becomes merely a manifestation of a language which has no other law than that of affirming . . . its own precipitous existence.[16]

(Foucault suggests this parallel: in the movement from Manet to Cézanne and on to Pollock painting affirms its own precipitous existence by forming a counter-illusionist space).[17] In the modernist age, the languages of art are no

14. Michel Foucault, *Raymond Roussel*, Paris, Gallimard, 1963, p. 25.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 300.
17. "Flaubert is to the library what Manet is to the museum. They both produced works in a self-conscious relation to earlier paintings or texts—or rather to the aspect in painting or writing that remains indefinitely open. They erect their art within the archive" (Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, p. 92). The allusion is no doubt to André Malraux, whose *Le musée imaginaire* appeared in 1965. Already in *Saturne* Malraux suggested that the mark of Manet's mod-

longer tied down by "discourse" or the obligation to depict or express something. To write is no longer to express some inner urge or will, or to represent the society of one's time. It is to link books to other books, words to other words, in some endless library.

> The space of language today is not defined by Rhetoric but by the Library, by the ranging to infinity of fragmentary languages substituting for the double chain of Rhetoric the simple, continuous, and monotonous line of language left to its own devices, a language fated to be infinite because it can no longer support itself upon the speech of infinity.[18]

Modernism is not an era of the œuvre, the critic, and the genius, but of the archive, and the universal dissemination of all works (past and present). Its great emblem is the museum without walls: ". . . there is nothing for it to do but to curve back in a perpetual return upon itself as if its discourse could have no other content than the expression of its form."[19]

The epic period is a period of glorification and immortalization of heroes and their exploits, of the founding myth of peoples, and of stories without authors told and retold. The classical period is a period which gives rise to the values of "taste, pleasure, naturalness, truth."[20] It is the period of the "Beaux-arts" of "*schöner Schein,*" a cultivated public and universalist "sensibilities." In the modernest period these classical values are overturned and "the scandalous, the ugly, the impossible"[21] become the object of an almost religious quest. Literature discovers death, anxiety, and nameless desire as the limits and truth of experience. It is no longer an art of glorifying heroes or pleasing the senses. It is an art of transgression.

When art is stripped of any transcendent or aesthetic purpose, there remains only the bare artistic act. It looks into itself; it surrounds itself with a new madness only psychoanalysis can analyze. Foucault says transgression is the only *ethic* in modernism, for modernist culture can abide no morality.[22] Modernism is that culture that *requires* one to transgress in the "counter-discourse" of modern art.

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ernity was his making art itself the "unique object" of painting, a theme developed by Georges Bataille in his remarkable *Manet* (Paris, Skira, 1955). Bataille is, of course, author of the concept of transgression that Foucault develops.

18. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, p. 67.
19. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 300.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, pp. 35, 116; and *The Order of Things*, p. 328.

The theme of transgression introduces Foucault's second main thesis on modernism—that the "source" or "essence" of art (and particularly of literature), the source which modernism finds or restlessly seeks (finds *by* restlessly seeking), is also the source or essence of experience, at least of *our* experience. The self-reflexivity of language in modern writing is a discovery of a "madness" in language; by purifying language of all obedience to "discourse," writing articulates the "mad" source of experience, and so transcends or transgresses that which constitutes its limits. That "formless, mute, unsignifying region where language can find its freedom" is in fact just the same "region where death prowls, where thought is extinguished, where the promise of origin interminably recedes."[23]

One version of the second thesis is that modernist art "performs" something we believe we cannot represent in ordinary discourse—our own death, our objectless angst, our nameless desire, our fitful "eroticism." In *The Order of Things*, Foucault explains that we cannot represent such things to ourselves (or each other) since we take them to be the limits of what we *can* represent—they are our "finitudes," the limits of our experience. Modernist art's transgression is the only way we have to transcend them. Abstract art is not an abstract way of expressing feelings we might otherwise express or state to each other, but a way of "articulating" the very limits of our discourse. "To represent the unrepresentable" becomes the formula of an abstract or modernist sublime.[24]

The thesis of a modernist sublime is what connects the formal or formalist nature of modernist art to the great figures of modernist contempt and condescension: the petit bourgeois consumer of mass culture, the inauthentic *das Mann* with its "idle chatter," the "last man" of our flat, leveled-down ascetic modern culture, the "neurotic" whose life is a long unsuccessful denial of his perversion, anxiety, rage, and death. Marx, Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Freud are thus the heroic thinkers for this conception of modern experience, and, depending on which master one prefers, one calls the unrepresentable or nondiscursive source of experience antibourgeois, post-Cartesian, Dionysian, or

23. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 383.

24. See Jean-François Lyotard, "Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime," *Artforum*, vol. XX, no. 8 (April 1982), 64–69. Lyotard derives the idea of the beautiful/sublime distinction from Kant, but of course there is a complex history in which the distinction travels through Shiller, Schelling, and Hegel to Schopenhauer, who thought of the sublime as the Will contemplating itself. It is in this form that it was transmuted into Nietzsche's distinction between Apollonian and Dioysian. This latter is, in fact, the more immediate background for Lyotard. As far back as its Longinian origins, the sublime seems to refer to an epic nobility in an effete "aestheticized" (modern) culture; that was certainly the case in Boileau's preferences for *les anciens*. It is thus linked to Bataille's theme of sovereignty—the modernist sublime being the sublime not of the hero but of the artist.

pre-Oedipal. In short, the modernist sublime articulates the Dionysian wisdom that the world of the inauthentic petit bourgeois neurotic rests on a fundamental Nothingness which he must deny; it defamiliarizes his world, reverses its values, and points toward a new age. Of this sublime transcendence, artists are the heroes. They articulate "the abyss" which lies behind our world and the limits of what we may experience in it. Artists no longer search for the pleasing style in which to "say the same things with other words" but heroically explore the very "source" of the language by which we designate things, the source of the fatal uncanniness (*Unheimlichkeit*) which nonartists know only at the cost of madness. The modernist sublime is the sublimation of a modern madness, not because it creates a socially acceptable version of repressed contents, but because it articulates what is uncivilizable and inarticulate about our desires—the source of our particular kind of madness.

As critic of the entire post-Cartesian period, the era of "representation" (*Vorstellung*) and of the *subjectum*,[25] Heidegger is surely the central philosophical influence. In the '30s, notably through his reading of Hölderlin, we can trace a movement in Heidegger's thought that goes from the postulation of angst as the fundamental experience (*Grunderfahrung*) to art or *Dichtung* as the privileged way in which it is articulated for us. In the process we find the reaction against the uprootedness of the modern subject, against the "essence" of technology, against mass culture, ultimately against the "gigantism" of America; we find also the dark prophecies of a new mutation, a new and more *dichterisch* style of thought, and, of course, a new god. Angst discloses the abysslike origins of our existence and that, in the end, is the "origin of the work of art." In *What Is Metaphysics*? (1929), Heidegger asserts that our uncanny relation to Being is shown to us in angst. Angst obsesses and oppresses our Being-there since beyond anything we can say it defamiliarizes all-that-is, and confronts us with the Nothing behind all the familiar "things" in our world. Angst is therefore the condition for the disclosure of what-is to man, the possibility of a transcendence of the *Da* of *Dasein*, of our limits or our finitude. Gradually one then discovers that the privileged mode in which to reveal and conceal this fundamental angst which silences us is precisely the work of art.[26]

Foucault's research into madness provided him, in the '60s, with a historical perspective on this modern conception of the relation between art and experience—on the modernist sublime. In modernist writing, madness was de-psychiatrized or de-medicalized and returned to its source in "not the meaning nor the verbal material, but in the *play*" of language—in "this obscure and cen-

25. Heidegger's characterization of modernity in "The Age of the World-Picture," in *The Question Concerning Technology*, New York, Harper and Row, 1979.
26. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe connects the theme of the *unheimliche* origin of art with Heidegger's relation to Nazism. See "Transcendence Ends in Politics," *Social Research*, vol. 49, no. 2 (Summer 1982), 405–440; and *Les fins de l'homme*, Paris, Editions Galilée, 1981.

tral liberation of speech from within the heart of itself, its uncontrollable fleeing towards a foyer ever without light. . . ."[27] The result was an interconnection between poetry and madness (and hence art and experience), subterranean and internal, unlike the Platonic ecstasy which "protects [the poet] from illusion and exposes him to the radiant light of the gods."[28] It was also unlike the fool, who represented the mad truth of resemblances in the classical age, when language was reduced to the neutral and transparent vehicle of discourse.

Foucault was engaged in a long examination of how psychiatry had been able to present madness as an illness. He became interested in the fact that, beginning in the nineteenth century, poets, writers, and philosophers numbered among its patients. Hölderlin, Nietzsche, Nerval, Artaud, Pound, and many others underwent episodes during which psychiatrists attempted unsuccessfully to treat them. When the modern artist is not mad, he fears he might be. In *How I Wrote Certain of My Books,* Raymond Roussel even republished Pierre Janet's case study of his illness, *De l'angoisse à l'extase.* In the madness of modern poets, misunderstood by psychiatry, Foucault discerned a new relation to the very language of poetry, and he speculated that this relation might survive the whole history of the psychiatrization of madness.

> Hence also this strange intimacy between madness and literature to which one should not lend the meaning of a psychological relation finally revealed. Uncovered like a language silencing itself and superimposing itself on itself, madness doesn't manifest or recount the birth of an œuvre (or something which, with genius or luck, could have become an œuvre); it designates the empty form whence the œuvre derives, that is to say the place from which it never ceases to be absent, where one will never find it because it was never there. In that pale region, this essential hiding, the common incompatibility of the œuvre and madness reveals itself; it is the blind spot of their possibilities and their mutual exclusion.[29]

Hence the centrality of Freud. Not that he provided the therapeutic means to allow our madness to be expressed, but rather that he "returned words to their very source—to this white region of self-implication where nothing is said."[30]

Thus Foucault was drawn to Freud, and more precisely to the version of Freud which had been elaborated by Lacan—psychoanalysis understood in terms of nineteenth-century literature, not nineteenth-century biology, understood not as a psychology of artists or the characters they create in fiction, but as a theory of the "being" of literature and its relation to the subject. With Lacan,

27. Michel Foucault, "La folie, l'absence d'œuvre," *La table ronde*, no. 196 (1964), 16.
28. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, p. 75.
29. Foucault, "La folie, l'absence d'œuvre," p. 19.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

psychoanalysis became a theory of what the "subject" must be if the claims of modernist literature to find a fundamental source of both experience and art were to be taken seriously. Psychoanalysis becomes the theory of the modernist sublime. In the famous *Discours de Rome* of 1953, Lacan in fact offers a definition of psychosis as "language without discourse," which Foucault, ten years later, was to make the central terms of his definition of modernist writing.

In fact, in the '30s, when Heidegger, reading Hölderlin, was lecturing on the essence of art, and Janet was calling his patient Roussel *un pauvre fou*, Lacan was arguing that a revolution in psychiatry would follow from a detailed linguistic study of the writings of the mad.[31] His thesis studies a woman who took dictations from voices, the results of which were published by Eluard under the title "*poésie involontaire.*" Against Janet's theory of *la fonction du réel*, he argued that auditory hallucination, as in the case of his patient, far from being a failure of aural perception, was in fact a cataclysmic alteration in the relation of the subject to her own speech, the suppression of which in normal subjects enabled the "perception of the real" in the first place. In Lacan's work from the '30s we may now read the ingredients of the transformation of psychoanalysis into a practice which matches modernist poetic experience: from the "automatism" of language that he discovers in psychosis comes the germ of the idea that the unconscious is not a reservoir of repressed contents but is "structured like a language." In psychosis he finds the fundamental alienation constitutive of our experience that he was shortly to analyze by postulating a "mirror stage"; there is already an insistence that an expressive or cathartic model of therapy (resembling a premodern poetry) be replaced by one in which the patient's "language" speaks a truth which the patient must try to reconstitute in his "concrete discourse"; there is also the notion that this "language" must be understood in literary or rhetorical categories as a sort of hermetic writing; and there is the startling connection between the movement away from discourse toward a mad language and a feminization of the subject or a rediscovery of a relation to the Mother. Finally there is Lacan's sense, typical of literary modernism, that a technocratic normalizing psychotherapy, symbolized by America, is the source of the betrayal of psychoanalysis as literary science, a theory of *la lettre.*

All of these elements are brought together in Lacan's interpretation of Schreber's memoir that appears in his summary of the seminar on psychosis of 1955–56, in which he introduced his claim that the origin of psychosis is a "foreclosure of the paternal metaphor."[32] The memoir helps to understand

31. "Écrits 'inspirés': schizographie"; see also Jacques Lacan, "Le probleme du style," in *De la psychose paranoïaque*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1975.
32. Jacques Lacan, "On a Question Preliminary to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis," in *Écrits, a Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, Norton, p. 199.

psychosis since it is self-reflexive: it is the delirious account of how it becomes necessary and possible to write such a work; its topic is "how I wrote this book," and it is thus the memoir of modern madness. Lacan sees the powers of creation which Schreber attributed to divine rays (and which Freud saw as allegorical of libidinal flows) as an allegory of words or linguistic expressions; he sees the delirious theory of Creation as a theory of writing, and analyzes the hermetic *Grundsprache* as a transgressive linguistic play. And *contra* Freud, Lacan sees Schreber's feminization not as the result of repressed homosexuality but as a consequence of his delirious return to the sources of language.

In 1961, Laplanche applied Lacan's theory of psychosis to Hölderlin, and, in '62, Foucault reviewed Laplanche's book (in '65, Derrida reviewed Foucault's review).[33] Foucault argues that Hölderlin exemplifies a great cultural alteration in the relations between art and life, which Laplanche's style of criticism allows us to understand.

On the one hand, criticism, freeing Hölderlin from "the accumulated weight of a half-century of interpretations inspired by the disciplines of Stephen George," had discovered that it was "necessary to recapture [Hölderlin's] language at its source," namely at the "profoundly embedded point where poetry self-consciously discovers itself on the basis of its proper language."[34] To understand that source we need to reformulate our views on the relation between life and art; a new cultural configuration is required to explain how it is that the "mute forms of madness" are linked "to the most essential aspects of a poem." We must ask "what *source* gives rise to the possibility of language."[35]

The answer, of course, is transgression, the secret of the modernist sublime. The heroism of the author is brought about with the decline of the epic, and "the psychological dimension in our culture is the negation of epic perception."[36] Modernism, however, pushes the development of literature beyond this dimension, since it discovers that the limits of an œuvre are in fact the limits of psychological experience:

> The dissolution of a work in madness, this void to which poetic speech is drawn as to its self-destruction is what authorizes the text of a language common to both. These are not abstractions, but historical relationships which our culture must eventually examine if it hopes to find itself.[37]

33. Michel Foucault, "Le 'non' du pere," *Critique*, no. 178 (1962), 195–206; trans. in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, pp. 68–86; Jean Laplanche, *Hölderlin et le question du pere*, Paris, P.U.F., 1961; Jacques Derrida, "La parole soufflée," in *L'écriture et la différence,*" Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1967.
34. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, pp. 68–69.
35. *Ibid*, pp. 71–72.
36. *Ibid.* p. 75.
37. *Ibid.* p. 85.

A Post-Enlightenment Culture

That "our" culture should find itself in these "historical relationships" is precisely what Foucault himself was trying to work out in this period, and *The Order of Things* is his most sustained attempt to do so—to show that "literature in our day . . . is a phenomenon whose necessity has its roots in a vast configuration in which the whole structure of our thought and our knowledge is traced."[38] This book elaborates Foucault's third main thesis on modernism: the culture in which art is free to take itself as an object in the sublime transgression of the limits of experience is the culture whose "fundamental problems" are "intimately linked" with the "question of the being of language."[39]

Literature had not been central to European culture. In fact Foucault asserts that since the sixteenth century it had been "foreign," denied, "over-lain."[40] In our period, however, it becomes "more and more that which must be thought."[41] *The Order of Things* is the story of the "return of language," which explains the central position of literature in our culture. Ours is a period in which language is taken to be at the root of all thought, and this is what "necessitates" modernist writing: It is not

> . . . a narcissism occurring within a literature freeing itself at last from what it has to say in order to speak henceforth only about the fact that it is language stripped naked. It is, in fact, the strict unfolding of Western culture in accordance with the necessity it imposed upon itself at the beginning of the nineteenth century. . . .[42]

Contained in this thesis is another one: that our period, focused on language, gives rise to a post-Enlightenment literary culture. Following Kant, "the Enlightenment" usually refers to that period which considers science to be universal and autonomous, art to be a matter of objective judgments of taste, and morals to consist in the self-legislation of universal laws by autonomous individuals—all three spheres having their foundations in the nature of man. By contrast, in *The Order of Things*, Foucault paints a picture of modernist culture in which there is no "nature of man," science is no longer autonomous or universal, no morality is possible at all, and the task of articulating the "limits" of experience has fallen to avant-garde writing and art. All scientific, aesthetic, and moral problems are reduced to problems of language, and languages have no warrant or foundation beyond themselves. Thought is always attempting to

38. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 383.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 302.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*, p. 384. This is obviously a weak or pejorative notion of narcissism. In her remarkable *Lecture du Narcisse* (Paris, Didier, 1982), Anne Boyman develops a deeper sort of connection between the narcissism in art and experience characteristic of modernism.

change us by discovering the tacit language games constitutive of our "forms of life," by demystifying the hidden ideologies of our society or the unconscious structures of our experience. It tries "to think the unthought."[43] Language becomes the limits of our being. It is only in transgressive writing that these limits are transcended; writers are the heroes of our age. This is a picture of what I call post-Enlightenment literary culture.

This picture is built into the very structure of *The Order of Things* and determines the plot of the story it tells. As is often the case,[44] the figure referred to as "we" traces a circle of interpretation. The book is written from "our" modernist perspective, but also tells the story of how our perspective "necessarily" emerged. Thus, not only is "the question of the being of language . . . intimately linked with the fundamental problems of our culture,"[45] but what *we* take to be deep, fundamental, or "archeological" in each previous era is in fact found in *its* conception of language. In the preface, Foucault asserts that he ends "on the threshold of a modernity that we have not yet left behind";[46] after the threshold it becomes possible for us to look back, in a burst of Borgesian laughter, on the preceding era and the "humanisms" that grew out of it. From this post-Enlightenment perspective, "we" then appear at the end of each chapter to review the "deep" arrangements of some earlier period, pointing in each case toward the writing of our own times. It is thus we literary modernists who tell the story of how language has returned as the fundamental problem of our period, and it is our literary culture which "finds itself" by telling itself its own history.

The plot of the story is complicated by the fact that Foucault superimposes his history of literature—in three periods (epic, classic, modern), with Cervantes, Sade, and company as heroes—on a highly original history of science, the history of an abrupt change that occurs concurrently in the study of life, labor, and language during the period from the French Revolution to Napoleon. The dual plot suggests a curious set of relations between literature and knowledge.

Later, Foucault explains that by the "episteme" of an age he meant not a world view or ideology but a system of possible discourse which underlies a body of knowledge and determines which groups of statements are susceptible of being either true or false.[47] It would not seem, however, that he means to include painting and literature under this definition, since they are not really a

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 322–327.
44. Compare the role of the *für uns* in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit.*
45. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 382.
46. *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.
47. See Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, pp. 112–113, where he says he had confused the episteme "too much with systematicity, theoretical form or something like a paradigm." On the contrast between paradigms and epistemes, see Ian Hacking, "Foucault's Immature Science," *Nous*, no. 13 (1979), 39ff.

part of such *savoirs*; on the contrary, modernist writing in particular is often thought to be, in the phrase of Georges Bataille, a *non-savoir*. Foucault's claims, such as "literature in our day . . . is a phenomenon whose necessity has its roots in a vast configuration in which the whole structure of our thought and our knowledge is traced," apparently mean not so much that literature occurs *within* that configuration as that it articulates its limits, and, in this sense, is *about* it as a whole. This in fact seems to be the general link between Foucault's two histories, the history of knowledge and the history of literature and painting. Arts are meta-epistemic, allegories of the deep arrangements which make knowledge possible. Thus, rather curiously, *Las Meninas* is about an order that underlies the seventeenth-century discussion of wealth, the Marquis de Sade is exploring the limits of the Port-Royal grammarians, and Raymond Roussel is discovering the "conditions of possibility of all knowledge about man."[48]

While Foucault rejects the traditional (Enlightenment) idea of progress in science and instead constructs his history of knowledge around sharp discontinuities, his literary history contains a hidden teleology. In periods of "break" or "rupture" (as in our period) literature and painting articulate or relate the "discontinuous" configurations, until in the modern period they assume their "avant-garde" role. "Our" perspective obviously determines the literary story. It is not at all a history of influence. Nothing about the influence of Sade, the readings of his works, or their "effective history" prepares one for the view that they were about the limits of the episteme of representation. Only *we* can see that a period of "counter-discourse" is initiated in his covert demonstration that desire cannot be captured in the rules of representation characteristic of knowledge in this era.

> Sade attains the end of Classical discourse and thought. . . .After him, violence, life and death, desire, and sexuality will extend, below the level of representation, an immense expanse of shade which *we* are now attempting to recover, as far as *we* can, in *our* discourse, in *our* freedom, in *our* thought.[49]

And yet it is this progressive literary story which stands behind the story of the "return of language." It is the affinities between modernist literature and the hermetic tradition (for example, Mallarmé and Paracelsus) that make it plausible to see in "our" interest in language a return to Renaissance hermeticism, when it was thought there was a language of the "signatures of things." Our literary discourse, our freedom, our thought . . . determines that it is the Renaissance from which language "returns."

Foucault notes that in the late nineteenth century discussion of language

48. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 375.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 211, emphasis added.

goes off in many directions, a "dispersion" quite unlike what happens to the discussion of life and labor to which it had previously been epistemically linked.

> For philologists, words are like so many objects formed and deposited by history; for those who wish to achieve a formalization, language must strip itself of its concrete content and leave nothing visible but those forms of discourse that are universally valid; if one's intent is to interpret, then words become a text to be broken down so as to allow that other meaning hidden in them to emerge and become clearly visible; lastly, language may sometimes arise for its own sake in an act of writing that designates nothing other than itself.[50]

Interpretation and formalization are the two main tendencies; Freud and Russell being on either end of the "fork" that branches in those two directions. Interpretation includes the turn to the *nouvelle critique* (which "does not proceed from the observation that there is language towards the discovery of what that language means, but from the deployment of manifest discourse towards a revelation of language in its crude being").[51] But the "most important" is the last development, in which this "being" itself is the issue: ". . . the appearance of literature, of literature as such . . . [which] can possess neither sound nor interlocutor, where it has nothing to say but itself, nothing to do but shine in the brightness of its being."[52] Writing is more important than the other paths language takes in the "arrangement" of our period (*Finnegan's Wake* would be more important for thought than the invention of the predicate calculus) because it continues the "counter-discourse" begun by Sade, and because it shares with modern madness an experience of our limits; it was characteristic of the classical period to repress or exclude such madness or counter-discourse. Thus writing announces a leap (*Ursprung*, origin)[53] toward a new form of thought:

> The dispersion of language is linked, in fact, in a fundamental way with the archeological event we may designate as the disappearance of Discourse. To discover the vast play of language contained once more within a single space might be just as decisive a leap towards a wholly new form of thought as to draw to a close a mode of knowing constituted during the previous century.[54]

We thus return to "our" assumption in the preface that writing is what the

50. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 298.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 300.
53. See Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, New York, Harper and Row, 1971.
54. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 307.

classical period had to cover over. Normally some version of "disenchantment" is used to describe the emergence of the classical era—an end to prejudice, magic, and superstition. But for Foucault that is only the consequence of a shift in the relations between "words and things" which modernism would again reverse. Cervantes and the Spanish baroque rather than Descartes (who contributes to the repression of madness) initiate the "fundamental arrangement" of the period, shown in the attitude toward language (and, therefore, toward literature).

> The threshold between Classicism and modernity . . . had been definitively crossed when words ceased to intersect with representations and to provide a spontaneous grid for the knowledge of things. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, they rediscovered their ancient enigmatic density. . . .[55]

Thus, "one might say, if one's mind is filled with ready-made concepts, that the seventeenth century marks the disappearance of the old superstitious or magical beliefs and the entry of nature at long last into the scientific order. But what we must grasp and attempt to reconstitute are the modifications that affected knowledge itself at the archaic level. . . ."[56] On the "archaic level," the central fact is rather that "language [withdrew] from the midst of beings themselves and . . . entered a period of transparency and neutrality."[57] On the deep level, neither a discovery of correct methods nor a new paradigm (neither "rationalism" nor "mechanism") made it possible for there to exist interpretation-proof regularities the rational subject might discover. Rather, symbolized in the baroque ironies about the end of the world of resemblances, what made such surface phenomena as rationalism and mechanism possible was a reduction of language to a transparent medium for the ideas or discourse through which a subject might represent the world. It is, of course, in modernism that this basic assumption "disappears." In the age of the return of language in which literature attains the limits of subjective experience, there emerges a counter-discourse, a new madness.

In short, while in our age literature is "more and more what must be thought," the "fundamental arrangement" of the Enlightenment period it replaces was precisely that *our* literature was *unthinkable* for it, hence "foreign," "covered over," and so on. In our post-Enlightenment culture, the whole self-conception of the Enlightenment as rooted in a basic nature of man is only a surface whose depth is incompatible with "transgressive writing." Hence, for us,

> Man had been a figure occurring between two modes of language;

55. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

> or, rather, he was constituted only when language, having been situated within representation, and, as it were, dissolved in it, freed itself from that situation at the cost of its own fragmentation. . . .[58]

Just what it was about '60s literary theory that Foucault was to denounce is contained in this thesis of a post-Enlightenment literary culture, which figured so crucially in his preoccupations in *The Order of Things*: "we" should no longer find ourselves in such a culture, but rather in more "specific" political struggles; writing should no longer be a "focus of things," something that "must be thought."

He reverses the central premise of his own work: the "fundamental arrangements" in our history are not about language but about power. It is misguided to formulate the problem of knowledge as a problem of language (translation, terminology, pragmatics) as though a study of language could shed much light on the workings of knowledge, particularly knowledge about ourselves in such disciplines as psychiatry or criminology. Hence there is little basis for the view that art or literature is meta-epistemic, or that the Enlightenment was basically only an understanding of language that represses writing. The questions of the Enlightenment, therefore, return. Morals become an issue within the new politics of specific intellectuals (nuclear weapons [Oppenheimer], "the environment," genetics, but also medicine, psychiatry, criminology, etc.)—the moral questions about what enables knowledge to become an instrument of policies. A study of language and literature is of little use in understanding this basic problem of our knowledge. Even in thought, language, far from introducing a new form, loses its centrality. Hence Foucault's sense that, far from being the cock's crow of a new age, it is the swansong of the obsessions of an old one.

With the centrality of language for contemporary thought goes the whole historical rationale for an "avant-garde" of writing. That modernist writing finds in itself the sources of all art, that all previous work is but an allegorical anticipation of it, that it articulates some mad, sublime, ineffable basis of experience, that it augurs a whole new mode for thought—all this "theorization about writing" is then the wrong path for specific intellectuals to follow.

Foucault's Autobiography

Foucault's condemnation of '60s literary theory is thus autobiographical. It is a rejection of his own preoccupations with modernism in the period, and even of his own "literary" style.

Formalism is one name *The Order of Things* uses for this attitude—"this general indication of our experience, which may be termed 'formalism'. . . ."[59]

58. *Ibid.*, p. 386.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 384.

Formalism is a term for the assumptions through which the "disruptions" and "transgressions" of the "counter-discourse" of modernist art were misunderstood and overestimated.

The problems Foucault finds in formalism, however, do not require a return to a precritical realism or figuration, or a renewed historicism. We may still recognize that there is (and for the last 100 years has been), in our art, a politics of forms—of the procedures, techniques, truth-claims, principles of authorship, and dissemination. But that politics is not (and was not) a politics *of* the forms as such, as the "source" or "essence" of all art or literature, as the triumph of pure self-examination, or as a struggle, against all forms of "representation," to attain a Dionysian wisdom about their limits. The problem with formalism is not that it draws attention to forms, but that its understanding of the politics of forms is *unspecific*—it cannot identify the specific struggles in which the forms figured. That is why Foucault's praise of "specific intellectuals" entails a reversal in the three theses on modernism I have isolated in his early writing.

Against the first thesis, it is wrong to locate the *essence* of art in its capacity to take itself as object. As a principle of criticism, self-reflexivity (the view that all arts have always been about themselves, their languages, and their traditions) commits one in the end to a misleading *internal* conception of tradition, to a "literary" conception of literature. In modernity, it leads one to a politics of the supremacy of the literary and of the writer rather than to a politics of the specific ways in which works participate or have participated in concrete struggles. Against his second thesis on modernism, Foucault now seems to hold that the opposition between a "literary" or "poetic" madness and a psychiatric "illness," and thus of the notion that Freud moves us from the second to the first, rests on a misguided contrast between literary and scientific or technocratic ways of representing ourselves. His central concern now is with a "technology of the self" which is found in literature—an unthinkable project for his earlier position. He attempts not to determine what escapes the limits of representation or of experience, but to specify *how* the terrible figures of the modernist sublime, death, desire, and anxiety have been put into words. Literature has no privilege in this, and it would thus be misguided to see in literature as such the main source of opposition to the power of "normalization" in our society.

These objections are contained in the problem with Foucault's third thesis on modernism: the problem with the very concept of modernity and with its implied reference to those of us who use the concept. For *modern* is a deictic term, as Foucault himself observes at one point in *The Order of Things*; a contrast "between *our* prehistory and what is still contemporary" should replace the contrast between classical and modern. In Foucault's later writing we can see how this idea is elaborated. *Modernity* comes to refer to what in the past is still operative in *our* present. *Discipline and Punish* purports to be a "genealogy of modern morals" and a "history of the present." The implied deictic reference is

to "specific intellectuals" and not to avant-garde or vanguard intellectuals. For Foucault takes the "present" to refer to entities like "mental illness" or "the criminal personality," which are presupposed by our current practices and, in ways we don't realize, are rooted in the past.[60] To write a history of the present is thus to draw attention to the constitution of those objects, and its consequences, and thus to open up our "modernity" to change. No attempt is made to predetermine what this change will be; we are committed to no general scheme of transformation and no single alternative. Hence, we no longer claim an avant-garde or vanguard relation to our own modernity, nor do we claim to announce a whole new form of thought and society. Conversely, the problem with taking art as allegorical of an age, as Foucault did in *The Order of Things,* is that it entails that there is a reality (or "spirit") of an age as a whole which precedes our specific problems, and which we as "universal" intellectuals have the special office of articulating or representing. That is how we arrive at the avant-gardist view that sees art as standing on the "threshold" or the point of "rupture" in our age, and thus, independently of the specific issues of our situation, we end up believing that Artaud may announce the end to the institution of psychiatry, or Mallarmé the institution of authorship.

In fact, the "individualization of the author" belongs to a broader or "deeper" politics which involves many other procedures to individualize us, including, for example, the individualization of homosexuals. Just as literature circulated for years without the idea that it belongs to an author whose intentions it must express, and thus, without the obligation to *be* an author, for centuries homosexual *acts* circulated without there arising the idea that they are the expression of the homosexual kind of *person,* and thus without the obligation to decide whether or not one *is* such a person. These two procedures to "individualize" intersect in the "political reality" of the homosexual writer—a matter of obviously specific concern for Foucault.[61] To examine *how* specifically the

60. See my "The Story of Foucault's History."

61. Conservative critic John Simon is a good case of someone who would "individualize" the homosexual writer. Having argued that male homosexuals are congenitally sick, infantile, and narcissistic and therefore have less "human potential" than others, Simon goes on to complain of their ubiquitous presence even in the audiences of artistic productions (see "Homosexuals in Life and Art," *The New Leader*, October 28, 1974). In a review of "avowed [*sic*] homosexual" Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality,* Simon claims that the book derives essentially from Foucault's identity as a "homosexual writer": "I cannot claim more than cursory knowledge of the previous work of Foucault, who, like Roland Barthes, is a professor at the renowned and formidable Collège de France. But what I do know of his books on language, madness, hospitals and prisons . . . establishes this sociologist-philosopher-linguisticist [*sic*] . . . as a master of paradox." According to Simon's argument, paradox is also the province of Oscar Wilde and Jean Genet, whose works, he says, constitute "criminal-pederastic propaganda" ("Paradox Lost," *The New Leader,* December 4, 1978). Foucault argues that there *is* such a thing as a homosexual identity in our art, but that it is not a result of an intrinsic sexual nature, but of a politics—a politics to which remarks such as Simon's, however unfounded and silly, necessarily contribute. For one account of Foucault's thoughts on the subject, see "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act: An Interview with Michel Foucault," *Salmagundi*, nos. 58–59 (Fall 1982-Winter 1983), 10–24.

individuality of both author and homosexual were constituted and then combined in our times (an examination which might well include a discussion of the forms as well as the themes of our literature and art) illustrates Foucault's approach to "specific" problems in our modernity. The point of such an examination would not be to place oneself, or the literature one examines, in an avant-garde position in relation to our whole society or culture, but to increase our freedom with respect to a specific way in which we are determined. Not only does the third thesis on modernism make the formalist assumption that "basic languages" are what is at issue in our art, but that thesis also rests on an unspecific "literary" conception of our position in modern culture.

Foucault's own attempt to offer a specific analysis of literature and art in modernity has in fact centered on this issue of individuality and subjectivity—on the politics of the terms and categories by which we identify ourselves and each other, and on the history of how we have been "constituted as subjects in both senses." Drawing on a preoccupation in recent French historiography, he treats literature or art not as a tradition of great works nor as a group of texts referring to one another in the infinite web of intertextuality, but as *documents* through which are constituted central categories of individuality in our modern life. He does not revert to the preformalist image of the critic who comments on his world. He does not ask how works represent or reflect the societies of an age or resolve its fundamental contradictions. Rather he asks how, in their forms as well as in their topics, arts figure within a configuration of other kinds of documents to constitute a political reality. More precisely, he attempts to specify the documents and the politics that have made of our own subjective identities a central problem in our literature and art—a project which the old thesis that the "subject is constituted in language" both suggested and obscured.

One might regard Foucault's more recent work as a complex political reelaboration of his '60s theme that "the psychological dimension in our culture is the negation of epic perceptions." The psychological dimension in our art and literature would include not simply the institution of authorship, and the obligation of authors to ferret out and reveal their innermost secrets, but also a preoccupation with the ugly little details of ordinary life, an importance ascribed to familial relations and their disturbances, an obsession with the crime or deviance that may be lurking inside us, and the whole issue of *secrets* as metaphors of the human heart and of the incompleteness of self-knowledge. His central question is how. How has the "psychological dimension" been put into discourse and how has there arisen an obligation to turn inward to discover the truth? Foucault's hero is now not Sade but Diderot—specifically Diderot's *Les bijoux indiscrets*, an erotic farce from the heart of the Enlightenment in which men in learned societies explain the power of the "sex" of women to speak, not knowing it has been incited by the magic ring of the Sultan (who represents the French monarch).

Discipline and Punish explores our modern psychologizing individualization in terms of "disciplines." Disciplines *are* individualizing classifications of populations (attention is given to each and every member of a population individually so as to enable individual prediction or intervention); they introduce our modern politics

> . . . to substitute for a power manifested through the brilliance of those who exercise it, a power that insidiously objectifies those on whom it is applied; to form a knowledge about these individuals rather than to deploy the ostentatious signs of sovereignty.[62]

The transition from epic literature is part of this change in the "modality of power." Procedures such as commemorative rituals and glorifications of sovereignty are replaced by documents like case studies, dossiers, and standardized examinations.[63] Instead of sanctifying heroes, the focus is on the internal sources of ordinary behavior and on its deviation from norms. Thus,

> . . . if from the early Middle Ages to the present day the "adventure" is an account of individuality, the passage from the epic to the novel, from the noble deed to the secret singularity, from long exiles to the internal search for childhood, from combats to phantasies, it is also inscribed in the formation of a disciplinary society. The adventure of our childhood no longer finds expression in *'le bon petit Henri,'* but in the misfortunes of "little Hans." The *Romance of the Rose* is written today by Mary Barnes; in the place of Lancelot, we have Judge Schreber.[64]

The History of Sexuality enlarges this analysis of how documents that focus on the exemplary deeds and laws of great men give way to documents that focus on the internal or secret desires of ordinary individuals. Confession, Foucault conjectures, is at the heart of it. There are the documents of avowal: "interrogations, consultations, autobiographical narratives, letters . . . re-

62. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, Pantheon Books, 1977, p. 220.

63. Foucault differs from the *Annales* historians in using documents not to make inferences about demographic trends or price cycles, for example, but about the ways they themselves constitute a political reality, in this case the power to individualize. In his classic defense of quantitative methodology in history ("L'histoire quantitative," *Annales E. S. C.*, vol. xxvi, no. 1 [1971]), François Furet notes in passing that there is such a politics in documentation, so that, for example, "the difference between the number of peasant uprisings under Henry II and Louis XIII may reflect first and foremost the progress of monarchical civilization." Foucault would conduct research into the administrative sources about uprisings in France not in order to reconstitute the uprisings themselves but to analyze the politics of dealing with them, and hence "the progress of monarchical civilization." On Foucault's divergence from the *Annales* historians, see Michelle Perrot, ed., *L'impossible prison*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1980; and my "The Story of Foucault's History."

64. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 193.

corded, transcribed, assembled into dossiers, published and commented on."[65] Through them we move from an epic to a modern literature:

> We have passed from a pleasure to be recounted and heard, centering on the heroic or marvelous narration of "trials" of bravery or sainthood to a literature ordered according to the infinite task of extracting from the depths of oneself, in between the words, a truth which the very form of confession [*aveu*] holds out like a shimmering mirage. . . . [66]

It is a change in forms (for example, in narrative structures), in topics (for example, in the stress on the details of ordinary life and on the family), in attitudes of reception (inwardness and "absorption") as well as in dissemination (printing, publishing, authorship, and so on). Sade is no longer the first to demonstrate that desire escapes representation in discourse, but, by "projecting the seventeenth-century pastoral into literature,"[67] he helps to constitute desire as something mysterious and internal that must be sought through meticulous procedures. Freud marks no departure or "rupture." There may be a similarity between literary or rhetorical forms and analytic techniques, and it may be true that both are concerned with the same kind of "truth" about ourselves. But it is just in this respect that both may be said to have roots in the same kinds of procedures of confession. *The Interpretation of Dreams* might stand as an emblem. It is, after all, an autobiography and a confession (since Freud's own dreams are at issue, even his dreams about the sacrifices he must make to science in analyzing his own dreams). Yet, in it, no attention is paid to dreams of actual sexual *acts* (as in premodern books on dream interpretation), while the secret truth of dreams is always to be found in those internalized deviant infantile sexual desires which only the laborious techniques of self-examination can uncover.

"Modern sexuality from Sade to Freud," Foucault wrote in the '60s.[68] In the '70s this had become for him a sexuality not of transgression but of confession, not of "expenditure" but of coersive fixing of identities. Thus it would be rhapsodical or illusory to think that the "transgressions" of modernist writing were subverting all individualization. For individualization is not a "literary" matter of representation in language, but a complex political reality no linguistic play can dispel. This realization was an event in Foucault's own "autobiography," indeed, one that led him to see his theoretical work *as* autobiographical:

> Each time I have attempted to do theoretical work, it has been on the

65. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, New York, Vintage Books, 1978, p. 73.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
68. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, p. 29.

> basis of elements from my experience—always in relation to processes that I saw taking place around me. It is in fact because I thought I recognized something cracked, dully jarring, or disfunctioning in things I saw, in the institutions with which I dealt, in my relations with others, that I undertook a particular piece of work, several fragments of an autobiography.[69]

Such "autobiography" is the reverse of self-expression or confession. It is an analysis of what in one's modernity (the processes going on around one) fixes one's identity, an analysis of the modern politics of individualization.

Documents

Today it is neo-conservatives such as Hilton Kramer who most emphatically question the association, widespread in the '60s, between formal experimentation and "adversary culture"; they propose to return to the old "criterion" of sound aesthetic judgment to prevent such work from ever again being associated with adversary attitudes.

In presenting Foucault as critical of the "formalism" of the association between avant-garde writing and Left politics in the '60s, I am suggesting that his work contains a different assessment of a similar state of affairs: it is not that modernist culture adopted an adversary stance, but that that stance was too "literary," too impregnated with avant-gardist pretensions, and too easily prey to aspirations to total change to be an intelligent, effective, "specific" opposition.[70]

It seems clear that the divorce of modernism from both formalist criticism and Left political aspiration is one of the main sources of our historicizing moment in which "post-" and "neo-" qualify all our "isms," a moment of great pastiche, when, rather in the manner of Cervantes, arts again become "self-reflexive"—the "neo-expressionists" a sort of mad Quixotic redoubling of the heroism of artists in an age of the modernist sublime. When the "transgressions" of the modernist sublime become politically futile, when the arts are

69. Michel Foucault, "Est-il donc important de penser?" *Libération* (Paris), May 30–31, 1981.

70. Alan Sheridan reports that, though Foucault's *Maladie mentale* of 1954 still contains a Marxist analysis of madness, Foucault had quit the Communist party in 1951 (see *Michel Foucault: The Will to Know*, New York, Tavistock, 1980, p. 5). The events of 1956 in Hungary would have caused Foucault and many members of the intellectual Left in France definitively to disown the party and to begin their questioning of Marxism, a questioning which intensified during the 1970s. (This corresponds to Foucault's own remarks about the discussion of the Lysenko affair in the 1977 interview cited above.) In my "The Story of Foucault's History," I argue that Foucault's historical works cause a dilemma for his Left political commitments, a dilemma which became more pronounced in the 1970s. It is during this period that the leftist associations of avant-garde literary culture no longer seemed defensible. I suspect that Sheridan's discussion of Foucault's Marxism originated in Foucault's own preoccupations during the past decade with his earlier Marxism; they, too, are part of his "autobiography."

divorced from the political and intellectual culture that once supported them, one possible reaction is for artists to reassert their "heroism," but with no capacity to invent new forms to do so. The result is a parody of self-expression, precisely the opposite of Foucault's "autobiography."

It is in pursuing the question of *how* have been "constituted" even our most "inward," even our "unrepresentable" experiences—the very experiences Freudians told us we had to discover or release—that Foucault participates in this moment. His is a sensibility of the *realism of documents*, shown in his enormous fascination with "discovering" and reading the tortuous detail of technocratic documentation, his fascination with procedures like the *lettre de cachet*, through which the secrets of the disorder of families were confessed to the figure of the king in extralegal privacy—secrets whose figures and topics recur in the painting of Greuze, Chardin, and Fragonard.[71] An artificially pure case of Foucault's realism of documents is found in *La vie des hommes infâmes*[72]—brief accounts of the lives of real but otherwise completely anonymous rogues, which Foucault extracted from various police and administrative sources, such as the *lettres de cachet*. For, unlike the *fama* of popular heroes, *all* that is known about such lives comes in effect from sources concerned to categorize and suppress them. For Foucault, such documents contain a secret—the secret of how the conceptual geography of our "real" lives and family problems have been constituted. And that, he finds, is a secret of our art and literature as well.

As a critical category and a genre, realism was the bane of *la nouvelle critique*—a sort of zero-degree of the denial of writing. But Foucault's realism of documents is not a taste for realism *in* art. Rather it is a taste for the way arts participate in techniques that constitute what is taken to be "real"; it is a taste for the "politics of the real."

Hence, perhaps, an affinity with photography that derives from the central fact noted by Barthes in his analysis of the "photographic message" in the '60s: the causal relation between object and photo in which is rooted the way photographs establish facts, invade privacy, or provide the envy of glamor; the complex of legal and moral questions about one's photographable "image"; and, of course, the special relation of photographs to death, which was to acquire such poignant significance for Barthes. Perhaps what is important is not the reproducibility of the photograph but the "documentary" character by which it contributes to a "politics of the real," and not the way it contrasts with an "inwardness" of an earlier "auratic" art or its survival in modernism—for inwardness, too, is only a political reality the documentary sources of which it now seems important to recover.

71. Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, eds., *Le désordre des familles*, Paris, Gallimard, 1982.
72. Michel Foucault, ed., *La vie des hommes infâmes*, Paris, 1977.

There is little today that resembles the unity of art and critical thought that constituted the avant-gardist culture of modernism. Foucault's work is one--nonconservative—direction the ends of modernism are taking today.

The Rivière Beast, or the Unfinished Trial of the Creature Who Tortured Birds and Frogs

I, Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister, and my brother . . . , A Case of Parricide in the 19th Century, *edited by Michel Foucault, translated by Frank Jellinek, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1982.*

JEAN-MARIE ALLIUME

If in the annals of memory,
We inscribe the names of great warriors,
We also record the dread names
Of some of history's villains;
That of young Pierre Rivière,
Whose heinous deeds I shall recount,
Abhorrent to all living souls,
Will forever be set down.[1]

The triple murders committed on June 3, 1835, by Pierre Rivière might perhaps never have become a cause célèbre within the confines of a legal institution solely directed toward the repression of crime. It was incumbent on the judges of such an institution to establish the material nature of the crime and to give it a name. It also fell to them to find the perpetrator and to draw up the indictment calling for trial. The jury had only to convict the accused, and then pronounce sentence as called for in the penal code. Execution of the sentence, which was inevitable, would constitute the logical conclusion of this imaginary process, whose sole objective and concern was the automatic enforcement of legal punishment.

The judiciary apparatus formed in France on the ruins of the ancien régime was not actuated by so rudimentary a penal philosophy. It had lost the taste for those vengeful punishments formerly unleashed by kings in total indifference to the political consequences of spectacles of horror. The new legal system aimed to accomplish more than the mobilization of the symbols of power for the production of salutary terror. In the economy of punishment con-

1. The first stanza of a popular ballad from a two-penny broadsheet telling of the crime, in *Moi, Pierre Rivière*, Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1973, p. 227.

I wish to thank Anne Lovell for her suggestions and criticism, which played an important part in the writing of this essay.

structed during the period of the Revolution, the Empire, and the Restoration, the least emphasized aspect is the punishment of crime.

Under these different regimes, which had a common hatred of the old despotism, a grandiose utopia gradually took form. Power should no longer be absolute in principle, but should become so in effect. And, on the legal level, today's crime should serve to prevent tomorrow's; no longer strike down the one who defies the king, but annihilate the lineage of crime. Instead of blind repression, eradication.

From this point of view it obviously becomes essential to probe into the soul of the person who has placed himself beyond the law. A new set of tasks soon becomes imperative: the uncovering of the intimate thoughts of the accused; the evaluation of their importance; the weighing of the possible influence of circumstances; the determination of degrees of moral discernment, motivation; and, more generally, the taking into account of the entire life of the accused. The penal utopia of the bourgeois order requires certainty and truth concerning the soul's "secret incentives."[2]

In Pierre Rivière's case, neither the ability to understand the significance of the action nor motivation can be established with certainty, and the doubt arising as to the parricide's moral state consequently produces hesitation. In the new system of punishment, not knowing who Pierre Rivière is is the same as not knowing what to do about him. The young Norman peasant is a problem because of what he may represent, an irreducible principle of disorder—the limit of penal efficacy.

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The Rivière dossier was discovered by chance in the early 1970s by a group of sociologists, historians, and jurists who, in a seminar at the Collège de France directed by Michel Foucault, were conducting a research program on the relationship between psychiatry and the penal justice system. As Foucault explains in the book's introduction, the Rivière affair differs in at least three ways from the numerous occurrences of parricide at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Although barely able to read and write and considered in his village to be an idiot, the accused wrote a long statement recounting in detail the events of his life and the circumstances of the crime. Astonishing as a document, the memoir had other unexpected results. It was expected to illuminate the man and his actions, but instead it compounded the problem. The judges believed

2. Concerning the subject of penality at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, to which I will refer in the course of this essay, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, Pantheon Books, 1977, Part Two, Chapters 1 and 2.

the account would contribute to a just, effective decision. In fact, the jurors were hamstrung by it.

The second important aspect of this case is the vast amount and variety of evidence available. Almost all of the documents were retained by their authors: reports of officials—from humble cantonal judge to minister of justice—testimonials by villagers, newspaper articles, letters from eminent local persons to the press, and so on. In reading through these many texts we begin to glimpse the often poorly understood mechanism of legal action. What's more, we come to appreciate the impact of parricide on groups, institutions, and individuals. Differences and stakes crop up; opinions surface and reveal various aspects of French society.

The Rivière dossier also includes three important medical documents, which in fact emanate from three distinct levels of the medical system, as divergent in their manners of perceiving and analyzing the monstrousness of the crime as in their conclusions: the report of a country doctor, the statement of a physician in charge of a mental asylum, and an opinion signed by some of the leading figures in psychiatric and forensic medicine—Esquirol, Marc, Leuret, Orfila, and others; in other words, three strategic, discursive views that characterize three ways of conceiving the rights and limitations of the psychiatrization of crime.

The documents in the dossier are supplemented by the seven articles written by the members of the seminar. The articles vary considerably in inspiration and method, constituting a collection devoid of organic unity and disconcerting in its variety. The variety, however, is important. To our knowledge it is the first time that an anonymous event previously lost from sight has been so painstakingly and effectively submitted to analysis. None of the complexity of the case—motivation, oppositions, tactics—has been left out. Furthermore, focus on detail is devoid here of the shortcomings it often entails. The various critical articles combine to expose the major opposing points of view and forces prevailing in the two institutions—law and psychiatry—that disputed the heinous crime for twenty years. Throughout this volume there has been a constant desire to establish a link between the miniscule scale of the Norman tragedy and the vast legal and governmental system. The Rivière affair is a fragment of history that reflects, through these articles, the conflictual relationship established during the Revolution between the power to punish and the knowledge of the soul.

*

There is one tempting reading of this terrible crime. It can be interpreted, purely and simply, as a failure of law and a victory for psychiatry. In this light, the outcome of the trial becomes the ultimate consequence of a new relationship of forces: the sanctioning of the hegemony of medical specialists and, in its

wider implications, the harbinger of the modalities of modern psychiatric treatment—coming to grips with abnormality and situating it within the system of confinement.

From this perspective the reasons for the legal failure are clear. Justice will falter when the bizarre behavior displayed by the accused throughout his life is revealed. The pathological entity is antecedent to the political problem of punishment. It had only to be recognized. Which explains psychiatry's easy victory. It could only stake out territory in a domain which had forever and rightfully belonged to it. And the function of forensic medicine? To extend the matrices of repression into an area the penal system could never have dealt with effectively.

In a certain way, Pierre Rivière provides a very clear illustration of this process. We shall see that the strategy of medical specialists is, in fact, to replace punishment with psychiatric confinement. It is, after all, their declared objective: spare the innocent, but lock them up as securely as if they were actually imprisoned. From this point of view, there is no basic difference between the critical concept of psychiatry and the fiction with which medical specialists regale one another. Suffice it to denounce what is claimed by right.

But as close as the Rivière affair may be to our notion of the historic role of psychiatry, it has other aspects that allow for a different interpretation, on the one hand, because of the problems created by a substitution strategy that consists solely of annexing abnormality; on the other hand, because beyond all the arguments, we can glimpse the elements of a second line of psychiatrization that will later play, in the penal area, a much more important role than the first.

In order to understand what this parricide entails, we must first consider the central event to which everything else is peripheral: the inability of the penal system to come to grips with Pierre Rivière. What upsets us about the man at the conclusion of his trial is not his insanity, for that is dubious. It is that the trial did not result in a decision and that the system of justice shifted the burden of its responsibilities onto the king. At this juncture, Pierre Rivière is less a threatening pathological entity than he is an individual before whom authority declares itself impotent. The problem is not medical, it is legal.

Consider the unusual nature of the trial. A bare majority of the jury had no sooner handed down the death sentence than a greater majority—including therefore some of those same jurors who had called for the death penalty—moved to submit a plea for mercy, requesting the sentence to be commuted to life imprisonment. It suddenly seemed that the condemned man did not deserve the punishment that had been meted out to him.

What is strange about this sudden revulsion for the death penalty—and what finally made the case notorious—is that it followed upon a double reversal. The judgment of guilt was overturned after both the plea of insanity and the claim of extenuating circumstances had already been set aside. The legal

machinery seemed to be creating the seeds of its own impotence. Indeed, Pierre Rivière would have inspired confidence if he had obviously been insane. The judges' uncertainty was, however, the result of the man's seeming neither a monster of moral perversion, an irresponsible madman, nor the victim of circumstances. Rivière was worse than insane, he was unidentifiable and incomprehensible. Why?

The answer is far from obvious. Indeed, we cannot help but be amazed that such an event should have taken place in 1835. Postrevolutionary lawmaking had set up a system designed to cover all types of wrongdoing. As for the penal code, its purpose was to identify the entire corpus of possible crimes, describe them, and assign a specific penalty to each. That is, in fact, a matter of principle; crime must know that the law has no lapses or weak spots.[3] From another perspective, the use of extenuating circumstances makes it possible to have an almost unlimited individualization of the penalties set forth in the code by allowing for a great variety of factors. Finally, the legislation with regard to insanity provided an opportunity to take administrative measures against those whose condition protects them from the rigors of the law. It goes without saying that this system was set up expressly to eliminate any uncertainty concerning the veracity of the culprit, and, consequently, to avoid any risk of indecision on the part of those whose duty it was to punish. In the Rivière case, however, the system did not function properly. There are two related questions that must be answered concerning this paralysis. Why can the crime not have its roots either in moral perversion, madness, or extenuating circumstances? And what caused the mechanism of power to break down—an obstacle external to it, or a contradiction inherent in it?

Self-interest and Example

When the first phase of the investigation had concluded, the charges hanging over Pierre Rivière were frankly overwhelming. The accused had admitted that he had acted with full knowledge of the significance of his actions. He admitted to having carefully planned the crime in advance. Furthermore, for a month after committing the murders, Rivière had eluded the authorities by hiding in the woods. Arrested and interrogated, he feigned insanity. Flight and pretense, two facts that constitute additional proof of undiminished moral responsibility. Pierre Rivière therefore knew what he was doing.

Numerous witnesses were interrogated in turn; they testified to his cruelty as a child, to the pleasure he took in crucifying living birds and frogs and in terrorizing his brother. And this cruelty was evidently deeply rooted in the subject's character if we admit other evidence—as we must—for example,

3. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 98.

statements of witnesses concerning his total lack of emotion when describing his heinous crime.

According to the reasoning of the public prosecutor, the bizarre, the extreme, the abnormal are no extenuation of guilt. Quite the contrary. They are just so many additional factors that aggravate the crime.[4] In short, all the conditions necessary for imposition of the death sentence are present. All except one.

Because the essential element is obviously missing from this portrait of moral perversion: a motive, a real or imaginary interest connected in some way with the decision to murder. There is indeed a motive, but clearly it is not the sort to establish the criminality of the act. "I shall tell the truth, I did it to help my father out of his difficulties. I wished to deliver him from an evil woman who had plagued him continually ever since she became his wife, who was ruining him, who was driving him to such despair that he was sometimes tempted to commit suicide. I killed my sister Victoire because she took my mother's part. I killed my brother by reason of his love for my mother and my sister."[5]

The prosecution wavered. Rivière was to confirm these remarks in his memoir, a statement that is woefully devoid of any hint of motivation. Granted: "Rivière cannot be classified in the categories of ordinary criminals. He was not driven by any of the motives which usually lead to crime; he harbored no personal grudge against any of his victims."[6]

Insofar as Rivière was only the murderer of his mother, his bizarre behavior indicts him. It does undoubtedly indicate some abnormality, but it is a moral abnormality, and there is predisposition to crime. The idea that Pierre Rivière could have been insane was not a primary consideration, at least not in the minds of the judges. What was of interest was not the strange behavior of a person who spoke in obscurities. The true insanity of the accused consisted more seriously in the fact that his motives did not emerge from any calculated interest. This was the reason for the prosecutor's scruple: Rivière was perceived primarily, from a legal point of view, as being pathologically abnormal. For the legal system of the period this represented a much greater threat than insanity.

This is because the utopia of the bourgeois order, on the legal level, only worked with regard to those motivated by self-interest. So it is possible to conceive of a legal system that can be absolute in its effect, because the crime of self-interest is one that can always be dealt with. The purported exemplary value of punishment and its usefulness are based on these considerations. The punishment represents the disadvantage set up in advance as a deterrent to the

4. Peculiarities of behavior that could not be made part of the indictment were simply forgotten. See Philippe Riot, "The Parallel Lives of Pierre Rivière," in *Pierre Rivière*, pp. 229–250.
5. *Pierre Rivière*, "First Interrogation of Pierre Rivière," pp. 23–34.
6. *Pierre Rivière*, "Report to His Majesty the King by the Minister of Justice," p. 168.

possible advantage to a future criminal of his crime.[7] Thus we have the paradox of a penalty that purports to be the basis of an unshakable order: the way in which it codifies its efficacy causes every transgression that is free of calculation to fall outside its purview. In the case of Pierre Rivière, therefore, it contemplates what is beyond the law—not because the condemned might embody some pathological essence, as medical humanism maintained, but because he embodies a juridico-moral monstrosity that reflects a political possibility. If the Pierre Rivières of the future are indifferent to calculated self-interest, the sentence passed on the first of them will have had no dissuasive impact at all. It will not serve as an example, and it will therefore be totally useless.

Even today the symbol of psychiatrization is still a part of the advance of medicine, and takes on the form of a protest. The doctor might tell the judge, "That person is crazy; he shouldn't be punished." A dream scenario. In reality, the discourse and the characters would be completely different. The judge would be the one who would wonder and ask, "It's impossible to punish him. . . . He must be insane, mustn't he?"

Insane, but not yet a lunatic. It is more a question of a "philosophical" insanity that accompanies the legal monstrousness evidenced by the lack of motive. What is insane about Rivière and makes one fear that he is radically incapable of being punished is that he recognized the possibility of his death in advance. Punishment did not deter, it became a part of the crime—a necessary sacrifice, like that of the hero of old who died for king or country. "I said to myself: these people died to uphold the cause of a man whom they did not know and who did not know them either, who had never given them a thought; while I, I would be dying to deliver a man who loves and cherishes me."[8] Such motives, which made the judge suspect some kind of instability, ought not be put down to the oddness of a disordered person. As Foucault points out,[9] Rivière's statement is organized in the same way as are the stories of crimes we find in contemporary broadsides and pamphlets. It was these stories that over a period of many years had raised everyday crime to the level of fiction, bringing together in the same discursive space murderers and soldiers, assassins and generals of the empire. No doubt to draw the contrast between them like night and day, to moralize and edify. But this requires setting up a system of equivalencies that will enable the ambiguities and equivocations to bounce back and forth between them. Pierre Rivière actually brought glory and infamy together by using the words that differentiate one from the other. His philosophical insanity is grounded in this miniscule diversion of a discourse of power, whose meaning had only to be inverted in order to construct a plea in

7. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 94.
8. *Pierre Rivière*, "Memoir," p. 105.
9. *Pierre Rivière*, "Tales of Murder," pp. 203–204.

favor of murder. Another reason for believing the insanity the legal system is up against is, in the first place, "political."

But things change, and with them the initial perception of the parricide. The relevance of Rivière's mental aberrations derives its importance from the charges lodged after the first round of investigations. The memoir then made it possible to interpret the crime in two new ways: as an act of insanity or as a combination of circumstances.

The Risk of Liberty

The charge of insanity introduces a dual problem in relation to the contradiction that exists between the all-inclusive political aim of the legal body and the legal definition of insanity.

In fact, whereas the lack of personal interest in the perpetration of a crime impels judges to consider the possibility of insanity, the law calls upon them to reach a judgment of complete culpability. The law holds that insanity can exist only in cases involving acts reflecting "unsound mind" or passion. Neither of these applies in the Rivière case. His intelligence excludes "unsound mind," and his premeditation makes impossible a plea of passion.

Nevertheless, was it the desire to follow the letter of the law that explains the jury's refusal to be guided by the conclusions of the physician testifying for the defense when he stated that Rivière was the victim of hereditary insanity? It is unlikely. The motives set down by the jurors in their appeal for clemency justify that assumption: "We realize that all the ills he suffered in the person of his father, whom he cherished to the extent of sacrificing himself for him, must have powerfully contributed to the disturbance and derangement of his mental faculties, which were never wholly sound."[10] A broad interpretation of the law would have enabled them to turn the parricide over to the psychiatrists.

In the context of the period, however, psychiatrization would have been an unsatisfying alternative. Using the argument of insanity in 1835 would have been tantamount to transforming, totally and irrevocably, crime into illness. It would have separated the perpetrator of the crime from his legal fate and set him on a therapeutic course with its own logic. Declared insane, Rivière would have been exempt from any punishment whatsoever and confined to a mental asylum. And this would have been a hazardous step, for the laws of the period did not stipulate the length of such confinement. Shouldn't it depend on the nature and development of the disease? And shouldn't the confinement logically be controlled by therapeutic principles? Thus, the possibility of some future release could not be ruled out. There was still—albeit for only a few more years—a gulf between psychiatry and the legal system; the two institutions were not compatible. Punishment and psychiatrization: two solutions

10. *Pierre Rivière*, "Report to His Majesty the King," pp. 166–167.

which, in 1835, continued to be, within the legal system, mutually exclusive. Which is exactly what the legal system cannot tolerate. For if the moral state of the parricide gives rise to the most contradictory opinions, everyone was in agreement on at least one point: Pierre Rivière had to be permanently isolated from society. The contradiction of principle that exists between the requirements of the penal system and confinement is not completely reflected in the facts, however. In most cases psychiatrists will claim jurisdiction and demand to exercise the right to transform therapeutic treatment into quasi-criminal confinement. Nothing better demonstrates the desire to effect such a realignment than the conclusion reached by Vastel, the doctor for the defendant. "Society is therefore entitled to demand, not the punishment of this wretched man, since there can be no culpability in the absence of mental freedom, but his restraint and confinement by administrative process as the only means of having an easy mind about what this madman may do in the future."[11] Although good will obviously exists, it has not yet been translated into law, and it is probable that in the eyes of the jury the doctor's statement would not carry the same weight as some legal guarantee. The psychiatric establishment is too "medical" for it to be allowed to take total responsibility for the criminally insane.

What is generally considered the essential aspect of modern psychiatry, from the nineteenth century to our own day, vis-à-vis punishment—the medicalization of crime—is exactly what the legal system proscribes. The abnormal must remain within the competence of the legal system.

As for Doctor Vastel, if his language is indeed an attempt to cover the crime with the myriad signs of insanity, the administrative measure he suggests depends on an entirely contrary reasoning. The asylum doctor is explicitly suggesting a de-medicalization of confinement.

Extreme Action

We concede that, in the last analysis at least, Pierre Rivière was not judged guilty in the first degree. We can also appreciate hesitation to declare him insane. On the other hand, it is difficult to understand why the jurors did not consider themselves bound to give him the benefit of extenuating circumstances. Their attitude is surprising for at least three reasons. First, both guilt and insanity having been rejected, the refusal to consider extenuating circumstances precipitated a legal crisis. Second, the trial occurred after the adoption of the reform of 1832, in which a formula for broadening the categories of extenuating circumstances to include the entire corpus of criminal acts was conceived as a way to avoid indecisive situations and their political repercussions. And finally, the formula was widely used, if we are to judge from its suc-

11. *Pierre Rivière*, "Medical Opinion by Dr. Vastel," p. 135.

cess beginning with the first year it was put into effect in 1833. The evolution of punishment toward a more indulgent attitude obviously acted in Rivière's favor.

Furthermore, extenuating circumstances led to an optimal political solution in the Rivière case. Recourse to them went hand in hand with life imprisonment—exactly what the jurors sought to obtain by their appeal for clemency.

Concerning this paradox, two of the contributors to the book refer to the unusual political circumstances that existed in 1835.[12] Louis-Philippe and his clique had just been made the objects of an assassination attempt. The prosecutor's investigation into the Fieschi affair—from the name of its chief conspirator—was being conducted at the same time as the Rivière case. The coincidence of the two events would have passed unnoticed had it not been that thinking with regard to imprisonment, as well as the code, was attempting to draw the two types of crime closer together by putting regicide and parricide on an equal footing. Under those circumstances, a gesture of clemency toward the parricide, with Fieschi and his accomplices not yet convicted, would have been a highly provocative step. It may have seemed preferable to let the king decide whether or not to grant a pardon.

Yet, as solid and powerful as the imagined unity between regicide and parricide may be, the frequency with which extenuating circumstances were brought into play after 1833 reveals that juries were hardly concerned with speculative equivalencies. Even if it were possible to prove that the assassination attempt against Louis-Philippe precipitated Pierre Rivière's death sentence, it does not follow that the unimportant Norman peasant would have benefited from the court's mercy had the attempted regicide not occurred. There is also reason to suppose that the equivocal behavior of the jury reflected its feeling that it was impossible to determine with certainty the role played in the crime by circumstances.

In order for the term *extenuating circumstances* to be applied to a given group of events, they must bear a certain relationship to the offence or crime. There should be a resemblance at least between the facts under consideration and the gravity of the act. In the case of Pierre Rivière, extenuation of the criminally heinous act would suppose that a minimal degree of monstrousness should be discernible in the circumstances. For almost every criminal, his life must have been somewhat exceptional for clemency to be justified. And it does seem that the exceptional is notably absent from Rivière's biography.

The life of the accused is projected against what we might call a backdrop of perpetual drama. Rivière's father was subjected almost continuously to the

12. Patricia Moulin, "Extenuating Circumstances," and Blandine Barret-Kriegel, "Regicide and Parricide."

odious nagging of a wife whom the entire village knew to be a tyrant. The woman the young man killed was not only his mother; she was a figure in society as well, someone who had created havoc in the heart of the village community,[13] someone who had risked organizing her entire life in defense of her "well-being." We are in the Napoleonic era of contracts and property. But in this game of sovereign subjects and property owners, Madame Rivière imposed extreme rules, and the prospect of the least profit led her into extreme confrontations. Contested contracts, wild accusations, constant appeals to the courts, pressures brought to bear, petty blackmail—in such ways the mother saluted the property-owning peasant. What was united in the pantheon of bourgeois values, she divided; she threatened the family in order to increase its wealth.

There is, however, a gulf between the hatefulness of the mother and the monstrousness of the son; it is revealed when the child finally begins to wonder if such a woman really deserves to live. He clearly doubted that she did. "I wholly forgot the principles which should have made me respect my mother and my sister and my brother, I regarded my father as being in the power of mad dogs or barbarians. . . ."[14]

After hearing the child's extravagant thoughts, how can one not flinch at the idea of extenuating circumstances? How is it possible not to see that the utter monstrosity inherent in the action continually reflects back upon its author, and upon him alone? The horror of his motivations rules out the possibility of mercy. The third possible solution from a judicial point of view is therefore inadmissible.

There is, however, another mystery in this refusal to compromise. Why would an institution whose purpose to punish is unquestionable be brought up short by something as insubstantial as uncertainty? We may, of course, suspect the twofold fear at the source of this indecision: fear of punishing the innocent and exonerating the guilty. No one wants to take a risk, whether on the side of leniency or on the side of rigor. It is time to ask what is really at stake politically in these hesitations. For, in the end, didn't political prudence require opting for strictness in the face of uncertainty? And why does justice seem to fear the death of the parricide?

Severity and Rigor

We have up to this point considered only the threat that the parricide, because unpunishable, poses to the entire social order. There is, in fact, another threat, indirect but more precise, which hangs over the very operation of penal justice itself.

13. *Pierre Rivière*, "The Animal, the Madman, and Death," Jean-Pierre Peter, Jeanne Favret.
14. *Pierre Rivière*, "Memoir," p. 105.

Until 1832 legal practice was in principle governed by the Napoleonic Penal Code of 1810. But in reality during the Empire there was always a considerable distance between the severity of punishments set forth in this code and the sentences actually handed down by juries. There was a sort of systematic resistance among jurors, or, in any case, a massive intractability, which took the form of innumerable judgments of clemency. So much so that from 1826 to 1830, Blandine Barret-Kriegel tells us,[15] the rate of jury acquittals stood at thirty-two percent, and many of these were simply a means of avoiding sentencing the accused to the overly severe punishments provided for in the code. Another tactic frequently used to achieve the same end was to change the name of the punishment.

Such practices represent much more than a mere rebellion. They are, in fact, tantamount to an inquiry into the very principles of the postrevolutionary penal utopia. In order to have a penal system that can prevent future transgressions no crime can be unpunishable. Punishment must therefore be inevitable, and this in turn presupposes that juries carry out their function with absolute firmness. From this point of view, constant intractability is a kind of perversion of the punitive strategy and is thus unacceptable.

Yet it is far from being insurmountable. It simply indicates the fallacy of the argument, so popular in certain legal circles, which holds that the rigor of justice should be directly and exclusively a reflection of the severity of the laws. It suggests that in fact severity is an obstacle to repression.

Undoubtedly, as Foucault demonstrates in *Discipline and Punish*, this criticism is not new. By the end of the eighteenth century it was already an idea that reform jurists were using against the legal system of the monarchy: demonstrations of royal violence caused the proliferation of inadmissible judgments of clemency.[16] There was a need to humanize punishment. But decreasing the level of severity is a slow process. Grant clemency, of course, but as seldom as possible. And perhaps it can be hoped that every new concession may be the last. The failure of the Napoleonic legal code actually proves a lack of daring.

Whence the reform of the penal code promulgated in 1832. Compared to the old code, there were three important changes. The vestiges of physical torture were eliminated. The number of crimes for which the death penalty was required was reduced. And, as we have seen, extenuating circumstances were made applicable to all crimes.

The principle underlying this new indulgence is explicitly stated by the drafter of the amended code. "The idea has been to make penalties severe, but more equal and more certain and to balance too great a chance of impunity

15. *Pierre Rivière*, "Regicide and Parricide," p. 225.
16. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 79.

with a modicum of indulgence."[17] To inscribe leniency into the law, to codify it, in order in fact the better to suppress it.

Without having fully achieved its goal, this tactic proved to be effective. In 1840, acquittals fell to twenty-eight percent of all cases. They constituted no more than seventeen percent in 1880.[18] By 1835, however, the time had not yet clearly borne out the initial successes of the reform, and the Rivière affair inevitably caused some tremors. It brought with it a recurrence of a radical state of indecision that extenuating circumstances had been designed to eliminate. Unable to decide in favor of extenuating circumstances, the men who judged Pierre Rivière found themselves faced with the dangerous alternative that had confronted juries before 1832: execute or set free. Either an acquittal that might very well be counter to the interests of society, or an execution whose effect, in the words of the presiding judge of the assize court, "will only be undesirable."[19] Two contrary but politically complementary extremes. For the "undesirable effect" of Rivière's eventual execution could subsequently influence juries faced with similar situations to hand down undeserved acquittals. It was therefore extremely important not to punish the parricide unduly.

Crime as Insanity

In 1835 heinous crime was already familiar to medical specialists. Psychiatrists had gradually developed a notion to explain those crimes lacking motive or reason: monomania. The purpose? To plumb the depths of heinous crimes, to tame them. The objective? To differentiate clearly criminal atrocity from monomaniacal homicide. To have the means to detect violence before it breaks out. To forestall disorder.

The monomaniac, it was held, is indistinguishable in appearance from a normal person. He feels, reasons, thinks, and behaves like anyone else except for one thing—his secret delusion. Which means that from the outset the monomaniac is more dangerous than the person who is certifiably insane. For the madness of the insane is readily perceived by everyone; it is a self-advertising madness. Monomania is quite the opposite. The delusion it harbors is not necessarily visible to the unpracticed eye. It is a delusion which can strike out savagely at any time, but which does not make itself obvious. Thus an opposition emerges between the political need for control and prevention and the medical prognosis of the pathological entity.

The contradiction is even more profound in the second form of monomania, which is characterized by a lapse of will, unlike the first form, in

17. *Pierre Rivière*, "Regicide and Parricide," pp. 224–225.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
19. *Pierre Rivière*, "Report by the Presiding Judge of the Assize Court to the Director of Criminal Affairs," p. 147.

which partial delusion allows for some hope of preventive treatment. The homicidal monomaniac need only have his will thwarted to be driven by an invincible force. Although this force compels him, it leaves his moral conscience and intellectual faculties intact. This line of argument, as Robert Castel points out, leads us to the notion that from a legal point of view insanity fits the crime. "Esquirol's great discovery, which he named monomania, had been to demonstrate—or believe he was demonstrating—that a certain type of crime was cogent evidence of madness, *in itself alone*, by its mere presence."[20]

This does not mean that the idea of "partial madness" was simply a notion suited to the moment, in response as it were to the disturbing rise in the number of heinous crimes. Pinel had stated this principle at the beginning of the nineteenth century when he described the insane as being "dominated by a species of instinctual frenzy, as if the affective faculties alone had been impaired."[21] Of course this idea was to gain increasing acceptance as time went on, codifying all the symptoms of fury.

What had been the tactic of the legal profession became the practice of doctors treating the insane. Nor was the suspicion of insanity based on any index of alienation. It was an insanity beyond pathology that existed only in a legal context. The doctor went no further. In the case of Henriette Cornier, who sawed off the head of a child entrusted to her care, the psychiatrist Marc maintained that the identifying sign of her insanity was the lack of motive "in the legal sense."[22] Whoever does not obey the principles of penal philosophy is insane.

In the land of evil, doctors of forensic medicine attempt to conquer a relatively small area. Not, as is often believed, the vast reaches of infra-judicial abnormality, but the enclave of major criminality whose contours—statute, clinical investigation, definition—are determined by the penal system. As for the discursive operation that underlies the strategic choice, far from being an extension of the concept of insanity, it is rather a kind of contraction of the traditional idea of insanity. Insanity retains all its violence, but now its powers no longer extend to all the faculties. A de-medicalized insanity is thus created. The concept of insanity is radically freed from its medical predicates. Instead of a medicalization of crime, there is a "legalization" of psychiatry.

The effort made by doctors of forensic medicine to adapt was to remain misunderstood. The doctrine of monomania stirred up a heated debate that reached its peak at the end of the 1820s. As Alexandre Fontana points out, it was criticized for its fatalism and its "materialism." It was perceived and de-

20. *Pierre Rivière*, "The Doctors and Judges," p. 259.
21. Philippe Pinel, *Traité médico-philosophique sur l'aliénation mentale*, second edition, Paris, 1809, pp. 155–156; cited by Robert Castel in *Pierre Rivière*, "The Doctors and Judges," p. 256, note 1.
22. *Consultation médico-légale pour H. Cornier*, 1826; cited by Alexandre Fontana in *Pierre Rivière*, "The Intermittences of Rationality," p. 272, note 2.

nounced as an invention of doctors who would ultimately use it to excuse crime. In a way, that is surprising, since the notion echoes the suspicion of the judges themselves. Moreover, it exactly corresponds to the object it describes. What was frightening about this notion? Why was this kind of psychiatrization rejected?

It is perhaps because the idea corresponds too closely to its object. Contemporary sources indicate that specialized medicine showed little interest in elaborating its etiology. Monomania is a clinical notion that is based entirely on the symptoms it describes. Therefore, the notion itself clearly becomes suspect when the symptoms, which are the sum total of the disease, are reduced to a single criminal act. If the illness consists solely of the crime, how can we be sure that its essence is not, precisely, its criminality? What is insanity deprived both of its clinical existence and of a recognized pathological basis?

And behind the theoretical problems lies the political problem. First hypothesis: monomania is an "invention of doctors." Therefore, the psychiatric confinement of monomaniacs is an incitement to crime. It deprives society of its only means of protection, the example of punishment. Or, second hypothesis: certain heinous crimes are, in fact, the acts of monomaniacs. But, since it is impossible to distinguish the criminal from the madman, the question of punishments once again arises in all its urgency. Finally, there is the problem inherent in discerning monomania. If monomania is invisible, as maintained, it is obviously an unavoidable danger, one against which the doctor is powerless. Such resignation is hardly acceptable for a political order that dreams of suppressing the tiniest germ of unrest. But neither is it any more satisfactory for an area of specialized medicine which, from the outset, made it clear that it had no intention of confining itself to caring for the sick, and declared itself ready to contribute to the organization of society itself.[23]

More generally, all criminal justice need do is effect a psychiatrization, which would entail substituting a "medical" diagnosis for a sentence. It does not want simply to change the ideological code. It has absolutely no need for further justification. It is in search of a new legal system, not some unproved embellishment.

Monomania and Insanity

Faced with the increasing hostility of judges and public opinion, medical specialists quickly adjusted the concept of monomania. In its extreme form, it had more to do with the medico-legal field than it did with the discourse of insanity. An attempt was made to integrate it into psychiatry. Nondelusional monomania was then abandoned in order to concentrate on homicidal mono-

23. See *Pierre Rivière*, "The Doctors and Judges," especially p. 265.

manias in which the criminal act had been preceded by at least the beginnings of an alteration of the mental faculties. It is at this very moment in the conflict that the Rivière affair occurred. At first sight the case of the parricide could very easily be adapted to the new outlook. Rivière's bizarre behavior made it possible to locate the lack of motive within the broader framework of insanity. It was unnecessary to continue to invoke the discredited idea of monomania; simple allusion sufficed. This was the thinking behind the official document that was signed by the founding fathers of specialized medicine. They believed they could escape from the thematic matrix of monomania. Which explains the tactical importance of the Rivière case.

First of all, they had to discount the diagnosis of the local country doctor, of that unenlightened individual who proved his inability to detect insanity by maintaining that the condition did not fall into "any of the main categories of madness." "As if," they added, "the categories established by nosographers were anything more than a method of classifying facts and thereby facilitating their study and that they do not have the slightest pretense to impose immutable boundaries on nature."[24] Since Rivière was not just another madman, they were able to set aside alienist discourse: the only way to discredit the local doctor.

But, since there was a reluctance to advance the notion of monomania, Rivière's pathology had to be inscribed within the clinical tradition. Like Vastel, the doctors in Paris had recourse to the extravagant behavior and the "aberrant motives" of the parricide in order to describe the nature of his insanity. Another obstacle. Just like the typical monomaniac, after committing his crime Pierre Rivière seemed to be in possession of all his faculties. There was only one way to overcome this obstacle: that was to mobilize de facto the thematic of monomania.

Did the memory of the condemned man mean that he was not insane? Nothing is more typical in cases of monomania. Did he show remorse after his crime? Again, exactly consistent with observations "in many mental defectives, especially homicidal monomaniacs and suicidal madmen who sometimes become calm and even rational again after accomplishing the act toward which they were impelled."[25]

Suddenly, all the effort made to reduce monomania to insanity was shown to be futile. For, in the end, what makes it possible to speak of homicidal monomania? Not the erratic behavior of childhood, since compared to that the crime is different in nature. The "ideas of crime" are thus the sole proof that when the deed was done it was done because of insanity. Rivière's insanity resided entirely in his crime; the two coincided. The failure of the specialists

24. *Pierre Rivière*, "Report by a Conference of Doctors in Paris on the Mental Condition of Pierre Rivière," p. 165.
25. *Ibid.*

plays a minor role, yet it was important because it demonstrated the impossibility of integrating into an alienist code the legal abnormality of the lack of motive "in the legal sense."

Contrary to other earlier expert opinions, however, the opinion on Rivière aroused no protests. There were two reasons for this. The first had to do simply with the man's strangeness; the second, and more interesting, with the advent a short time later of a method of psychiatry quite different from the one practiced at that time.

What saved expert opinion and preserved its credibility, on a basic level, was that it echoed the general perception of the condemned man, known in his village as "the Rivière beast." The specialists went along with that opinion, just as they had corroborated the judges' intuitions. This represents a considerable change, since in the 1820s psychiatrists frequently carried on their struggle in isolation.

Yet the calmness with which the medical opinion was received also has to do, paradoxically, with the fact that expert opinion was totally unimportant. Indeed, it conflicted with solutions that were emerging in the field of forensic medicine; but, precisely because those solutions would soon gain the upper hand, the anachronism of the doctors treating the insane did not create a problem. It didn't even merit a controversy.

Degrees of Determinism

To all appearances, the advances made by the doctors in Paris represent a break in psychiatric tradition, and reflect their discontent at the restrictions imposed on them by law. But the doctrinal disparity that appears between their discourse and that of the general practitioner cannot conceal the continuing existence of shared goals.

Esquirol believed that nothing was more important than to persuade his contemporaries of the possibility of a temporary loss of the faculties. This modern turn of mind is demonstrated by his notion of a state of temporary insanity without past or future. From this point of view the break with tradition is absolute. On another level, however, the Parisian specialists, too, are in the grip of the general practitioner's alternative. Either Pierre Rivière is insane, or he is of sound mind; the decision is either a medical one or a legal one. Not one of the three medical reports considers any other possibility. All of them agree that insanity obliterates liberty, that it puts a stop to the course of justice, that it excludes by definition the notion of guilt. That it declares innocence.

Now, in the Rivière affair, something totally different is at stake: a system that announces the imminent intervention of psychiatric modalities into the realm of penality, and which thus embodies true modernism in a much more precise way than do the progressive beliefs espoused by the doctors in Paris. To Esquirol and his colleagues, who unanimously declared Rivière insane, the

presiding judge of the assize court replied not with a contradiction but with a different question: "Since Rivière has been so diversely judged by conscientious and enlightened persons, there is reason to believe that there is something about him which ought to preclude his being regarded in the same way as other men guilty of equally atrocious actions; and if there are *degrees* of derangement of the mental faculties, may his crime not be ascribed to a state of momentary overexcitement induced by his father's misfortunes, a state which no doubt is not madness, but which nevertheless does not imply the full possession of reason, especially in the case of someone whose actions had at times appeared acts of aberration?"[26] Having achieved a high point in their evolution, the psychiatrists could only conceive of a temporary suspension of reason. The judge, heedless of the doctrinal problems he was creating, speaks of possible degrees of derangement.

The fact that an ordinary representative of the legal system should have summed up, in a few sentences uttered in passing, as it were, the function that was to devolve upon psychiatry in a few years justifies our thinking that the notion of restricting liberty was already extremely widespread, except, paradoxically, among medical specialists.

However, we shouldn't be surprised at the great weights that bogged down the thinking of Pinel's successors. In a way, their blindness, their inability to understand the demands made of them by the penal order, all that uncertainty had its source in a highly understandable epistemological coherence. The field of specialized medicine was seeking some moral determinism. It was trying to construct a procedural science through which man could entirely do away with, get away from, his humanity. Insanity exists when the forces within the mind, and which the mind ordinarily controls, manage to act on their own, on their own power, blindly. And insanity follows because their irruption leads to inevitable consequences, because it prompts actions that are not controlled by the will and which the conscience no longer understands. Thus the behavior of the man who becomes insane moves away from the notion of determinism at the same time that it opens up the possibility of positive knowledge. For a discourse that was trying to set itself up as a science on an equal footing with medicine, the notion that insanity might consist of certain phenomena linked together out of compelling necessity was really a minimal requirement.

The medical specialists were perhaps then unable to take the initiative in the reforms designed to lay down the rules of modern psychiatric practice. To invent and promote the idea of responsibility, it was essential to act with a sovereign detachment with regard to the most elementary professional precautions. And indeed it is almost impossible to think of any term that adequately describes the type of causality or determinism implicit in the statement of the

26. *Pierre Rivière,* "Report by the Presiding Judge of the Assize Court," pp. 146–147.

presiding judge of the assize court. Isn't saying that there may be degrees of derangement of the senses the same as positing a notion of causality whose effect could be suspended, or of a determinism without consequences? That is really what it's all about. Here is a new subject for the psychiatrist, no longer a pathological entity and its observable manifestations but a legal subject. Instead of a person afflicted with a disease we have a man to be punished. While the psychiatrist's focus had traditionally been centered on the regions of the mind ravaged by disorder and abandoned by the conscious subject, albeit open to medical examination, henceforth it would be directed toward a frontier zone where he would observe the secret complicities insanity and freedom enjoy. A new equation takes the place of the old question of insanity and guilt: up until what point is innocence guilty? What degree of madness is there in error?

Behind this unique epistemological break a new political orientation emerges, one which reveals the incompatibility that still existed in 1835 between the strategy of psychiatrists and that of the legal profession.

The part played by the expert opinion handed down by the Paris doctors in the Rivière case was in the final analysis an ambiguous one. Normally the theoretical alternative to which the opinions of the experts contribute would lead to the practical alternative of punishment or psychiatric internment. In retrospect, it is this second step that Leuret proposed in his opinion. "Pierre Rivière ought to have been placed in confinement; the young man was too ill to be left at large."[27] To punish or to confine, such is, theoretically speaking, the choice.

The real choice, the one forced on the medical specialists, was quite another matter. In fact, their opinion was introduced during the appeal for clemency with the purpose of supporting it. Now, this procedure allowed for only two solutions: execution of the death sentence or commutation of the sentence to life imprisonment. There was no question of reconsidering the fact that the trial had set aside the matter of responsibility. The only favorable result of the expert opinion, if it were to gain the royal approbation, would be an extenuation of the sentence. But it would still remain a criminal sentence.

Consequently there is no reason to see anything prophetic about Leuret's statement. Clearly he anticipated certain aspects of the procedure that would come, in 1838, to be known as "official placement," permitting the authorities to proceed to the confinement of those representing a threat to the social order and to themselves. But isn't that another matter than employing psychiatry for the purposes of punishment, which was the very problem the political irreality of the Paris doctors managed to conceal? Leuret was dreaming. In his imagination he went back to the days before Pierre Rivière had committed his crime. Mentally reconstructing Rivière's childhood, he reviewed his bizarre behavior

27. *Pierre Rivière*, "Report by a Conference of Doctors," p. 166.

and, tacitly advising the judges, informed the court that if it had been left to the psychiatrists the young man would have been confined long before. Which is exactly what the law of 1838 concerning official placement would not allow, since under its provisions confinement would be contingent on a disturbance or clear danger to public order.

Leuret would have liked to think that his medico-legal role was completely separate from his role as psychiatrist. What did he refuse to see? That his opinion would serve to determine a level of criminal sentencing. Insanity would no longer merit acquittal. Innocence would no longer be an excuse, but would constitute a level of punishment.

All of this was understood by the presiding judge of the assize court, and much better than by the minister of justice, who considered the life sentence as a compromise that was justified by the uncertainty as to the truth. "I myself feel such grave doubts about the condemned man's mental state that I am wholly unable to conclude either that the sentence should be carried out or that he should be excused from all punishment. Under these circumstances I believe it my duty to propose to Your Majesty that the penalty inflicted on Rivière be commuted to penal servitude for the rest of his natural life, without exposure on a public place."[28] The same decision was reached by the presiding judge of the assize court, although the latter did not consider the possibility of acquittal; criminal confinement is consonant with the thematic machinery he set in motion. In place of insanity there would be derangement of the faculties in varying degrees. Insanity at once becomes one of the factors allowing—like circumstances—for an extenuation of guilt. Insanity ceases to be an obstacle to punishment.

Even though this mechanism had not yet become institutionalized, it was already shaping Pierre Rivière's fate. Was he not a man whose recognized innocence condemned him to life in prison?

A mental patient sentenced to life imprisonment, Pierre Rivière died on October 20, 1840, at one thirty in the morning.

28. *Pierre Rivière*, "Report to His Majesty the King," p. 168.

Six Poems

F. T. MARINETTI

translated by RICHARD J. PIOLI

Babel of Dreams

Sunsets with gold claws
beneath their manes of fire! . . .
Sunsets crouched at the horizon's edge
had torn my adolescent flesh
with their tawny paws outstretched
like lions! . . .

It was you, O crepuscular Sea, that gave me
a biting nausea for living and infinite sadness! . . .
Having contemplated you too much in my youth,
I now stagger in your breath, drunk with desperation! . . .

Some evenings down there, in bewitched Africa,
all of us, a mournful pack of schoolboys,
were guided over your morose beaches
dragging along sheeplike
under the custody of gloomy priests.
Silhouettes of ink that stained the intangible silk
of a beautiful Oriental sky! . . .

And you came indolently toward us, O sensual Sea,
fresh and green like a woman half naked
under the frills of foam, to dry
your snowy feet upon the sand . . .
Trembling with anger like a wild child,
you sulked at the lazy, lingering evening,
the beautiful evening, the lover rouging your cheeks! . . .
And you hurled our stars and dreams high above
as far as the zenith with the rolling
hollows and smoothnesses of your waves,
slack glass beads come to us from the Orient! . . .

My heart was drunk from the murmurings of pearls
that your weary hand shelled in the caves of the rocks! . . .
My heart sobbed between your burning fingers
like a Satanic lyre, whose stretched strings
exhausted by caresses, suddenly burst
with racking laughter! . . .
My heart?
I rolled it in your nocturnal tresses . . .
My heart?
I dragged it along, panting
beneath your foamy waves, toothed
like cruel silver saws! . . .

O contemptible Sea, a thousand times
disgraced, according to astral laws
you that peopled my pensive youth
with Levantine mouths open in spasmodic song,
and with the obscene twisting of sexual waves! . . .
O Oriental dancer with your rising belly
and breasts red with the blood of shipwrecks! . . .

We walked,
dragging our legs
ears bloodstained, like wounded dogs
quenching their thirst in stagnant puddles . . .
already flowered with illusory stars! . . .
We dreamed aground, like mendicants
before the dazzling portal of the venerable night
where your frenetic fingers wrote the chronicles
of your shipwrecks in ebb and flow! . . .
And within my heart I held the sumptuous image
of a black palace with a hundred gold turrets
brandished against the sky, where the Bride
of Brides was imprisoned finally
and kept untouched,
conquered at the price of all the heavens
constellated in my dreams! . . .
And my eyes explored the bottom
of the hateful twilight
and the blue depth of fabulous grottoes
among the greenish forks of the clouds . . .

Later, when I returned home
a sweet and social family evening was beginning
beneath the lamp that raised its neck of flame
to the sky, radiating its wings of brightness
upon the table and hatching my soul's
exalted desires in the flutter of its silky rays . . .
like a hen with large magic golden eggs
. . . in a dark corner
my wrinkled Sudanese nurse
sang sadly in her thin dark voice
marking the rhythm by clapping her hands
with a sound like castanets . . .
And in the suffocating evening
scorched by the heat,
the woman's voice colored the silence
with legends tangled like black heads,
broken up with white laughter
and crowned with scarlet feathers! . . .
I leaned out the window for a moment
O Sea, to hear you murmuring your entreaties
on the passing waves
like a streetwalker.

O Sea, who will come to share your violent bed
this evening . . . to caress the menacing turns
of your serpentine flesh . . . and bite
your breasts studded with fires
triggering against God in the tempests
until they bleed in a death rattle? . . .

Suddenly, rising with a leap among the rocks,
frothy and savage
like a madman jumping in rage,
you shook your ivory arms
rattling your amulets
snapping your teeth
upon resounding pebbles . . .

from *Destruction,* 1904

The Duomo of Milan

O Duomo of Milan, I have terrified you,
skimming your monstrous steeples
of centuried cliffs
with my gull's wings.
You say I am a Milanese who moves too fast.
In fact your dismayed tenderness
stains yellow and red
and black and green and white
the transparent skin
of your chameleon-like glass windows.
I irritate you every evening
flinging the ball of my heart
higher than your little golden madonna.

O Duomo of Milan
O boundless octopus with white tentacles,
you tremble when you feel
the immense net of flashing rails
wrap around you with all their streetcars,
multicolored rings
adorning the evening
with green seaweed and coral.
Are you weeping at your fate,
cathedral stranded in the middle
of the noisy tumult
from the greatest train station in the world?
The day will come
(the Milanese are capable of it)
when they will build a colossal train
drawn by a giant locomotive
to carry you back into Paradise
from where you were sent in other times
by the Gondrand Brothers! . . .

from *Le Monoplan du Pape,* 1912

Correction of proofs + desires in speed

No poetry before ours
with our wireless imagination words in freedom longggGGG live FUTURISM finally finally finally finally finally

FINALLY

POETRY BEING BORN

train train train train **tren tron tron tron** (iron bridge: **tatluuuuntlin)** **sssssssiii ssiissii ssiisssssiiii** train train fever of my

train express-express-expressssssss press-press press-press-press-press-press-press-press-press-press-press-pressssssss stung by the sea salt aromatized by the oranges seeking the sea sea sea jumping jumping rails rails jumping rrrrrails rrrrrails ***(GREEDY SALTY PURPLE FANTASTIC INEVITABLE SLOPING IMPONDERABLE FRAGILE DANCING MAGNETIC)*** I will explain these words I mean the sky sea mountains are greedy salty purple etc. and that I am greedy salty purple etc. all that outside me as well **as in me** absolute totality simultaneity synthesis = the superiority of my poetry over all others stop Villa San Giovanni

capture + fish + enjoyment

of the train-shark netting it pushing it

in the ferry-boat-whale
the floating station
of the planed oaken sea
departure of
solidity
indigo ventila-
tion ***(INSENSIBLE DAILY ORDERLY METHODICAL SILKY STUFFED METALLIC TREMBLING CUT-OFF PACKED UP POLISHED NEW)*** ignition of a sailing
ship = a kerosene lamp + 12 white
lampshades + a green carpet + circle
of solitude serenity family
method of a second ship prow working
the metal of the sea at its lathe
foam shavings being lowered by the
temperature = 3 fans above the mountains
of Calabria ***(AZZZZZZURRRRRRE SLOW INDULGENT SKEPTICAL)***

Debris of Messina in the straits

earthquake of walls-mud feel-
ing the sea as a sum of different
weights navigating = addition
200,000 blocks beams ropes barrels
(ploooom) + a million sacks blue rotten
ceilings green doors yellow cabs
+ 2,000 steam pregnancies **tataploom-**
ploom flac flac against the prow-
stomach holding in its mouth the
entire ROUND SEA = swimmer juggler
+ porcelain dish (6 Km. in diameter)
between the teeth

MOON *(OLD YELLOW)*

over

head

tremors whiteness buzzings birth exaspera-

tion of 4 electric lights hanging on the
train stopped in the floating station of
the ferry-boat

MOON ***(DIRTY MILK)***

over

head

light sufficient for correcting the galley
proofs to my book on Adrianople
no no nausea appearance
of the besieged city in the straits turning away
from Messina-Mustafa-Pascia
the graduated heap of Villa
San Giovanni tumbling of 8 electric
lights into the sea to the right Reggio
2nd cascade of white fire beneath

my feet-bulkhead-keel 1,000 m. depth
center of the straits volcanic sewer
opened 5 years ago possible
stretchings of the terrestrial intestine
Villa San Giovanni = febrility
of 300 electric lights shaken by 18
different densities of wind current
dance of fishes amused before the
acetylene limelight of a fishing boat
Reggio = tumult of 800 electric
lights ***(BRANDISHED FURIOUS RABID)*** shaken
by 20 different densities of wind
current universal hatred for the
moon train sliding away
from the ferryboat-net

MESSINA

Messina improvisation general rehearsal of

a city that is about to walk out on stage
indifference of the author sugars and joys of
the atmosphere exchange of serenades
(3 baritones 2 tenors) chilly tenacity of the
ivy upon the huts flexibility of the rein-
forced concrete in harmony with the rabid
cunning of the lava elegance of an apart-
ment = alcove + canopy + art gallery
+ kitchen stuffed in a hut (8 mq.)
impossibility of opposing haughty
facades to the wind of the straits any
higher than 10 m. truncated ambition of
the proprietors preoccupation of the
houses = getting on all fours like wrestlers
to avoid getting knocked down next quarrel
appearance of the earthquake
wrestler tired sleeping on the doorstep
smoke of the volcano appeal hurled to the ve-

suvius's stromboli's treachery of the
vegetation = disguises for the earthquake men-
ace of a heavily perfumed garden peppered
with danger powder-magazine +
will + work + comfort + thoughtless-
ness of the nocturnal fecundation =
Messina speed of cars
heading for Catania

driver half-thrown back
beneath the enormous wheel
that spins like a planet skat-
70 Km. ing skating on the speed
per hr. washed by the turns turns
trrrrrrrrrrrr meadows gardens beaches
scenery of Calabrian
mountains cone of Etna
indigo inlets promontories

exploding roasting + speed + ferocity of the
tires coal dust of the street thirst thirst of
the rubber cactus

Futurism
spinosity
sobriety heroism
depth resistance
solidity
antivegetable
metalism
300,000 solitudes
dog-days sands snares
hot Libyan wind mouths eyes sting
African conquests
Sahara concentrates

of the
cactus
native troops
offering
fruits
juicy with
pink
like
electric
lightbulbs

fe
ro
cious
ly

born
between
between on
in
against

(BLACK
HARD
CONTORTED)

bowels
writing
torrents
jolts
spasms
running
screeching
smoking
of
PETRIFIED
LAVA
beneath
vast
frozen
cotton
of the atmosphere

80 Km. per hr. TRrrrrrrrrrr

speediest sedentariety of the driver half-thrown back from the wheel Saturn with its ring spinning spinning pressing his foot upon the very far little blue pedal of the most free speeds **gloo gloo gloo** of air in bottles-ears ventriloquist wind

95 Km. per hr. TRRRRRR

musical abandon of the driver half-thrown back under the wheel pushing the pedal of the snoring organ of exhaled kilometers in a puff blow again further

100 Km. per hr. TRRRRRR

pushing down with his right foot accelerator distances + 1,000 depths + 300,000 resistances of the earth to the rubbbbing speeds giving giving a **pan-pan-traaak tatatraak**

tung tung zang panache

Stop

(instinctive braking tremor agony of
the driver) ⅛ of the car 3 wheels
nibbling tranquilly fodder blondness ironies
of a village 306 years old
silliness of a mountain landscape
taking my car through ruins valleys of the
Girgenti embracing it in the arms of its
streams trees grasses
correcting galley proofs no no look

LOOK

the proofs just as they are for POLISHING
my DEAR surviving carburator

from *Zang Tumb Tumb*, 1914

Nocturnal dialogue in the Observation-Post of the 8th Bombard Battery at Zagora

It is raining. Two shadows beneath the silvery, leaping triangles of the searchlights. The trench is terribly white. Petrified convulsion. The crazed barbed wire seems to shake its silver grid of rain.

— Tell me, do you love Julia?

— Why yes, with all my soul. You too?

— Me too.

— Yup, with all my soul.

— Why do you love her so much?

— Because, she adores me.

— She told you that?

— Yup, she's sworn it and proven it.

— She swears it, proves it, to me, to you, to anyone.

— Good night, I'm lying down for an hour, then at daybreak I have to check the mountain passes.

— I'll come with you.

— Come? Why?

— The machine guns can do her choosing. We'll walk together real close, one behind the other, then we'll be hit together and Julia will be left with empty hands.

— I don't think so. Julia's hands will never be empty. Good night.

from *8 anime in una bomba,* 1919

Successively

Successively

Blue absense

Red will

Pink desires

Sadly gray
in other words

On

Nearby

But

But

However

the shadows
prepare a formidable
plot

FOR

too red

further

really
TOO BLACK

from *I nuovi poeti futuristi,* 1925

Yes, yes, like this, the dawn on the sea

(words in freedom)

3 corrosive shadows against
the DAWN
the winds working away away kneading the sea so muscles
and blood for Daybreak

EAST yellow light awry

Then
an icy green

skidding

Then

NORTH an insolent red
hard glassy noise

Then a stupefied gray

The rosy clouds are faraway charms
carmine fanfares scarlet explosions
feeble **no** gray tomtoms of azure

No Yes
NO
YES
yes
yes yes
YES

Yes

bombastic yellow
Marvel of grays
All the pearls say YES
Persuasive green-blue discourses in the enticing bays
The smooth cyanotic Slabs of the sea tremble with enthusiasm
A ray Rebounds from rock to rock
Wonder begins to laugh in the veins of the sea
Risk of a blue cloud perpendicularly over my head
All the sharp prismatics of the waves go mad
Attractions of reds
no
no
no
YES
YES
YES
soft exchange
of shadows and light

Purely

Expansive repose

unsatisfied half-light

A kindled veil
neckline on the horizon shimmering

ROAR OF GOLD

whirlpool of three shadows in that bay eaten by Sun-
mouth bloody teeth long drivels of gold drinking the sea
and biting rocks

YES simply

YES
resiliently

easily
LIKE THIS

again

AGAIN

AGAIN

BETTER **LIKE THIS**

from *I nuovi poeti futuristi,* 1925

Gods, Princes, and Scribes

Teachers, Writers, Celebrities: The Intellectuals of Modern France, *by Régis Debray, translated by David Macey, London, New Left Books, 1981.*
Le scribe, *by Régis Debray, Paris, Editions Graffet, 1980.*
Critique de la raison politique, *by Régis Debray, Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1981.*

MARC CHÉNETIER

In the early summer of 1982 a bomb partially destroyed the Parisian apartment of Régis Debray. The target was Special Adviser to President François Mitterand for Foreign Affairs, but more specifically it was one of this adviser's oldest and best-publicized images, that of a man whose arrival in the antechambers of power so displeased the American government in 1981, the author of *Revolution in the Revolution?*, the guerrilla companion of Che Guevara, the confidante of Fidel Castro and Salvador Allende. For those of my generation who shared intense political and literary concerns, the name of Régis Debray surfaced in the 1960s. It immediately became interesting—and disappointing; here, on the one hand, was a young man whose political courage and integrity had led him straight into the Bolivian jails, where his life was said to be in immediate danger, someone whose life Sartre and others were actively petitioning to save. A "normalien" from la rue d'Ulm (Ecole Normale Supérieure), a brilliant student of philosophy, he represented a certain vision of the "concerned student" of the 1960s, as Americans of the same decade would have put it. Thus my disappointment when someone (publisher? friend?) attempted to cash in on the prisoner's new celebrity by publishing two of Debray's youthful novellas; I read them and was bored to tears. I suspect Debray was not particularly pleased with either the texts or the move to publish them. It never mattered much; the exotically oriented of 1968 were naturally more inclined to read his *Essays on Latin America* and *Revolution in the Revolution?* (both 1967), and the opportunistic shops of the Left Bank then made a killing selling posters of Che Guevara, which ended up on the walls of plush bourgeois apartments.

In using this opening set of images, I invite the reader to see more than a simple jest. It is rather a double paradox. While in the minds of the French Right, Debray has retained his "knife-between-the-teeth" reputation and is still regularly manhandled in the press for his florid guerrilla commitment and his "terrorist" past, his joining the French Socialist party in the seventies appeared to some Trotskyite veterans of 1968 and Che idolaters (in praxis or poster version) as a cop-out. At the same time, while Debray has, since his liberation, consistently written on political theory and questioned the foundations and

conduct of French politics, while he has retained his fundamental commitment to the Left and has not repudiated his Marxist analyses (a rare occurrence in these days of ideological quick-change acts), a number of the most dogmatic sixty-eighters have very efficiently recycled themselves, under the tag of "new philosophers," as official knife-wielders for the Giscardian Right. Debray thus occupies an interesting position. If we are to believe his hilarious pamphlet *Modeste contribution aux discours et cérémonies du Xème anniversaire* (Paris, Maspéro, 1978), this is largely due to a chronological mishap. Locked up in far away Camiri while the wave of 1968 rolled by ("an unfortunate delay which may be responsible for my unawareness of certain current novelties, but which also puts me somewhat in advance, and possibly even gives me prior information" — *C*, p. 14),* he emerged on the other side of these "events" during the ebb of the enthusiasm that had brought them about. This is certainly not the place to analyze the causes and effects of May '68, but one may, in passing, note that the generally idealistic components of the upheaval (as well as the material issues attached to it) were left intact under the different forms of reaction that set in in its wake. Once the "proletarian guerrilla" aftermath of the early 1970s had subsided, the most ardent "Maoists" became the most solid supporters of conservatism. The common factor was, as everyone knows, fervent anticommunism, first in the name of libertarianism, then as a sheer and staunch defense of the status quo. Whatever the legitimate basis of the Solzhenitsyn-inspired anti-Gulag spirit, the ideological returns of the antitotalitarian campaign were paradoxical. They consisted, on the one hand, of a systematic denigration of whatever the Left did, in the name of the "perverse" Marxist principles that were said to animate it as a whole; on the other hand, they acted to enfranchise the Socialist party, which increasingly affirmed its basic differences from the Communist party, to the point where the former was seen as an effective barrier against the political influence of the latter. François Mitterand's election in 1981 was thus made possible and even palatable to many of his opponents. In public opinion his Socialist humanism overrode the Marxist elements of Socialist politics. While the so-called new philosophers theorized and systematized their opportunism, abandoning and opposing their former ideas in the same idealistic spirit (as in the hilariously clownish shifts of Sollers and the *Tel Quel* group, passing from Maoist fundamentalism to the cult of John Paul II by way of a vision of America hypostasized out of the quick tours of Sollers and Kristeva to New York)—while the idealists rolled on, then, Debray quietly tackled an analysis of the political as such. Several volumes of reflections on Latin America (*La critique des armes, Les épreuves du feu, La guerrilla du Che,* all 1974) were followed by an assessment of the forces at work in France (*L'espé-*

* Page citations in the text refer to the three books under review and are abbreviated as follows: *TWC* for *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities, S* for *Le scribe,* and *C* for *Critique de la raison politique.* All translations from the French in the case of the latter two books are mine.

rance au purgatoire and *Les rendez-vous manqués*, both 1975; and *Lettre ouverte aux communists français* and *Modeste contribution aux discours et cérémonies du Xème anniversaire*, both 1978). A "petit bourgeios caught between two fires and four walls," as the title of a book of 1976 put it, Debray then launched into what he was determined to call mediology, a discipline which in turn produced *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities: The Intellectuals of Modern France, Le scribe*, and *Critique de la raison politique.*

With these three books, I believe, we witness the birth and ascent of an intellectual in the French sense of the term.[1] A militant author of partisan journalism turns into a polemicist and political theorist, then broadens his field of thought to include a historical understanding of his themes, and finally (thus far) gains distance enough from this subject to submit the field itself to a theoretical and epistemological assessment. This latter stage in turn illuminates his original endeavors, widening, reinforcing, even providing a support for earlier intuitions, albeit a critical support.

The notion of power has somehow been eliminated from the title of Régis Debray's book on French intellectuals (its French title is *Le pouvoir intellectuel en France*). This is a regrettable omission, since it can seem that, with this book, Debray has strayed from his usual preoccupations to make a documentary, sociological foray into the world of intellectuals, presented as detached from the body politic. On the contrary, however, this book lays the groundwork for subsequent and more fecund analyses. While at least two other books on French intellectuals were published shortly after Debray's,[2] neither one has been followed by more detailed analysis, and there is no reason to see them as other than ends in themselves. One revealing reaction to *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities* is that of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, reviewing it for *The New York Review of Books*. The eminent French historian, who forsook the Left quite a few years ago to become a liberal supporter of Giscard, highly commends Debray's exceptional stylistic talents and solid homework, and marvels at the ability of the French to make bestsellers of the somewhat arid material of history or social theory. In the name of this admiring condemnation, he reproaches Debray for being systematic, and even totalitarian (the title of the review is "Guide Rouge"), for criticizing the attitude and actions of people with whom Ladurie himself is affiliated or whom he admires: the Comité des Intellectuels pour l'Europe des Libertés (CIEL), for example, or Jean-François Revel. But his most paternally severe admonition is directed to the central interest of Debray's books: "Perhaps Debray would have a clearer vision of these matters if he stopped muddling culture and politics except where these two really do inter-

1. On the semantics of *intellectual* and *intellectuel,* see my "The Difference a Letter Makes," in *The Intellectual in America,* ed. Rob Kroes, Amsterdam, EAAS Series, 1978.
2. H. Hamon and P. Rotman, *Les Intellocrates,* Paris, Ramsay, 1981; and H. R. Lottman, *La Rive Gauche,* Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1981.

sect."[3] This remark may merely indicate that in 1982 Ladurie had not yet read the sequel to *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities* — *Le scribe* — in which the permanence of the link is clearly sketched, nor *Critique de la raison politique,* where it is extensively theorized. It may also indicate Ladurie's unwillingness to follow Debray in his interesting association of the two terms. The examination of what Debray demonstrates to be such an inescapable connection may indeed force every intellectual into a painful, close-to-the-bone examination of his or her own ideological situation and philosophical choices. For what Debray drives home in the progression of the three volumes at hand is nothing other than the ineradicable genetic brotherhood of culture and politics under the common parentage of the religious.

*

It is important to understand that Régis Debray's research and analyses converge upon the definition of a new cycle in the status of French intellectuals. After having been hegemonically defined by the university (1880–1930) and by the press (1920–1960), intellectuals are now defined by their power over the media, primarily TV. The trouble is, of course, that the media, in fact, have power over the intellectuals, and that television — and here Debray does follow McLuhan — has a knack for trivializing thought and making the most complex reflections into the fast food of hurried and superficial minds. Where barter and banter collaborate, the exchange-value of intellectual goods quickly takes precedence over their use-value; though "good" cultural programs may be animated by loquacious, humorous, clever, informed, and devoted MCs, the medium annuls or banalizes any message. This is no news, even if the theorization of such merchandizing had never been more explicit and rigorous.

> A mediatized society devalues words and over-values the indices of the market-place and the moment — the inflation of the descriptive being equivalent to a deflation of the semantic. What is said is less important than who says it, and where and when he says it. In a word, the only work common to the intellectual animals is the dissolution of all works, each work being dissolved by all the others (*TWC*, p. 240).

Debray is conscious of the double bind that makes any such criticism potentially specious: "The supreme irony is perhaps that they cannot be described without being reproduced, since anyone who mentions their tricks will immediately be suspected of playing a different trick" (*TWC*, p. 240). And his

3. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "Guide Rouge," *The New York Review of Books,* vol. 28, nos. 21–22 (January 21, 1982), 60.

conclusions, replacing local analysis within the theoretical context of mediology, are the most important part of the book, if we keep in mind the perspective of the two books which follow. The concluding section, entitled "Nine Gates to Hell," bonds technology to ideology and shows the necessary link that exists between a mediatized intelligentsia and an unintelligent product: "The mass media insure the maximum socialization of private stupidity" (*TWC*, p. 242); because truth is much "too expensive," objective reality lies further and further from consumers, and all knowledge becomes a kind of incantation following the mediatized missal. The entropy of communication is governed by the smothering weight of meaningless information. In fact, the basic question that lies at the heart of *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities*, as it is reformulated in the *Critique de la raison politique*, is this: "What must symbolic activity be like in order for it to have an influence on the materiality of social relationships in a secular republic such as ours?" And, next in this logical exploration, the following becomes the central question of *Le scribe:* "What must society be in order to be, yesterday as well as today, in organic need of a special corps of indicators of meaning?" (*C*, p. 46). These "indicators of meaning" are, again, "intellectuals," "scribes"; but lest we lose sight of the orientation of his research, Debray subtitles *Le scribe* "Genèse du politique"—that is, not "politics" (*la* politique) but that which is essentially political at the core of human activities: *le* politique. In his *Critique*, Debray confesses that for him *le politique* had long been concealed by *la politique*. If you concentrate on the show and the puppets, you no longer see the strings. Stand back and they become visible again: "The permanent element in the intellectual function—by which every civilization postulates an 'intellectual' office—consists precisely in the *relational* function of these servants of the absolute. Which is to say a function that is essentially political" (*S*, p. 14). Thus, this genealogy of intellectuals, pursued on a basis of pedagogically strict historicity, is, in its outlook, no more sociological or documentary than *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities* was. The prospect is the discovery of an operational logic of social thought that would make possible the establishment of reliable connections between thought and authority, between the ways in which thought is transmitted and communicated and the facts of government. Although Debray has since, in the *Critique*, adumbrated what he now sees as an occasionally moralizing approach in *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities* and *Le scribe*, and because the *Critique* seems a cool and stoic counterpart to its hot and polemical prolegomena, *Le scribe* clearly paves the way for a more solid critique. Part I, "A Genealogy of Power," retraces the emergence of the modern French intellectual from his political (the statesman) and clerical or churchly (the man of God) precedents; part II, "The Powerlessness of Ideologies," first analyzes what Debray calls Marxist idealism ("Marx against intellectuals") and second, bourgeois idealism ("intellectuals against Marx"). The second and third ("The Mediuman") parts are by far the most enriching.

Because a "science" has no need of intellectuals, Marx never asked himself

what the use of intellectuals was; nor could he ever contemplate the birth of Marxism, as his remark to Lafargue ("I'm not a Marxist") indicates. All "isms" are devised by intellectuals for the use of those who are not intellectuals, and if Marxism is a "scientific" discipline, as in "science of history," it can have no founder properly speaking. Thus Marxism begins as a theoretical ineptitude and Debray locates in this "ismization" the birth of what he considers to be Marxist idealism. Because Marx never provided himself with a materialist theory of his own materialist theory, because he thought his own antispeculative thought through the categories of classical speculation, his work often translates idealist postulates into materialist theses, for example, that of the impact of "real thoughts" on the world. Debray's conviction that Marx never thought out the political is based on Marx's disinterest in all that founds *the political* according to Debray: absence and the relational. Convinced that this theorization of *break* is secretly governed by the category of the *continuous*, inherited from Hegel, Debray writes:

> This dialectician thought of negation outside of negativity, as a necessary moment in the process of reconciliation, excluding, on principle, the risk of getting lost along the way. There is inconsistency in a dialectician who does not take mediation seriously, in itself and for itself. Which is why Marx provides neither for thinking out the political nor for a politics of thought. The absence of the intellectual from the field of his fundamental reflection is necessarily the obverse of the absence of party, of parliament, and of all other mechanisms of representative democracy. The cult of fullness implies that of the positive. But all representation sees a possibility of cleavage and absence as a condition of possibility (*S*, p. 163).

If Marx had been right, in other words, there would be no Marxism, because there would have been no need for mediation; Communist ideas and reality would have been spontaneously generated from industrial life. On the other hand, Kautsky, Lenin, and Gramsci had to betray Marx so as to translate his thought into reality; "*Tradutore, traditore*" is inverted into the necessary "*Traditore, tradutore.*" In Marxist theory, the rehabilitation of the intellectual was the work of the organizers and founders of parties who needed intellectuals because they wanted to conquer power and therefore had to be interested in politics, which means to make room for men of thought. And Marxism only became an influential political force where recognized mediators existed, that is, in countries with a strong tradition of notability and recognition of intellectuals.

As Régis Debray repeats again and again in different ways, "No action is possible where mediations are rejected" (*S,* p. 183). And his analyses of the media, of intellectuals, and of politics are all structured by the theme of mediation because power originates, in all cases, in it and in it alone.

Bourgeois idealism pits "intellectuals against Marx" for much the same rea-

sons, and this section of the work is in itself a repudiation of Le Roy Ladurie's reproach. Where bourgeois intellectuals see culture as an idealist construct inhabiting an empyrean (CIEL spells *sky*), Debray traces the origin of all culture in material facts. Culture can be only a culture of masters, as it alone leaves a trace; the class nature, race nature, and western nature of the concept belie its universals. Debray's third-worldly convictions emerge here at their clearest, most moving, and most convincing. The economic foundations of culture are masterfully exposed and the veil of decency that conceals the concept for idealists is humorously lifted: "Name of the Mother: Agriculture. Name of the Father: State. Profession: Culture. Age: None" (*S*, p. 202). Not that intellectuals necessarily repudiate the links of culture and politics. But they refuse, as against Marx, to contemplate its economic foundations. As Debray puts it, "Good manners dictate that genesis should be spirited away," because

> . . . the symbolic operation intersects with economics and politics: a small productive machine coupled with an apparatus of authority and, lower down, with a source of energy. Clear-headed producers acknowledge the existence of the transmission belt for authority. Pirandello to Benjamin Crémieux: "You need a Caesar or an Octavius in order to produce a Virgil"—but revulsion follows thoughts of the other. The scribe hates his shadow—the body of him who feeds and flanks him and without whose hard work he will wither (*S*, p. 202).

Debray's brilliant materialist analysis of culture pulls the rug from under the feet of those ideologues who peddle the notion that intellectuals merely carry and propagate values generated by their own thought; the very same men who are employed to bridge the gap between heavenly absence and undeniable earthly presence are shown to be specialists in short-circuitry, dedicated to the neat elimination of material circumstances from the genesis of values. The reproduction of such short-circuiting is ideology at work, "a precious activity whose function consists in denying real functions, which are always synonymous with *correlations*, in order to produce *entities* or *substances*. . . . Nothing is more useful to gods and leaders than the production of symbols which make it possible to misconstrue human history" (*S*, p. 211). The manifestos of liberal or right-wing intellectuals always end up masking inconsistencies with unrelated and de-semanticized abstractions. "To what do makers of words owe their life and living? To the fact that the others have never taken them at their own word. For the last 6,000 years" (*S*, p. 245).

The mediuman (*hommedium* in its French condensation) is thus the scribe's ultimate figure. Whatever their treatment of the intellectual, Marxists and liberals seem to have assumed a common idealist notion of him, by adopting the set of antitheses intellectuals use for their own protection: mind versus matter; value versus need; culture versus interest. A perfectly analyzable function is thereby perennially transformed into a sublimated substance, doing into being.

The mediuman is the eternal middleman; not a very nice position, to be sure, but politically strategic. Under the apparently trivial or minor garb of the interpreter, of the translator, of the go-between, beats the heart of the political function itself, justifying the rule of the polis in the name of the values of the spirit. As Debray puts it, the mediuman sees to the "effective transport of meaning into a community" (*S*, p. 276); since all political power presupposes metaphysical positions, there is an obvious social necessity for a body of translators in charge of adequating facts to the founding of values. "The logos has economic value because its surplus value is political" (*S*, p. 291). Only the mediuman can understand the State and only the State knows what he is about: they live in constant collaboration and in perfect mutual distrust. Announcing his *Critique*, Debray concludes, "The triangle *State-Media-Intelligentsia* delimits a historically retrospective and logically operational figure." Stopping just short of its promises, just as *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities* had done, *Le scribe*, like the preceding volume, makes *Critique de la raison politique* possible, a draft too heavily loaded with topical reference to allow a theory that requires detachment and the cynical view. In *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities* and *Le scribe*, Debray is still largely acting the part of the militant, the partisan, the intellectual commando. There is none of this in the *Critique*, a fat volume which the author, in his introduction, decides to call his first book, although its real serial number in "Debrayan" production is already seventeen.

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Evoking Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, the *Critique de la raison politique* owes much of its development from the two preceding volumes to Michel Serres's discovery in them of the principle of "social incompletion"; this the author gratefully acknowledges. The previous studies of intellectuals were merely intended to penetrate the internal logic of communities; Debray now wants to analyze his fascination with our daily irrationality (*déraison*) and to discover its underlying logic. His approach here is anything but militant. As a matter of fact, the whole book is a systematic deconstruction of those political enthusiasms which may have propelled Debray himself into his various actions and functions. André Glucksmann has recently called for a "cynicism" as necessary for an understanding free of pain or disillusionment, and it is to be found here. (Spinoza's "not to deride, not to cry, but to understand.") "A *Critique of Political Reason* can tell me what I cannot do, but under no circumstances what I should not do. It spells out the impossible, not what is wished for (or detested). Whoever may search through it for a sketchy 'stand,' not to speak of a 'line,' will thereby risk a radical misreading" (*C*, p. 68). Furthermore, "the conception articulated in this book is not to my liking. I find it repulsive and shocking. I formulate it because it alone seems to me to be in conformity with the available observed data, even though it goes against all my

practical interests" (*C*, p. 69). Needless to say, such an approach breaks drastically with the current intellectual media scene in which intellectual goods are treated as merchandise for the aggrandizement of their author's image. That Debray has steadily refused media coverage of his work, personality, reactions, and so forth and that he has opted for an obscure and little-known or talked-about position argues for the seriousness of his declaration. Everything in the *Critique* induces skepticism and discouragement for those for whom understanding is not paramount. But his book was hardly off the press before Debray was advising the French president in terms of this absolutely antiauthoritarian safeguard, the motto that must accompany the reading of his essential book: "Act in such a way that the maxim of your action can never be construed as a universal law" (*C*, p. 73).

One misconception must be dispelled at once: just as Debray's critique of Marx is at every point supported by an unfailingly materialist apparatus, just as his critique of materialism owes nothing to its idealist adversaries, so this critique of political reason is everything but a plea for the irrational. Initially, the book was to be entitled "Critique of Theoretical Unreason." Debray traces political *reason* through a very complex and never reductive itinerary back to the birth of the religious itself. He never succumbs, however, to the temptation that consists in positing *that* as absolute origin; this is where he fundamentally differs from René Girard, a man whose work on violence and the sacred he would certainly deem useful, but misguided. Agreeing, as any informed anthropologist would, Debray must acknowledge certain correlations between religion and politics. He sees Girard's tautological explanation of the religious by religion, however, as well as his idealist succumbing to the Christian reading, as a victory of piety over science. The craze for explanations by or through the sacred is now rehearsed on a scene strewn with the soiled wreckage of prefabricated and ill-digested spiritualisms: anti-intellectualism and irrationality now strut for the greater glory of established values and to the tune of muddled thinking, both domestic and imported. Here lies the paramount importance of Debray's work, for it tackles *all* the problems raised without ever relinquishing the primacy of rational analysis. François Mitterand, that most astute and seasoned politician whom Debray now serves, mentioned in front of the Israeli Knesset on March 4, 1982, "the primacy of reason, which, because it is reason, knows where its own power no longer obtains," thus neatly defining the instrumentality of reason and its superior plasticity. Against those who tend to throw out the babies of reason with the bathwater of aberrant technology or of monstrous totalitarianism, Debray trusts reason to uncover the logic of political "reason"; it is a reason which has all the signs of unreason, but which, being extant and operational, must be recognized as unavoidable and analyzed for the efficiency of its inner workings.

His central question thus becomes that of the relationship between theoretical reason and political reason, that of the differentiation between the sphere

of thought and that of action. The initial reversal accounting for the religious nature of ideological propositions is that of the order of group and cohesion. Ideologies propose a meaning for the world in which we live and societies cohere around that meaning; but where idealist propositions would have it that cohesion is attained because there meaning exists or is to be found, a materialist analysis will show that there is meaning in the world because the cohesion of groups requires it. Where no meaning is found and shared, no group survives. Whether based on space or time, astronomy or territory, something of the sacred is introduced into societies at their earliest stages, simultaneously with their political organization. "It is not the consciousness of men which determines their political existence, but their social existence which determines that consciousness is itself submitted to a logical system of constraining material relations" (*C*, p. 51). Societies thus have a political unconscious made visible in their various emergences (religions or their "lay" ideological substitutes), and a critique of political reason cannot but become to a certain extent a science of social dreams. But political philosophy is also the science of insoluble problems, as shown by the perennial renewal of identical patterns and the eternal political desire to abolish time. A critique of political reason can only have as its goal a better knowledge of the limitations inherent in all political enterprises, the determination of the limits within which a given faculty (political reason) can operate. As such, it is a "system of guaranteed disappointments" and can only be "unhappy."

Against philosophical triumphalism, Debray's work intransigently applies the materialist principle, which places praxis over theory, to political theory itself, including materialism. His movement can be said to be "overmaterialist" or "meta-materialist"; "it offers no remedies and promises no cures."

There can be no honest summing up of a dense, admirably written 473-page book, and I shall not attempt it here; the task I have set myself is to draw attention to the importance of work largely neglected by political and mediatic oracles. I shall merely indicate the overall economy of the text and a few of its major fields of investigation.

The four sections of the *Critique*—"Logic of Appearance," "Physics of Belief," "Logic of Organization," "Physics of Orthodoxy"—explore in turn the fictive illusion of "ideology," the affective springs of creed, inadequacy, and the religious, and the political "unconscious."

The notion of ideology, its transformations and manipulations, its uses as magic and incantation by would-be sorcerers, its complicity in the revival of magical simplification in contemporary discourse, is brilliantly taken apart in the first section. But (and here lies the grandeur of Debray's method) there is no denunciation; this new fact is merely assimilated within an understanding that the shamanistic function answers a need that is licit *because* it is social. We are given an analysis, then, of the ways in which it works: "The magical illusion results from the transfer into speech itself of its principle of causality" (*C*, p. 111).

As Debray justifies it in a remarkably consistent passage which might serve to introduce his method:

> A vain idea which produces effects is a grave idea, a grave idea which does not produce effects is vain. . . . Value is the result of the effect, not the object; or rather, political reason selects as its proper object the effects of ideas that have no objectivity, and the critique, the study of those conditions under which an idea, or an ideology, becomes efficient. Our rationalism is therefore of the cynical type: as long as it works, we're interested. Therefore, I'm interested in your myths. Including the Gospel and *Mein Kampf* (*C*, p. 117).

Whence the critique of Marx's and Engels's mechanistic vision of history and of Marx's own error on the concept of ideology. "Ideological illusion," the master sentence of this first page goes, "is the illusion of those who believe in ideology as illusion" (*C*, p. 160).

For Debray, "religious myth pushes to its utmost limit the banal fiduciary nature of our political behavior" (*C*, p. 176). As logic without logos, political reason relies on the ambivalent nature of myth, which "mobilizes and mystifies, but would not do the one without the other" (*C*, p. 194). The analysis is therefore thoroughly performed on the level of its socializing impact, and Debray's conclusion underlies the nature and daring of his own enterprise: "Everything happens as if militant criticism is stopped short by a sort of theoretical ceiling. Our intelligentsia is by now lucid enough in its disillusionment to identify the nature of political practices as religious, but still doesn't wonder *why* it is that political practices are religious in nature. They acknowledge the marks of the sacred in our profane exercises, but when it comes to profaning the sacred itself, nothing doing!" (*C*, p. 249).

"Why should there be belief in groups?" is the question that prefaces the third section. The answer is found in the feeling of "the incomplete." This, in turn, triggers two mechanisms: representation and repetition; all social ensembles presuppose representation and "all social ensembles presuppose repetition" (*C*, p. 265). The group is formed through reference to that which is missing; it is constituted by absence. There is a need to bridge the gap between ourselves and the absolute Other, followed by the urge toward an eternal return to archetypes, "natural" among other things; "the desacralization of history" results in a "resacralization of nature" (*C*, p. 299). It is here that Debray analyzes the eternal and banal cycle that links "the God that failed" to the "birth of a nation," the "end of ideology" to the "renewal of spirituality."

In the final portion, the aporia central to political reason is explored; reason moves toward an opening up while the political tends toward closure. The urge to freedom is constantly balanced by the need for orthodoxy. The various ways in which political systems defend themselves are the object of a special chapter which offers a most convincing and ironic analysis of what Debray

names the "Constantine complex." The mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion which form the basis for the political are most clearly illustrated by Constantine, "the Oedipus of the political unconscious," its symmetrical and antithetical counterpart (*C*, p. 401). Constantine unites in his person the various figures, usually distinct in modern political philosophy, of the sovereign, the warrior, and the theologian; each function helps to consolidate the others, and all three produce unity. Relying on the sacred triad of territorial delimitation, religious intercession, and legal delineation, Constantine is "the symbolic constant of synthesis. As such he incarnated "good government," just as Oedipus, the symbolic constant of analysis, is the incarnation of "bad government" (*C*, p. 402). Fascinating remarks on utopia and atopia, archaism and progress make up the last portion of the text, where the necessary homeostasis of the political and the religious is brought to light and begins to function as a valid interpretation of cycles in human history.

Debray's thought emerges at a very crucial moment, opposing as it does an irrationality which threatens to assume dangerous proportions. The present revivals of national and spiritual incentives for political action are not defused by his work, but it does provide us with an essential tool for their understanding. There are numerous reminders of Christopher Lasch's work in Debray's texts, and their reception recalls the mixed reactions to *The Culture of Narcissism* and its attempts to stem the tide. The criticism of Marx undertaken in the name of his own political philosophy is accompanied by a denunciation of theoretical and ideological drifts. In establishing relationships among economic, social, psychological, and religious phenomena, Debray nevertheless refuses to follow the deadly logic of any *one* explanation to its lethal ends. Debray's analytic rigor does not please and will not win him a place high on the hit-parade of contemporary thinkers. The radical implications of *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities; Le scribe;* and *Critique de la raison politique* cannot accommodate the loose epicureanism and narcissism of contemporary Western society, which refuses to meet its debts and their accumulated interest to the Third World, which refuses to submit to the stern discipline of facts. The stoicism which Debray proposes ("Commit yourself and bear it") could account for the real, even though apparently immodest, humility and candor of his conclusion. "I run the risk, not of being contradicted," he writes, "but of not being properly understood." I personally fear that many will understand while pretending not to.

Current fashion in the United States is apparently spreading the word that French intellectuals are burnt out. Sartre, Barthes, and Lacan are gone, but the list of major thinkers who have not yet been absorbed into the circuit of intellectual conspicuous consumption is still long, and the area of the social sciences is filled with remarkable minds. I offer, in conclusion, a modest tip: here is a major thinker, one whose place is with Serres, Bourdieu, Braudel, Duby, and Foucault, among others, one who combines the best the social sciences have to offer. But with this tip goes a piece of advice: this is not

coffee-table thought for consumption by the affluent. Handle it carefully, lest it explode in your grasp. They told you, didn't they? The man is a terrorist.

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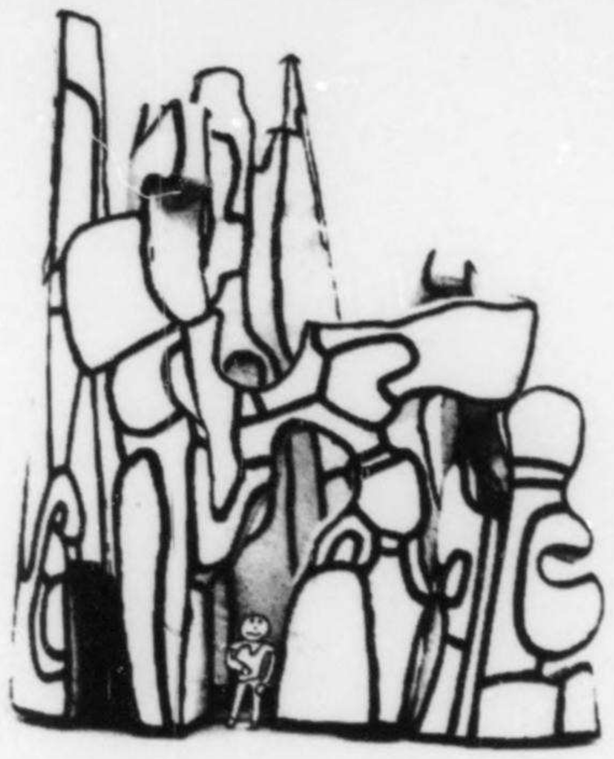

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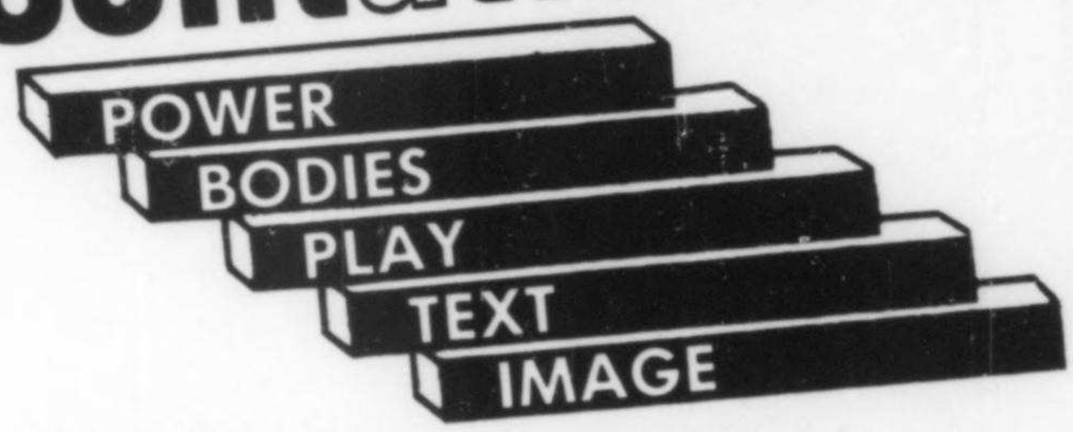

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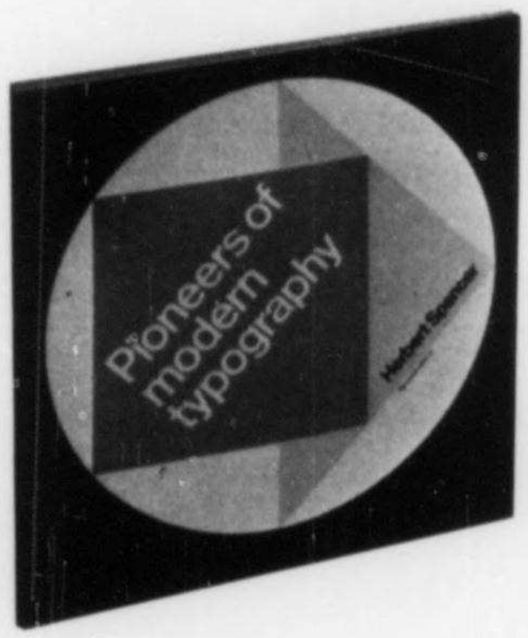

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