

Neither economic nor political liberalism, nor the various Marxisms, emerge from the sanguinary last two centuries free from the suspicion of crimes against mankind. We can list a series of proper names (names of places, persons and dates) capable of illustrating and founding our suspicion. Following Theodor Adorno,⁹ I use the name of Auschwitz to point out the irrelevance of empirical matter, the stuff of recent past history, in terms of the modern claim to help mankind to emancipate itself. What kind of thought is able to sublimate (*Aufheben*)¹ Auschwitz in a general (either empirical or speculative) process towards a universal emancipation? So there is a sort of sorrow in the *Zeitgeist*. This can express itself by reactive or reactionary attitudes or by utopias, but never by a positive orientation offering a new perspective.

The development of techno-sciences has become a means of increasing disease, not of fighting it. We can no longer call this development by the old name of progress. This development seems to be taking place by itself, by an autonomous force or 'motricity'.² It doesn't respond to a demand coming from human needs. On the contrary, human entities (individual or social) seem always to be destabilized by the results of this development. The intellectual results as much as the material ones. I would say that mankind is in the condition of running after the process of accumulating new objects of practice and thought. In my view it is a real and obscure question to determine the reason of this process of complexification. It's something like a destiny towards a more and more complex condition. Our demands for security, identity and happiness, coming from our condition as living beings and even social beings appear today irrelevant in the face of this sort of obligation to complexify, mediate, memorize and synthesize every object, and to change its scale. We are in this techno-scientific world like Gulliver:³ sometimes too big, sometimes too small, never at the right scale. Consequently, the claim for simplicity, in general, appears today that of a barbarian.

From this point, it would be necessary to consider the division of mankind into two parts: one part confronted with the challenge of complexity; the other with the terrible ancient task of survival. This is a major aspect of the failure of the modern project (which was, in principle, valid for mankind as a whole).

The third argument is more complex, and I shall present it as briefly as possible. The question of postmodernity is also the question of the expressions of thought: art, literature, philosophy, politics. You know that in the field of art for example, and more especially the plastic arts, the dominant idea is that the big movement of avant-gardism is over. There seems to be general agreement about laughing at the avant-gardes,⁴ considered as the expression of an obsolete modernity. I don't like the term avant-garde any more than anyone else, because of its military connotations. Nevertheless I

9. German philosopher and cultural critic (1903–1969). ADORNO famously declared that "To write poetry after Auschwitz"—the Nazi's largest concentration camp—"is barbaric."

1. A technical term from the philosophy of GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL (1770–1831). In Hegel the thesis and its opposite, the antithesis, are "sublated" in the synthesis that joins them together. Here progress, the movement of humanity to its perfection, is met by an antithesis, the murderous acts of Auschwitz.

2. Lyotard's coinage, conveying the sense that the

motor of history, its movement, is now out of human control.

3. The narrator-hero of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), who visits both an island whose inhabitants are 6 inches tall and an island inhabited by giants.

4. What today are designated the modernist or historical avant-gardes were the self-organized and self-named "cutting edge" movements such as surrealism, dadaism, futurism, and constructivism of the high modernist period (1914–30). The term originally meant the advance guard of an army.

would like to observe that the very process of avant-gardism in painting was in reality a long, obstinate and highly responsible investigation of the pre-suppositions implied in modernity. The right approach, in order to understand the work of painters from, say, Manet to Duchamp or Barnett Newman⁵ is to compare their work with the anamnesis⁶ which takes place in psychoanalytical therapy. Just as the patient elaborates his present trouble by freely associating the more imaginary, immaterial, irrelevant bits with past situations, so discovering hidden meanings of his life, we can consider the work of Cézanne, Picasso, Delaunay, Kandinsky, Klee, Mondrian, Malevitch⁷ and finally Duchamp as a working through—what Freud called *Durcharbeitung*⁸—operated by modernity on itself. If we give up this responsibility, it is certain that we are condemned to repeat, without any displacement, the modern neurosis, the Western schizophrenia, paranoia, and so on. This being granted, the 'post-' of postmodernity does not mean a process of coming back or flashing back, feeding back, but of *ana*-lysing, *ana*-mnesing, of reflecting.⁹

1986

5. American abstract expressionist painter (1905–1970). Edouard Manet (1833–1883), sometimes called the first modern painter, a forerunner of the impressionists. Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), French (later American) painter and conceptual artist, whose experiments foreshadowed much postmodern art.

6. Remembering.
7. All important modern artists: Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), French impressionist painter and forerunner of cubism; Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), Spanish painter who is the most celebrated modernist artist; Robert Delaunay (1885–1941), French modernist painter; Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), Russian abstract painter; Paul Klee

(1879–1940), Swiss avant-garde painter; Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), Dutch abstract painter and member of De Stijl; Kasimir Malevich (1878–1935), Russian constructivist painter, active during the Russian Revolution and its immediate aftermath.

8. Working through (German), a technical term from Freudian theories of therapy. Only after "working through" various elements in the past not assimilated into self-understanding can the patient get rid of the symptomatic (and/or neurotic) behaviors that have grown out of the repression of the past.

9. *Ana*-literally means "again" or "back" (Greek).

MICHEL FOUCAULT

1926–1984

Michel Foucault is arguably the most influential European writer and thinker of the second half of the twentieth century. His unclassifiable work (is it history? philosophy? cultural theory?) is controversial and has attracted much criticism, but the questions he raised, the topics he addressed, and the positions he took have become central features of today's intellectual landscape. In literary studies, Foucault stands as a major source for poststructuralism, New Historicism, cultural studies, and queer theory, while also fueling the growing interest in literature and medicine, the examination of the institutional bases from which writers and critics operate, and the interest in processes of identity formation.

Foucault was born in Poitiers, France. His father was a doctor, and he (unlike his brother) went against the family's wishes that he study medicine; he eventually became a fierce critic of modern medical practices and institutions. Awkward, bookish, and brilliant, Foucault progressed easily through the elaborate French educational system, with its extremely competitive exams for gaining a place in the multitiered hierarchy. Foucault took his university degree at the nation's top university, the École Normale Supérieure, where he specialized in the philosophy of psychology.

Under the influence of his teacher LOUIS ALTHUSSER, Foucault joined the Communist Party in 1950, quitting three years later. He spent the 1950s teaching in France (briefly) and then abroad—in Sweden, Poland, and Germany. Returning to France in 1960, he defended the graduate thesis that became his first book, *Folie et déraison* (1961; part was translated into English as *Madness and Civilization*). A major theme of this book and its follow-up, *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), is an attack on the institutions and procedures characteristic of modern medicine. They inaugurate Foucault's lifelong preoccupation with the ways in which individuals are "administered" by the various bureaucratic institutions—hospitals, prisons, the military, schools—that increasingly render selves docile in the modern world.

Foucault's 1966 *Les Mots et les choses* (translated as *The Order of Things*) made his reputation. Recognizably a structuralist history, *The Order of Things* examines how the disciplines of economics, linguistics, and biology emerged, offering along the way a brilliant, if overly schematic, characterization of the three different "epistemes" (deep-rooted, unconscious structures for organizing knowledge) of the Middle Ages, the "classical period" (Foucault's term for the Enlightenment), and modernity. Foucault attempted to explicate and justify the methodology of *The Order of Things* in his next major book, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969).

By 1969 Foucault's focus had shifted away from intellectual history and methodological meditations. The events of May 1968, when a student-led revolt almost toppled the French government before itself collapsing, together with his own involvement in student unrest in Tunisia (where he taught from 1966 to 1968), "radicalized" Foucault. He became politically active—and remained so to the end of his life. His book *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (1975, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*) is a direct outgrowth of his work on prison reform. Foucault asks himself in the first chapter of the book why he has written a history of the prison: "Simply because I am interested in the past? No, if one means by that writing a history of the past in terms of the present. Yes, if one means writing the history of the present." He aims at describing the present through an analysis of the forces that created it, a historical and critical undertaking that he follows the nineteenth-century philosopher FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE in calling "genealogy." From the history of the prison, Foucault turned next to the history of sexuality. Three volumes of his work on that topic were published, although the entire project was incomplete when he died of complications from AIDS at the age of fifty-seven.

From 1970 on, Foucault spent longer and longer stints in North America as a lecturer or visiting professor at various universities—most notably at the University of California at Berkeley, where the New Historicists gathered around STEPHEN GREENBLATT brought Foucault-inspired work directly into literary studies. Tales of Foucault's experimentation with and explorations of drugs and sex were oral legend before being recorded in James Miller's notorious, yet mostly accurate, biography, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (1993). The relevance of his personal life to the work is debatable, but Foucault's own growing interest in "the care of the self" in his later years suggests that separating private and public is no easy task.

Our selections present work particularly important to literary and cultural studies. The essay "What Is an Author?" (1969) directly questions some of the most fundamental assumptions of literary criticism. Foucault realizes that he had taken the author for granted in *The Order of Things*, and asks himself what it would mean to take seriously "the death of the author" (in ROLAND BARTHES's famous phrase). Foucault's approach to this question is characteristic of much of his work. We must consider, he says, what "functions" the category of "author" fulfills within the "discourse" the historian or critic deploys in the analysis of written texts. The concept *author*, he points out, is an organizing device, permitting us to group certain texts together. More crucially, the concept underwrites a number of interpretive conventions. We ascribe a certain unity and coherence to all the works written by a single author, or at least we feel that an author's drastic changes in style or opinion must

be explained. And we assume, at the most fundamental level, that the author is the source of the text. Interpretation moves from the written text (which may be all we know of a writer) back toward the author, searching out an individual's biography, psychology, and intentions. The author thus functions both to organize the vast reservoir of materials that the past bequeaths us and to anchor a certain way of interpreting those materials.

Foucault's ultimate target here is "humanism," the postmedieval understanding of who and what individuals are. He highlights the historical contingency of the belief that we are "individuals" with unique natures, possessing coherent interior identities, motives, desires, and conscious intentions that cause our actions. Humanism claims for each individual the capacities that literary criticism ascribes to authors.

Significantly, the "author function" has not always been deemed necessary to the apprehension and interpretation of texts. Prior to 1500 anonymous texts were the norm. Even today the importance of authors varies from field to field. A contract has no author, nor does the average poster. We barely note the authors of most newspaper articles. Generally speaking, Foucault opines, emphasis on the author is a mark of prestige. "Discourse that possesses an author's name is not to be immediately consumed and forgotten. . . . Rather, its status and its manner of reception are regulated by the culture in which it circulates."

Foucault's essay, then, invites us to examine the ways in which literary criticism approaches its object—the text—and accords it the prestigious title of "literature" partly through the exaltation of the author (as talented, as worthy of honor and study). He also—and we see here his importance to New Historicism—shifts our focus away from the author and toward larger systematic social forces. What if the author is not the cause, the source, of the text? What if author and text are both effects? In that case, the critic's inquiries and scrutiny need to be directed toward their common cause, toward cultural conventions and their inclusions and exclusions, not confined to formal analyses of texts or psychological investigations of writers' lives.

Such questions reveal a persistent Foucauldian preoccupation: the social constitution of the "subject" (structuralism's preferred term for the self or the individual). In "What Is an Author?" he writes that "the subject should not be entirely abandoned. It should be reconsidered, not to restore the theme of an originating subject, but to seize its functions, its intervention in discourse, and its system of dependencies. . . . [W]e should ask: under what conditions and through what forms can an entity like the subject appear in the order of discourse; what position does it occupy; what functions does it exhibit; and what rules does it follow in each type of discourse?" Though antihumanistic "deconstruction of the self" is characteristic of French post-structuralism, Foucault insists on keeping the category of the *subject* as a means to study the historical discourses of power and knowledge that constitute it.

Foucault uses the term *subject* for two reasons. First, he is thinking of the grammatical subject, the subject of a sentence. Following the structuralists, he is influenced by the idea of a "subject position" that exists as a slot in syntax and is then occupied by different actual selves at different times. That selves assume the subject position only tentatively and temporarily is highlighted by grammatical "shifters," whose most dramatic example is the pronoun "I." When I use "I," it means me; when you use "I," it means you. I become "I," the first-person subject of the sentence, only when I am authorized to speak or when I seize that position. Shifters thus indicate that subject positions—created by language—preexist individual selves, and that power enables their use.

Second, Foucault draws on *subject* as a verb. Individuals get to occupy subject positions (the various roles existing within a discourse or an institution) only through a process in which they are "subjected" to power. Indeed, individuals are constituted by power as subjects prior to having any standing as individuals.

Foucault's work from 1969 to 1980 focuses on the processes through which subjects are produced. Later, he writes of *selves*, using a term that might allow individuals

an existence apart from their relations to a constituting power. But in the works of his middle period from which our selections are drawn, Foucault turns the usually celebratory narrative of the rise of the individual in modern Western societies on its head by connecting that rise with a tremendous decrease in freedom. Our selection "The Carceral" (the final section of *Discipline and Punish*) presents Foucault's sweeping, bleak, and all-too-convincing portrait of modern society since the 1740s as a series of increasingly prisonlike institutions that aim at "the accumulation and useful administration of men," conceived as docile subjects. The modern individual is produced by a power that individualizes precisely in order to better control. A panoptic (all-seeing) power keeps subjects under constant surveillance. (Foucault takes the term *panoptic* from the early-nineteenth-century English reformer Jeremy Bentham, who designed a circular prison, the Panopticon, in which each inmate was always in view of a single guard in a central tower.)

Foucault argues that premodern power intervened in subjects' lives only intermittently. Unless they broke the law, most premodern persons lived in deep obscurity, unnoticed by various authorities. But modern societies intervene from day one to shape, train, and normalize individuals. Compulsory schooling, public health measures, passports, employment records, family counseling, and the like are all very recent social practices—none more than 250 years old. In each case, an institution molds behavior according to a norm, subordinates individuals to institutional demands, examines and watches over all subjects, and punishes deviants. Such a society, Foucault argues, not only needs prisons because it inevitably produces deviants but also is itself prisonlike, "carceral," from top to bottom. The institutions that administer individuals (schools, factories, the army) use the same strategies and techniques of control that prisons employ.

Alongside this historical argument, Foucault developed—in both *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, volume 1, *An Introduction* (1976)—an influential account of the interconnections among power, knowledge, and the subject. Two short phrases provide excellent points of entry to Foucault's revision of traditional notions of power. Famously, he writes that "power is exercised, rather than possessed," and he insists that power is not repressive but "productive."

Power in Foucault's account does not belong to anyone, nor does it all emanate from one specific location, such as the state. Rather, power is diffused throughout social institutions; as it is exercised by innumerable, replaceable functionaries. It operates through the daily disciplines and routines to which bodies are subjected. Thus, for example, the teacher exercises power over students, and schools have countless ways of governing students' behavior. But the teacher holds that power only as a function of his or her place in the institution, being subject as a teacher to various rules, incentives, and punishments. Both teacher and students are located (though differently) within the institution, and both go through their paces within a network that guides and oversees their conduct. Foucault stresses modern power's capillary "microtechniques," its ubiquitous reinforcement of the norm at every step, its direct work upon "docile" bodies. Think of how much time is spent making schoolchildren sit still or develop the motor skills required for "good" handwriting. Foucault sees power as decentralized and depersonalized.

The diffusion of power through the "capillaries" of the social system alters the model of political action. In our selection from the interview "Truth and Power," Foucault tells us that the traditional images of revolution are no longer appropriate. KARL MARX and other revolutionary theorists had dreamed of locating both the "universal" voice (the intellectual) and the agent (the proletariat) of humankind's political aspirations. Their combined efforts could successfully confront the massed power of the state and capitalism. But Foucault points out that power operates in innumerable places, taking many different forms that may or may not work in tandem. There is no single privileged place for the political activist to go to work, no locus of power whose removal will bring the whole system tumbling down. He therefore argues that the

time of the "universal" intellectual has given way to that of the "specific" intellectual, "situated" (as are all subjects) in social networks. Though no local struggle is necessarily more crucial or more effective than any other, the political agent must start with the local and the specific—not only because of his or her own location but also because "universalist" claims arrogantly (and mistakenly) assume the right to speak and act for others.

The insistence that "power is productive" underwrites Foucault's rejection of "the repressive hypothesis" in our selection from volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*. Power is traditionally seen as repressing behaviors that it finds unproductive, threatening, or otherwise undesirable. For example, people have various sexual desires (to masturbate or to seek same-sex partners) that are deemed unacceptable, and social power is exerted to repress those desires and the behaviors that follow from them. Foucault argues, however, that modern power produces the very categories, desires, and actions it strives to regulate. Before an act is prohibited, it is not singled out as something separate and identifiable or perhaps even desirable. The enunciation of the category and the law both creates (identifies, designates) certain actions as crimes and affords them a heightened presence.

In keeping with his historical argument that modern power operates through continual classification, surveillance, and intervention, Foucault goes further, proposing that such power names actions as crimes and perversions precisely to increase its opportunities for intervention. This is why he insists that modern society "is in actual fact, and directly, perverse." It produces the very desires and behaviors it claims to abhor, relying largely on discourse. Power can operate physically on bodies, but discursively it carves up the world. Through language various bodies are assigned to various categories (race, gender, IQ, etc.), and various actions are designated in relation to norms as praiseworthy, deviant, punishable, or criminal. A whole new array of identifiable "perverse" sexualities were named in the nineteenth century. Discourse disposes: it puts everything in its place. Modern power penetrates everywhere, giving a specific name to every possible variant of human action so as to master the world and leave nothing unexamined, unknown, uncatalogued. The nineteenth century (with its supposedly repressed Victorians) began this "explosion of discourse," which in the field of sexuality produced extensive new vocabularies and categories for naming desires and actions that could then become subjected to medical, legal, and other institutional and state interventions.

Along with producing subjects, modern power produces sexual (and other) categories that structure the world in certain ways. Here *Discipline and Punish* and volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality* are in accord. (In the later two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, partly in response to criticism, Foucault examines how selves might act to produce themselves.) Consider Foucault's comment (one of the founding remarks of queer theory) on the medical categorization of homosexuality in 1870: "Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy to a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual now was a species." Power acts discursively to produce homosexuality when it separates out and labels as *homosexual* certain actions that had previously been included in the grab-bag term *sodomy* (which also included bestiality and some nonreproductive heterosexual acts). The new attempt to be more precise, more "scientific," in categorizing human sexual behavior itself requires that behavior to be scrutinized more carefully than ever before.

Foucault further argues that the way that the courts and sociologists treat criminals and the medical profession and psychologists view homosexuals indicates a dramatic shift in the very form of subjecthood. In modern society, actions begin to be taken as evidence of a deep-rooted and persistent identity. In the premodern world, in contrast, sodomy and other crimes were seen as temporary aberrations, single acts that carried no particular relation to the self who committed them; they certainly were not seen

as demonstrating a sexual identity or a criminal nature. The label *sodomite* says nothing beyond pointing to the commission of particular acts. But the homosexual carries his homosexuality within himself at every moment; the act comes to determine identity. Foucault's argument is that through this connection of actions to "being," of what I do to what I am, modern power produces subjects who have identities, thereby enabling its grip on us. Subjects whose identities must be figured out through an interpretation of their actions become "both an object of analysis and a target of intervention."

Foucault is exposing—and questioning—our era's most fundamental assumptions about who and what individuals are. And he argues that these assumptions have been produced by and are the foundational principles of the "social sciences"—what the French call "the human sciences." It is no coincidence that the modern academic disciplines arise during the same period that sees the shift toward disciplinary power. The knowledge produced in psychology, sociology, anthropology, criminology, and medicine is itself an integral part of the discursive ordering and physical management wielded by modern power.

Power/knowledge is the term Foucault uses to indicate how the production of knowledge is wedded to productive power. Modern power requires increasingly narrow categories through which it analyzes, differentiates, identifies, and administers individuals. The human sciences not only provide tools for this sorting process but also legitimate the actions that follow it. The psychological exam, for example, tells us what needs to be done: is this murderer a criminal who must be sent to prison, or an insane person who must be sent to a hospital?

Clearly, power/knowledge undercuts any lofty humanistic narrative of "the life of the mind" or "the disinterested pursuit of knowledge." The intellectual comes to look like power's dupe, or perhaps a privileged insider to power's activities. The university, in particular, serves a dual function. As gatekeeper, it sorts students via grades, exams, course requirements, and so on, thereby limiting access to various cherished places in the social hierarchy, such as medical careers. At the same time the university undertakes funded research, thereby producing the knowledge through which populations are observed and managed.

Not surprisingly, Foucault's thoughts on the knowledge/power nexus have sparked some of the most intense criticisms of his work, and toward the end of his life he did soften some of his more extreme statements. The close of our selection from "Truth and Power" illustrates disturbing consequences that critics of Foucault's view have highlighted. At issue is the relation of knowledge and truth to political action. The modern world has repeatedly seen governments manipulate their populations by outright lies and by cover-ups of the truth. Eastern European dissidents against communist dictatorships and Americans protesting the war in Vietnam saw the strategy of exposing government lies as crucial. Foucault argues, however, that "truth" is always a part of a "regime." He uses the same logic that leads him to present the author as a "function" and to refute "the repressive hypothesis." As he says in our selection from *Discipline and Punish*, "there is no outside." Nothing—whether selves, desires, or truth—is external to the productive power/knowledge that creates the categories by which it is known. Thus, the truth to which dissidents appeal is no less a product of interested strategies—in this case, their own—than the truth spoken by the officials whom they oppose. Truths are not all born equal, because some discourses are more powerful than others. But Foucault does not recognize any component of truth separate from power. His position seems to reduce politics to a battle that can be waged only on the field of propaganda. Can I get the people to buy my "regime of truth" in place of the one that currently reigns?

Critics of Foucault have often focused on aspects of this lack of any "outside," as everything that might stand apart from power or discourse is swallowed up within them in his work. Disciplinary power is so all-pervasive and triumphant that meaningful resistance and independent agency appear impossible. Foucault insisted

repeatedly that there was resistance everywhere throughout the world created by power, but by his own logic such resistance, like everything else, is an offshoot of power. As a result, many activities that may seem to oppose power are, a Foucauldian analysis shows, "complicitous" with it, reinforcing rather than contesting its reign. (Analyses of this sort, preoccupied with trying to differentiate the truly from the apparently oppositional, abound within New Historicism and cultural studies.) Foucault struggled to find ways to escape this compelling logic without returning to naive appeals to "truth" or "selves" that exist independently of the discursive and social networks in which they appear. His efforts in that direction remain fragmentary. Since his death, the ever-increasing pressure on individuals to fit in the bureaucratic slots of a "globalized" world of transnational corporations, international trade alliances and political organizations, and newly prominent nongovernmental organizations (such as the World Trade Organization) makes Foucault's account of a supervising, norm-enforcing, disciplinary power appear even more pertinent.

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its kind, while Joan Nordquist's *Michel Foucault: A Bibliography* (1986) and *Michel Foucault II* (1992) are more recent. The fairly extensive bibliography in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* is well arranged and easy to use.

What Is an Author?¹

In proposing this slightly odd question, I am conscious of the need for an explanation. To this day, the "author" remains an open question both with respect to its general function within discourse and in my own writings; that is, this question permits me to return to certain aspects of my own work which now appear ill-advised and misleading. In this regard, I wish to propose a necessary criticism and reevaluation.

For instance, my objective in *The Order of Things*² had been to analyse verbal clusters as discursive layers which fall outside the familiar categories of a book, a work, or an author. But while I considered "natural history," the "analysis of wealth," and "political economy" in general terms, I neglected a similar analysis of the author and his works; it is perhaps due to this omission that I employed the names of authors throughout this book in a naive and often crude fashion. I spoke of Buffon, Cuvier, Ricardo,³ and others as well, but failed to realize that I had allowed their names to function ambiguously. This has proved an embarrassment to me in that my oversight has served to raise two pertinent objections.

It was argued that I had not properly described Buffon or his work and that my handling of Marx⁴ was pitifully inadequate in terms of the totality of his thought. Although these objections were obviously justified, they ignored the task I had set myself: I had no intention of describing Buffon or Marx or of reproducing their statements or implicit meanings, but, simply stated, I wanted to locate the rules that formed a certain number of concepts and theoretical relationships in their works. In addition, it was argued that I had created monstrous families by bringing together names as disparate as Buffon and Linnaeus or in placing Cuvier next to Darwin⁵ in defiance of the most readily observable family resemblances and natural ties. This objection also seems inappropriate since I had never tried to establish a genealogical table of exceptional individuals, nor was I concerned in forming an intellectual daguerreotype of the scholar or naturalist of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. In fact, I had no intention of forming any family, whether holy or perverse. On the contrary, I wanted to determine—a much more modest task—the functional conditions of specific discursive practices.

Then why did I use the names of authors in *The Order of Things*? Why not avoid their use altogether, or, short of that, why not define the manner in which they were used? These questions appear fully justified and I have

1. Translated by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon.

2. Published in 1966 as *Les Mots et les choses*; in it, Foucault uncovered the epistemic assumptions of the "classical" (Enlightenment) and modern periods by examining the work of natural scientists, political economists, and linguists.

3. David Ricardo (1777–1823), English economist. Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon

(1707–1788), French naturalist. Georges Cuvier (1769–1832), French anatomist.

4. KARL MARX (1818–1883), German social, political, and economic philosopher.

5. Charles Darwin (1809–1882), English naturalist and theorist of evolution. Carolus Linnaeus: Carl von Linné (1707–1778), Swedish botanist who devised the modern scientific nomenclature of living things.

tried to gauge their implications and consequences in a book that will appear shortly.⁶ These questions have determined my effort to situate comprehensive discursive units, such as "natural history" or "political economy," and to establish the methods and instruments for delimiting, analyzing, and describing these unities. Nevertheless, as a privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, and literature, or in the history of philosophy and science, the question of the author demands a more direct response. Even now, when we study the history of a concept, a literary genre, or a branch of philosophy, these concerns assume a relatively weak and secondary position in relation to the solid and fundamental role of an author and his works.

For the purposes of this paper, I will set aside a sociohistorical analysis of the author as an individual and the numerous questions that deserve attention in this context: how the author was individualized in a culture such as ours; the status we have given the author, for instance, when we began our research into authenticity and attribution; the systems of valorization in which he was included; or the moment when the stories of heroes gave way to an author's biography; the conditions that fostered the formulation of the fundamental critical category of "the man and his work." For the time being, I wish to restrict myself to the singular relationship that holds between an author and a text, the manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside and precedes it.

Beckett supplies a direction: "What matter who's speaking, someone said, what matter who's speaking."⁷ In an indifference such as this we must recognize one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing. It is not simply "ethical" because it characterizes our way of speaking and writing, but because it stands as an immanent rule, endlessly adopted and yet never fully applied. As a principle, it dominates writing as an ongoing practice and slights our customary attention to the finished product. For the sake of illustration, we need only consider two of its major themes. First, the writing of our day has freed itself from the necessity of "expression"; it only refers to itself, yet it is not restricted to the confines of interiority. On the contrary, we recognize it in its exterior deployment. This reversal transforms writing into an interplay of signs, regulated less by the content it signifies than by the very nature of the signifier. Moreover, it implies an action that is always testing the limits of its regularity, transgressing and reversing an order that it accepts and manipulates. Writing unfolds like a game that inevitably moves beyond its own rules and finally leaves them behind. Thus, the essential basis of this writing is not the exalted emotions related to the act of composition or the insertion of a subject into language. Rather, it is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears.

The second theme is even more familiar: it is the kinship between writing and death. This relationship inverts the age-old conception of Greek narrative or epic, which was designed to guarantee the immortality of a hero. The hero accepted an early death because his life, consecrated and magnified by death, passed into immortality; and the narrative redeemed his acceptance of death. In a different sense, Arabic stories, and *The Arabian Nights* in

6. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969).

7. Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing* (1974), p. 16

[translators' note]. Beckett (1906–1974), Irish-born French novelist and playwright.

particular, had as their motivation, their theme and pretext, this strategy for defeating death. Storytellers continued their narratives late into the night to forestall death and to delay the inevitable moment when everyone must fall silent. Scheherazade's story is a desperate inversion of murder; it is the effort, throughout all those nights, to exclude death from the circle of existence.⁸ This conception of a spoken or written narrative as a protection against death has been transformed by our culture. Writing is now linked to sacrifice and to the sacrifice of life itself; it is a voluntary obliteration of the self that does not require representation in books because it takes place in the everyday existence of the writer. Where a work had the duty of creating immortality, it now attains the right to kill, to become the murderer of its author. Flaubert, Proust, and Kafka⁹ are obvious examples of this reversal. In addition, we find the link between writing and death manifested in the total effacement of the individual characteristics of the writer; the quibbling and confrontations that a writer generates between himself and his text cancel out the signs of his particular individuality. If we wish to know the writer in our day, it will be through the singularity of his absence and in his link to death, which has transformed him into a victim of his own writing. While all of this is familiar in philosophy, as in literary criticism, I am not certain that the consequences derived from the disappearance or death of the author¹ have been fully explored or that the importance of this event has been appreciated. To be specific, it seems to me that the themes destined to replace the privileged position accorded the author have merely served to arrest the possibility of genuine change. Of these, I will examine two that seem particularly important.

To begin with, the thesis concerning a work. It has been understood that the task of criticism is not to reestablish the ties between an author and his work or to reconstitute an author's thought and experience through his works and, further, that criticism should concern itself with the structures of a work, its architectonic forms, which are studied for their intrinsic and internal relationships. Yet, what of a context that questions the concept of a work? What, in short, is the strange unit designated by the term, work? What is necessary to its composition, if a work is not something written by a person called an "author"? Difficulties arise on all sides if we raise the question in this way. If an individual is not an author, what are we to make of those things he has written or said, left among his papers or communicated to others? Is this not properly a work? What, for instance, were Sade's papers before he was consecrated as an author?² Little more, perhaps, than rolls of paper on which he endlessly unravelled his fantasies while in prison.

Assuming that we are dealing with an author, is everything he wrote and said, everything he left behind, to be included in his work? This problem is both theoretical and practical. If we wish to publish the complete works of Nietzsche,³ for example, where do we draw the line? Certainly, everything

8. Scheherazade, narrator of *The Arabian Nights* (a collection of traditional tales from several Middle Eastern cultures, codified ca. 1450), tells her stories to avoid the fate of the king's previous brides: execution on the morning after he marries them.
9. Franz Kafka (1883–1924), Austrian novelist, who lived much of his life in Prague. Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880), and Marcel Proust (1871–1922), French novelists.

1. The phrase "death of the author" comes from the French literary critic ROLAND BARTHES (1915–1980).

2. The French author the marquis de Sade (1740–1814) began to write while in prison.

3. FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE (1844–1900), the German philosopher, was insane the last ten years of his life and left many unpublished works, including wild jottings from his later years.

must be published, but can we agree on what "everything" means? We will, of course, include everything that Nietzsche himself published, along with the drafts of his works, his plans for aphorisms, his marginal notations and corrections. But what if, in a notebook filled with aphorisms, we find a reference, a reminder of an appointment, an address, or a laundry bill, should this be included in his works? Why not? These practical considerations are endless once we consider how a work can be extracted from the millions of traces left by an individual after his death. Plainly, we lack a theory to encompass the questions generated by a work and the empirical activity of those who naively undertake the publication of the complete works of an author often suffers from the absence of this framework. Yet more questions arise. Can we say that *The Arabian Nights*, and *Stromates* of Clement of Alexandria, or the *Lives* of Diogenes Laertes⁴ constitute works? Such questions only begin to suggest the range of our difficulties, and, if some have found it convenient to bypass the individuality of the writer or his status as an author to concentrate on a work, they have failed to appreciate the equally problematic nature of the word "work" and the unity it designates.

Another thesis has detained us from taking full measure of the author's disappearance. It avoids confronting the specific event that makes it possible and, in subtle ways, continues to preserve the existence of the author. This is the notion of *écriture*.⁵ Strictly speaking, it should allow us not only to circumvent references to an author, but to situate his recent absence. The conception of *écriture*, as currently employed, is concerned with neither the act of writing nor the indications, as symptoms or signs within a text, of an author's meaning; rather, it stands for a remarkably profound attempt to elaborate the conditions of any text, both the conditions of its spatial dispersion and its temporal deployment.

It appears, however, that this concept, as currently employed, has merely transposed the empirical characteristics of an author to a transcendental anonymity. The extremely visible signs of the author's empirical activity are effaced to allow the play, in parallel or opposition, of religious and critical modes of characterization. In granting a primordial status to writing, do we not, in effect, simply reinscribe in transcendental terms the theological affirmation of its sacred origin or a critical belief in its creative nature? To say that writing, in terms of the particular history it made possible, is subjected to forgetfulness and repression, is this not to reintroduce in transcendental terms the religious principle of hidden meanings (which require interpretation) and the critical assumption of implicit significations, silent purposes, and obscure contents (which give rise to commentary)?⁶ Finally, is not the conception of writing as absence a transposition into transcendental terms of the religious belief in a fixed and continuous tradition or the aesthetic principle that proclaims the survival of the work as a kind of enigmatic supplement of the author beyond his own death?

This conception of *écriture* sustains the privileges of the author through

4. Greek scholar (ca. early 3d c. C.E.) whose *Lives* is a compilation of the lives and doctrines of the philosophers. Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–ca. 215 C.E.), early church father and theologian; the *Stromates* (*Miscellanies*) is a collection of notes, full of digressions, on Christian philosophy.
5. Written language or writing (French). In post-

structuralist thought, especially that of JACQUES DERRIDA (b. 1930), *écriture* designates that which is required for any particular speech act—whether spoken or written—to take place.
6. Here Foucault is criticizing the writings of Derrida.

the safeguard of the *a priori*;⁷ the play of representations that formed a particular image of the author is extended within a gray neutrality. The disappearance of the author—since Mallarmé,⁸ an event of our time—is held in check by the transcendental. Is it not necessary to draw a line between those who believe that we can continue to situate our present discontinuities within the historical and transcendental tradition of the nineteenth century and those who are making a great effort to liberate themselves, once and for all, from this conceptual framework?

It is obviously insufficient to repeat empty slogans: the author has disappeared; God and man died a common death. Rather, we should reexamine the empty space left by the author's disappearance; we should attentively observe, along its gaps and fault lines, its new demarcations, and the reapportionment of this void; we should await the fluid functions released by this disappearance. In this context we can briefly consider the problems that arise in the use of an author's name. What is the name of an author? How does it function? Far from offering a solution, I will attempt to indicate some of the difficulties related to these questions.

The name of an author poses all the problems related to the category of the proper name. (Here, I am referring to the work of John Searle,⁹ among others.) Obviously not a pure and simple reference, the proper name (and the author's name as well) has other than indicative functions. It is more than a gesture, a finger pointed at someone; it is, to a certain extent, the equivalent of a description. When we say "Aristotle," we are using a word that means one or a series of definite descriptions of the type: "the author of the *Analytics*," or "the founder of ontology," and so forth. Furthermore, a proper name has other functions than that of signification: when we discover that Rimbaud² has not written *La Chasse spirituelle*, we cannot maintain that the meaning of the proper name or this author's name has been altered. The proper name and the name of an author oscillate between the poles of description and designation,³ and, granting that they are linked to what they name, they are not totally determined either by their descriptive or designative functions. Yet—and it is here that the specific difficulties attending an author's name appear—the link between a proper name and the individual being named and the link between an author's name and that which it names are not isomorphous and do not function in the same way; and these differences require clarification.

To learn, for example, that Pierre Dupont⁴ does not have blue eyes, does not live in Paris, and is not a doctor does not invalidate the fact that the name, Pierre Dupont, continues to refer to the same person; there has been no modification of the designation that links the name to the person. With

7. That is, that which is derived from self-evident propositions (vs. from experience).

8. STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ (1842–1898), French symbolist poet; he was interested in writing techniques that diminished the author's role in the creation of the poem.

9. See John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (1969), pp. 162–74 [translators' note]. Searle (b. 1932), American philosopher.

1. Greek philosopher (384–322 B.C.E.; see above).

2. Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891), French poet.

The prose poem "La Chasse spirituelle" was published in 1949 as a recovered "lost" work by Rimbaud; its actual authors revealed the hoax shortly after publication.

3. In the philosophy of language, a *description* is a meaningful set of words that refers to a particular object. Hence, "the author of *Great Expectations*" describes "Charles Dickens." In contrast, the name "Charles Dickens" is a *designation* of the person who bears that name.

4. The French equivalent of "John Doe," a random designation of a living person.

the name of an author, however, the problems are far more complex. The disclosure that Shakespeare was not born in the house that tourists now visit would not modify the functioning of the author's name, but, if it were proved that he had not written the sonnets that we attribute to him, this would constitute a significant change and affect the manner in which the author's name functions. Moreover, if we establish that Shakespeare wrote Bacon's *Organon* and that the same author was responsible for both the works of Shakespeare and those of Bacon, we would have introduced a third type of alteration which completely modifies the functioning of the author's name.⁵ Consequently, the name of an author is not precisely a proper name among others.

Many other factors sustain this paradoxical singularity of the name of an author. It is altogether different to maintain that Pierre Dupont does not exist and that Homer or Hermes Trismegistes⁶ have never existed. While the first negation merely implies that there is no one by the name of Pierre Dupont, the second indicates that several individuals have been referred to by one name or that the real author possessed none of the traits traditionally associated with Homer or Hermes. Neither is it the same thing to say that Jacques Durand, not Pierre Dupont, is the real name of X and that Stendhal's name was Henri Beyle.⁷ We could also examine the function and meaning of such statements as "Bourbaki is this or that person," and "Victor Eremita, Climacus, Anticlimacus, Frater Taciturnus, Constantin Constantius, all of these are Kierkegaard."⁸

These differences indicate that an author's name is not simply an element of speech (as a subject, a complement, or an element that could be replaced by a pronoun or other parts of speech). Its presence is functional in that it serves as a means of classification. A name can group together a number of texts and thus differentiate them from others. A name also establishes different forms of relationships among texts. Neither Hermes nor Hippocrates existed in the sense that we can say Balzac⁹ existed, but the fact that a number of texts were attached to a single name implies that relationships of homogeneity, filiation, reciprocal explanation, authentication, or of common utilization were established among them. Finally, the author's name characterizes a particular manner of existence of discourse. Discourse that possesses an author's name is not to be immediately consumed and forgotten; neither is it accorded the momentary attention given to ordinary, fleeting words. Rather, its status and its manner of reception are regulated by the culture in which it circulates.

We can conclude that, unlike a proper name, which moves from the interior of a discourse to the real person outside who produced it, the name of

5. Some people have argued that the plays of William Shakespeare (1564–1616) were actually written by the English philosopher Francis Bacon (1561–1626), whose *Organon* (1620) is often cited as the founding text of the "scientific method."

6. The god of letters, to whom 42 philosophico-religious works and books on alchemy and astrology, presumed to be the ancient wisdom of Egypt, were attributed. Homer is the traditional author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (ca. 8th c. B.C.E.); but the question of whether these two poems, originally transmitted orally, were the work of any single author remains open.

7. The real name of the French novelist (1783–1842) who wrote under the pen name Stendahl.

8. Victor Eremita and the other names listed here were all pseudonyms used by the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) at various times during his career. Nicolas Bourbaki, the allonym for a group of 20th-century algebraists.

9. Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), French novelist. Hippocrates (469–399 B.C.E.), Greek physician usually considered the father of medicine; though it is unlikely that he wrote any of the books attributed to him, Hippocrates did exist.

the author remains at the contours of texts—separating one from the other, defining their form, and characterizing their mode of existence. It points to the existence of certain groups of discourse and refers to the status of this discourse within a society and culture. The author's name is not a function of a man's civil status, nor is it fictional; it is situated in the breach, among the discontinuities, which gives rise to new groups of discourse and their singular mode of existence. Consequently, we can say that in our culture, the name of an author is a variable that accompanies only certain texts to the exclusion of others: a private letter may have a signatory, but it does not have an author; a contract can have an underwriter, but not an author; and, similarly, an anonymous poster attached to a wall may have a writer, but he cannot be an author. In this sense, the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society.

In dealing with the "author" as a function of discourse, we must consider the characteristics of a discourse that support this use and determine its difference from other discourses. If we limit our remarks to only those books or texts with authors, we can isolate four different features.

First, they are objects of appropriation; the form of property they have become is of a particular type whose legal codification was accomplished some years ago. It is important to notice, as well, that its status as property is historically secondary to the penal code controlling its appropriation. Speeches and books were assigned real authors, other than mythical or important religious figures, only when the author became subject to punishment and to the extent that his discourse was considered transgressive. In our culture—undoubtedly in others as well—discourse was not originally a thing, a product, or a possession, but an action situated in a bipolar field of sacred and profane, lawful and unlawful, religious and blasphemous. It was a gesture charged with risks long before it became a possession caught in a circuit of property values. But it was at the moment when a system of ownership and strict copyright rules were established (toward the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century) that the transgressive properties always intrinsic to the act of writing became the forceful imperative of literature. It is as if the author, at the moment he was accepted into the social order of property which governs our culture, was compensating for his new status by reviving the older bipolar field of discourse in a systematic practice of transgression and by restoring the danger of writing which, on another side, had been conferred the benefits of property.

Secondly, the "author-function" is not universal or constant in all discourse. Even within our civilization, the same types of texts have not always required authors; there was a time when those texts which we now call "literary" (stories, folk tales, epics, and tragedies) were accepted, circulated, and valorized without any question about the identity of their author. Their anonymity was ignored because their real or supposed age was a sufficient guarantee of their authenticity. Texts, however, that we now call "scientific" (dealing with cosmology and the heavens, medicine or illness, the natural sciences or geography) were only considered truthful during the Middle Ages if the name of the author was indicated. Statements on the order of "Hip-

pocrates said . . ." or "Pliny¹ tells us that . . ." were not merely formulas for an argument based on authority; they marked a proven discourse. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a totally new conception was developed when scientific texts were accepted on their own merits and positioned within an anonymous and coherent conceptual system of established truths and methods of verification. Authentication no longer required reference to the individual who had produced them; the role of the author disappeared as an index of truthfulness and, where it remained as an inventor's name, it was merely to denote a specific theorem or proposition, a strange effect, a property, a body, a group of elements, or pathological syndrome.

At the same time, however, "literary" discourse was acceptable only if it carried an author's name; every text of poetry or fiction was obliged to state its author and the date, place, and circumstance of its writing. The meaning and value attributed to the text depended on this information. If by accident or design a text was presented anonymously, every effort was made to locate its author. Literary anonymity was of interest only as a puzzle to be solved as, in our day, literary works are totally dominated by the sovereignty of the author. (Undoubtedly, these remarks are far too categorical. Criticism has been concerned for some time now with aspects of a text not fully dependent on the notion of an individual creator; studies of genre or the analysis of recurring textual motifs and their variations from a norm other than the author. Furthermore, where in mathematics the author has become little more than a handy reference for a particular theorem or group of propositions, the reference to an author in biology and medicine, or to the date of his research has a substantially different bearing. This latter reference, more than simply indicating the source of information, attests to the "reliability" of the evidence, since it entails an appreciation of the techniques and experimental materials available at a given time and in a particular laboratory.)

The third point concerning this "author-function" is that it is not formed spontaneously through the simple attribution of a discourse to an individual. It results from a complex operation whose purpose is to construct the rational entity we call an author. Undoubtedly, this construction is assigned a "realistic" dimension as we speak of an individual's "profundity" or "creative" power, his intentions or the original inspiration manifested in writing. Nevertheless, these aspects of an individual, which we designate as an author (or which comprise an individual as an author), are projections, in terms always more or less psychological, of our way of handling texts: in the comparisons we make, the traits we extract as pertinent, the continuities we assign, or the exclusions we practice. In addition, all these operations vary according to the period and the form of discourse concerned. A "philosopher" and a "poet" are not constructed in the same manner; and the author of an eighteenth-century novel was formed differently from the modern novelist. There are, nevertheless, transhistorical constants in the rules that govern the construction of an author.

In literary criticism, for example, the traditional methods for defining an author—or, rather, for determining the configuration of the author from existing texts—derive in large part from those used in the Christian tradition

1. Roman writer (23/24–79 C.E.); only his 37-book *Natural History* survives.

to authenticate (or to reject) the particular texts in its possession. Modern criticism, in its desire to "recover" the author from a work, employs devices strongly reminiscent of Christian exegesis when it wished to prove the value of a text by ascertaining the holiness of its author. In *De Viris Illustribus*, Saint Jerome² maintains that homonymy is not proof of the common authorship of several works, since many individuals could have the same name or someone could have perversely appropriated another's name. The name, as an individual mark, is not sufficient as it relates to a textual tradition. How, then, can several texts be attributed to an individual author? What norms, related to the function of the author, will disclose the involvement of several authors? According to Saint Jerome, there are four criteria: the texts that must be eliminated from the list of works attributed to a single author are those inferior to the others (thus, the author is defined as a standard level of quality); those whose ideas conflict with the doctrine expressed in the others (here the author is defined as a certain field of conceptual or theoretical coherence); those written in a different style and containing words and phrases not ordinarily found in the other works (the author is seen as a stylistic uniformity); and those referring to events or historical figures subsequent to the death of the author (the author is thus a definite historical figure in which a series of events converge). Although modern criticism does not appear to have these same suspicions concerning authentication, its strategies for defining the author present striking similarities. The author explains the presence of certain events within a text, as well as their transformations, distortions, and their various modifications (and this through an author's biography or by reference to his particular point of view, in the analysis of his social preferences and his position within a class or by delineating his fundamental objectives). The author also constitutes a principle of unity in writing where any unevenness of production is ascribed to changes caused by evolution, maturation, or outside influence. In addition, the author serves to neutralize the contradictions that are found in a series of texts. Governing this function is the belief that there must be—at a particular level of an author's thought, of his conscious or unconscious desire—a point where contradictions are resolved, where the incompatible elements can be shown to relate to one another or to cohere around a fundamental and originating contradiction. Finally, the author is a particular source of expression who, in more or less finished forms, is manifested equally well, and with similar validity, in a text, in letters, fragments, drafts, and so forth. Thus, even while Saint Jerome's four principles of authenticity might seem largely inadequate to modern critics, they, nevertheless, define the critical modalities now used to display the function of the author.

However, it would be false to consider the function of the author as a pure and simple reconstruction after the fact of a text given as passive material, since a text always bears a number of signs that refer to the author. Well known to grammarians, these textual signs are personal pronouns, adverbs of time and place, and the conjugation of verbs. But it is important to note that these elements have a different bearing on texts with an author and on

those without one. In the latter, these "shifters"³ refer to a real speaker and to an actual deictic situation, with certain exceptions such as the case of indirect speech in the first person. When discourse is linked to an author, however, the role of "shifters" is more complex and variable. It is well known that in a novel narrated in the first person, neither the first person pronoun, the present indicative tense, nor, for that matter, its signs of localization refer directly to the writer, either to the time when he wrote, or to the specific act of writing; rather, they stand for a "second self," whose similarity to the author is never fixed and undergoes considerable alteration within the course of a single book. It would be as false to seek the author in relation to the actual writer as to the fictional narrator; the "author-function" arises out of their scission—in the division and distance of the two. One might object that this phenomenon only applies to novels or poetry, to a context of "quasi-discourse," but, in fact, all discourse that supports this "author-function" is characterized by this plurality of egos. In a mathematical treatise, the ego who indicates the circumstances of composition in the preface is not identical, either in terms of his position or his function, to the "I" who concludes a demonstration within the body of the text. The former implies a unique individual who, at a given time and place, succeeded in completing a project, whereas the latter indicates an instance and plan of demonstration that anyone could perform provided the same set of axioms, preliminary operations, and an identical set of symbols were used. It is also possible to locate a third ego: one who speaks of the goals of his investigation, the obstacles encountered, its results, and the problems yet to be solved and this "I" would function in a field of existing or future mathematical discourses. We are not dealing with a system of dependencies where a first and essential use of the "I" is reduplicated, as a kind of fiction, by the other two. On the contrary, the "author-function" in such discourses operates so as to effect the simultaneous dispersion of the three egos.

Further elaboration would, of course, disclose other characteristics of the "author-function," but I have limited myself to the four that seemed the most obvious and important. They can be summarized in the following manner: the "author-function" is tied to the legal and institutional systems that circumscribe, determine, and articulate the realm of discourses; it does not operate in a uniform manner in all discourses, at all times, and in any given culture; it is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a text to its creator, but through a series of precise and complex procedures; it does not refer, purely and simply, to an actual individual insofar as it simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy.

I am aware that until now I have kept my subject within unjustifiable limits; I should also have spoken of the "author-function" in painting, music, technical fields, and so forth. Admitting that my analysis is restricted to the domain of discourse, it seems that I have given the term "author" an excessively narrow meaning. I have discussed the author only in the limited sense of a person to whom the production of a text, a book, or a work can be legitimately attributed. However, it is obvious that even within the realm of

2. Church father and scholar (ca. 340–420), the first to translate the Bible into Latin. *De Viris Illustribus* (392–93, *Of Illustrious Men*) is a collection of 130 biographies of Christian writers.

3. Words whose referent changes according to the context in which they specify a person or thing (pronouns), place (adverbs), or time (adverbs, verb tense)—that is, according to the "deictic situation."

discourse a person can be the author of much more than a book—of a theory, for instance, of a tradition or a discipline within which new books and authors can proliferate. For convenience, we could say that such authors occupy a “transdiscursive” position.

Homer, Aristotle,⁴ and the Church Fathers played this role, as did the first mathematicians and the originators of the Hippocratic tradition. This type of author is surely as old as our civilization. But I believe that the nineteenth century in Europe produced a singular type of author who should not be confused with “great” literary authors, or the authors of canonical religious texts, and the founders of sciences. Somewhat arbitrarily, we might call them “initiators of discursive practices.”

The distinctive contribution of these authors is that they produced not only their own work, but the possibility and the rules of formation of other texts. In this sense, their role differs entirely from that of a novelist, for example, who is basically never more than the author of his own text. Freud⁵ is not simply the author of *The Interpretation of Dreams* or of *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious* and Marx is not simply the author of the *Communist Manifesto* or *Capital*: they both established the endless possibility of discourse. Obviously, an easy objection can be made. The author of a novel may be responsible for more than his own text; if he acquires some “importance” in the literary world, his influence can have significant ramifications. To take a very simple example, one could say that Ann Radcliffe⁶ did not simply write *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and a few other novels, but also made possible the appearance of Gothic romances at the beginning of the nineteenth century. To this extent, her function as an author exceeds the limits of her work. However, this objection can be answered by the fact that the possibilities disclosed by the initiators of discursive practices (using the examples of Marx and Freud, whom I believe to be the first and the most important) are significantly different from those suggested by novelists. The novels of Ann Radcliffe put into circulation a certain number of resemblances and analogies patterned on her work—various characteristic signs, figures, relationships, and structures that could be integrated into other books. In short, to say that Ann Radcliffe created the Gothic Romance means that there are certain elements common to her works and to the nineteenth-century Gothic romance: the heroine ruined by her own innocence, the secret fortress that functions as a counter-city, the outlaw-hero who swears revenge on the world that has cursed him, etc. On the other hand, Marx and Freud, as “initiators of discursive practices,” not only made possible a certain number of analogies that could be adopted by future texts, but, as importantly, they also made possible a certain number of differences. They cleared a space for the introduction of elements other than their own, which, nevertheless, remain within the field of discourse they initiated. In saying that Freud founded psychoanalysis, we do not simply mean that the concept of libido or the techniques of dream analysis reappear in the writings of Karl Abraham or Melanie Klein,⁷ but that he made possible a certain number of

differences with respect to his books, concepts, and hypotheses, which all arise out of psychoanalytic discourse.

Is this not the case, however, with the founder of any new science or of any author who successfully transforms an existing science? After all, Galileo⁸ is indirectly responsible for the texts of those who mechanically applied the laws he formulated, in addition to having paved the way for the production of statements far different from his own. If Cuvier is the founder of biology and Saussure⁹ of linguistics, it is not because they were imitated or that an organic concept or a theory of the sign was uncritically integrated into new texts, but because Cuvier, to a certain extent, made possible a theory of evolution diametrically opposed to his own system and because Saussure made possible a generative grammar radically different from his own structural analysis. Superficially, then, the initiation of discursive practices appears similar to the founding of any scientific endeavor, but I believe there is a fundamental difference.

In a scientific program, the founding act is on an equal footing with its future transformations: it is merely one among the many modifications that it makes possible. This interdependence can take several forms. In the future development of a science, the founding act may appear as little more than a single instance of a more general phenomenon that has been discovered. It might be questioned, in retrospect, for being too intuitive or empirical and submitted to the rigors of new theoretical operations in order to situate it in a formal domain. Finally, it might be thought a hasty generalization whose validity should be restricted. In other words, the founding act of a science can always be rechanneled through the machinery of transformations it has instituted.

On the other hand, the initiation of a discursive practice is heterogeneous to its ulterior transformations. To extend psychoanalytic practice, as initiated by Freud, is not to presume a formal generality that was not claimed at the outset; it is to explore a number of possible applications. To limit it is to isolate in the original texts a small set of propositions or statements that are recognized as having an inaugurative value and that mark other Freudian concepts or theories as derivative. Finally, there are no “false” statements in the work of these initiators; those statements considered inessential or “pre-historic,” in that they are associated with another discourse, are simply neglected in favor of the more pertinent aspects of the work. The initiation of a discursive practice, unlike the founding of a science, overshadows and is necessarily detached from its later developments and transformations. As a consequence, we define the theoretical validity of a statement with respect to the work of the initiator, where as in the case of Galileo or Newton,¹ it is based on the structural and intrinsic norms established in cosmology or physics. Stated schematically, the work of these initiators is not situated in relation to a science or in the space it defines; rather, it is science or discursive practice that relate to their works as the primary points of reference.

In keeping with this distinction, we can understand why it is inevitable that practitioners of such discourses must “return to the origin.” Here, as well, it is necessary to distinguish a “return” from scientific “rediscoveries”

4. Aristotle's encyclopedic writings enormously influenced medieval philosophy and science.
5. SIGMUND FREUD (1856–1939), Austrian founder of psychoanalysis.
6. English novelist (1764–1823); her *Mysteries of*

Udolpho (1791) was extremely popular.

7. Austrian-born English psychoanalyst (1882–1960). Abraham (1877–1925), German psychoanalyst.

8. Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), Italian astronomer and physicist.

9. FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE (1857–1913), Swiss

linguist.

1. Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727), English physicist and mathematician.

or "reactivations." "Rediscoveries" are the effects of analogy or isomorphism with current forms of knowledge that allow the perception of forgotten or obscured figures. For instance, Chomsky in his book on Cartesian grammar² "rediscovered" a form of knowledge that had been in use from Cordemoy to Humboldt.³ It could only be understood from the perspective of generative grammar because this later manifestation held the key to its construction: in effect, a retrospective codification of an historical position. "Reactivation" refers to something quite different: the insertion of discourse into totally new domains of generalization, practice, and transformations. The history of mathematics abounds in examples of this phenomenon as the work of Michel Serres on mathematical anamnesis shows.⁴

The phrase, "return to," designates a movement with its proper specificity, which characterizes the initiation of discursive practices. If we return, it is because of a basic and constructive omission, an omission that is not the result of accident or incomprehension. In effect, the act of initiation is such, in its essence, that it is inevitably subjected to its own distortions; that which displays this act and derives from it is, at the same time, the root of its divergences and travesties. This nonaccidental omission must be regulated by precise operations that can be situated, analysed, and reduced in a return to the act of initiation. The barrier imposed by omission was not added from the outside; it arises from the discursive practice in question, which gives it its law. Both the cause of the barrier and the means for its removal, this omission—also responsible for the obstacles that prevent returning to the act of initiation—can only be resolved by a return. In addition, it is always a return to a text in itself, specifically, to a primary and unadorned text with particular attention to those things registered in the interstices of the text, its gaps and absences. We return to those empty spaces that have been masked by omission or concealed in a false and misleading plenitude. In these rediscoveries of an essential lack, we find the oscillation of two characteristic responses: "This point was made—you can't help seeing it if you know how to read"; or, inversely, "No, that point is not made in any of the printed words in the text, but it is expressed through the words, in their relationships and in the distance that separates them." It follows naturally that this return, which is a part of the discursive mechanism, constantly introduces modifications that would come to fix itself upon the primary discursivity and redouble it in the form of an ornament which, after all, is not essential. Rather, it is an effective and necessary means of transforming discursive practice. A study of Galileo's works could alter our knowledge of the history, but not the science, of mechanics; whereas, a re-examination of the books of Freud or Marx can transform our understanding of psychoanalysis or Marxism.

A last feature of these returns is that they tend to reinforce the enigmatic link between an author and his works. A text has an inaugurative value precisely because it is the work of a particular author, and our returns are conditioned by this knowledge. The rediscovery of an unknown text by Newton or Cantor⁵ will not modify classical cosmology or group theory; at most, it

will change our appreciation of their historical genesis. Bringing to light, however, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, to the extent that we recognize it as a book by Freud, can transform not only our historical knowledge, but the field of psychoanalytic theory—if only through a shift of accent or of the center of gravity. These returns, an important component of discursive practices, form a relationship between "fundamental" and mediate authors, which is not identical to that which links an ordinary text to its immediate author.

These remarks concerning the initiation of discursive practices have been extremely schematic, especially with regard to the opposition I have tried to trace between this initiation and the founding of sciences. The distinction between the two is not readily discernible; moreover, there is no proof that the two procedures are mutually exclusive. My only purpose in setting up this opposition, however, was to show that the "author-function," sufficiently complex at the level of a book or a series of texts that bear a definite signature, has other determining factors when analysed in terms of larger entities—groups of works or entire disciplines.

Unfortunately, there is a decided absence of positive propositions in this essay, as it applies to analytic procedures or directions for future research, but I ought at least to give the reasons why I attach such importance to a continuation of this work. Developing a similar analysis could provide the basis for a typology of discourse. A typology of this sort cannot be adequately understood in relation to the grammatical features, formal structures, and objects of discourse, because there undoubtedly exist specific discursive properties or relationships that are irreducible to the rules of grammar and logic and to the laws that govern objects. These properties require investigation if we hope to distinguish the larger categories of discourse. The different forms of relationships (or nonrelationships) that an author can assume are evidently one of these discursive properties.

This form of investigation might also permit the introduction of an historical analysis of discourse. Perhaps the time has come to study not only the expressive value and formal transformations of discourse, but its mode of existence: the modifications and variations, within any culture, of modes of circulation, valorization, attribution, and appropriation. Partially at the expense of themes and concepts that an author places in his work, the "author-function" could also reveal the manner in which discourse is articulated on the basis of social relationships.

Is it not possible to reexamine, as a legitimate extension of this kind of analysis, the privileges of the subject? Clearly, in undertaking an internal and architectonic analysis of a work (whether it be a literary text, a philosophical system, or a scientific work) and in delimiting psychological and biographical references, suspicions arise concerning the absolute nature and creative role of the subject. But the subject should not be entirely abandoned. It should be reconsidered, not to restore the theme of an originating subject, but to seize its functions, its intervention in discourse, and its system of dependencies. We should suspend the typical questions: how does a free subject penetrate the density of things and endow them with meaning; how does it accomplish its design by animating the rules of discourse from within? Rather, we should ask: under what conditions and through what forms can an entity like the subject appear in the order of discourse; what position does

2. Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics* (1966) [translators' note]. Chomsky (b. 1928), American linguist.

3. Karl Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), German statesman and philologist. Geraud de Cordemoy (d. 1684), French author of *A Philo-*

sophical Discourse Concerning Speech (1668).

4. Michel Serres, *La Communication: Hermes I* (1968), pp. 78–112 [translators' note].

5. Georg Cantor (1845–1918), Russian-born German mathematician.

it occupy; what functions does it exhibit; and what rules does it follow in each type of discourse? In short, the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse.

The author—or what I have called the “author-function”—is undoubtedly only one of the possible specifications of the subject and, considering past historical transformations, it appears that the form, the complexity, and even the existence of this function are far from immutable. We can easily imagine a culture where discourse would circulate without any need for an author. Discourses, whatever their status, form, or value, and regardless of our manner of handling them, would unfold in a pervasive anonymity. No longer the tiresome repetitions:

“Who is the real author?”

“Have we proof of his authenticity and originality?”

“What has he revealed of his most profound self in his language?”

New questions will be heard:

“What are the modes of existence of this discourse?”

“Where does it come from; how is it circulated; who controls it?”

“What placements are determined for possible subjects?”

“Who can fulfill these diverse functions of the subject?”

Behind all these questions we would hear little more than the murmur of indifference:

“What matter who’s speaking?”

1969

From Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison¹

The Carceral

Were I to fix the date of completion of the carceral² system, I would choose not 1810 and the penal code, nor even 1844, when the law laying down the principle of cellular internment was passed; I might not even choose 1838, when books on prison reform by Charles Lucas, Moreau-Christophe and Faucher were published.³ The date I would choose would be 22 January 1840, the date of the official opening of Mettray.⁴ Or better still, perhaps, that glorious day, unremarked and unrecorded, when a child in Mettray remarked as he lay dying: ‘What a pity I left the colony so soon’.⁵ This marked the death of the first penitentiary saint. Many of the blessed no doubt went to join him, if the former inmates of the penal colonies are to be believed when, in singing the praises of the new punitive policies of the body, they remarked: ‘We preferred the blows, but the cell suits us better’.

1. Translated by Alan Sheridan.

2. Related to the act of incarceration and to institutions that discipline the body, especially prisons.

3. Charles Lucas, *De la réforme des prisons* (1836); L. Moreau-Christophe, *De la mortalité et la folie dans le régime pénitentiaire* (1839); L. Faucher, *De la réforme des prisons* (1838) [Foucault’s note].

4. French prison farm for juvenile criminals founded in 1840; it was widely imitated throughout Europe as a model of modern disciplinary techniques.

5. E. Ducpétiaux, *De la condition physique et morale des jeunes ouvriers* (1852), p. 383 [Foucault’s note].

Why Mettray? Because it is the disciplinary form at its most extreme; the model in which are concentrated all the coercive technologies of behaviour. In it were to be found ‘cloister, prison, school, regiment’. The small, highly hierarchized groups, into which the inmates were divided, followed simultaneously five models: that of the family (each group was a ‘family’ composed of ‘brothers’ and two ‘elder brothers’); that of the army (each family, commanded by a head, was divided into two sections, each of which had a second in command; each inmate had a number and was taught basic military exercises; there was a cleanliness inspection every day, an inspection of clothing every week; a roll-call was taken three times a day); that of the workshop, with supervisors and foremen, who were responsible for the regularity of the work and for the apprenticeship of the younger inmates; that of the school (an hour or an hour and a half of lessons every day; the teaching was given by the instructor and by the deputy-heads); lastly, the judicial model (each day ‘justice’ was meted out in the parlour: ‘The least act of disobedience is punished and the best way of avoiding serious offences is to punish the most minor offences very severely: at Mettray, a useless word is punishable; the principal punishment inflicted was confinement to one’s cell; for ‘isolation is the best means of acting on the moral nature of children; it is there above all that the voice of religion, even if it has never spoken to their hearts, recovers all its emotional power’⁶); the entire parapolitical institution, which is created in order not to be a prison, culminates in the cell, on the walls of which are written in black letters: ‘God sees you’.

This superimposition of different models makes it possible to indicate, in its specific features, the function of ‘training’. The chiefs and their deputies at Mettray had to be not exactly judges, or teachers, or foremen, or non-commissioned officers, or ‘parents’, but something of all these things in a quite specific mode of intervention. They were in a sense technicians of behaviour: engineers of conduct, orthopaedists⁸ of individuality. Their task was to produce bodies that were both docile and capable; they supervised the nine or ten working hours of every day (whether in a workshop or in the fields); they directed the orderly movements of groups of inmates, physical exercises, military exercises, rising in the morning, going to bed at night, walks to the accompaniment of bugle and whistle; they taught ‘gymnastics’;⁹ they checked cleanliness, supervised bathing. Training was accompanied by permanent observation; a body of knowledge was being constantly built up from the everyday behaviour of the inmates; it was organized as an instrument of perpetual assessment: ‘On entering the colony, the child is subjected to a sort of interrogation as to his origins, the position of his family, the offence for which he was brought before the courts and all the other offences that make up his short and often very sad existence. This information is written down on a board on which everything concerning each inmate is noted in turn, his stay at the colony and the place to which he is sent when he leaves’.¹ The modelling of the body produces a knowledge of the individual; the apprenticeship of the techniques induces modes of behaviour and the acquisition of skills is inextricably linked with the establishment of power

6. Ibid., p. 377 [Foucault’s note].

7. Closely related to the penal.

8. Those who correct, or set straight, children.

9. “Anything that helps to tire the body helps to expel bad thoughts; so care is taken that games consist of violent exercise. At night, they fall asleep

the moment they touch the pillow” (Ducpétiaux, *De la condition physique et morale*, pp. 375–76) [Foucault’s note].

1. E. Ducpétiaux, *Des colonies agricoles* (1851), p. 61 [Foucault’s note].