Foucault’s Motion.

A Report to an Academy.

Par Carlo Caduff

‘*Notre héritage n’est précédé d’aucun testament*’.

René Char



There is, it seems, a puzzle in the way we think about ideas. While increasingly acknowledging that ideas have the ability to appear at all sorts of times and travel to all sorts of places, we are still eager to attribute them to authors, that is, to refer them back to what is imagined as the time and place of their origin. By and large, this contrast animates today’s obsession with intellectual property rights: The more Euro-Americans are drawn to reveal the flow of ideas, the more efforts they seem to invest in the fabrication of moments of invention and sites of conception. Accordingly, isolating the source of a piece of information has become tantamount to conferring a title of ownership. Offering the finest example in support of the view it actively entertains, the idea of intellectual property behaves just like other ideas: it travels globally.

The function of the author, in other words, has not disappeared, but rather taken on unexpected valence as a compelling way of regulating the fluidity of

information brought about by new technologies of communication. Not quite sure yet about the mechanisms of limitation imposed on the circulation of ideas by new regimes of intellectual property rights, scholars seem completely comfortable in continuously returning to particular authors, conceived of as creators of ideas. However, as Michel Foucault remarked, to return to the ideas of an author frequently ‘constitutes an effective and necessary task of transforming the discursive practice itself’ (Foucault, 1998: 219). Paradoxically, the practice of attaching ideas to creators can function as a correlate to their ‘transcendence’.

In the first part of this paper, I will point to a certain mode of returning to Foucault currently virulent among American scholars in particular. In the second part, I shall outline a different mode of appropriating Foucault. My aim is to render visible how Foucault himself repeatedly returned to his own work, testing its limits, setting himself in motion, exploring the possibility of transforming the discursive practice he was engaged in by rendering his analytic tools amendable to a particular type of historical inquiry. Significantly, Foucault’s diverse historical inquiries, addressing a series of specific practices embedded in particular historical contexts, always entail, in a certain sense, critical readings of earlier research projects. What then was the guiding principle of Foucault’s work’

My contention is that the guiding principle, if I may call it so, is not exactly to be found in Foucault’s texts themselves, but rather in their relationship. Evoking Foucault’s inventive mode of appropriating Foucault, I shall argue that there is not a theory, but an ethos to be discovered in his work. In attaching a creator to his creations, referring to the circumstances of their production, my ambition is not to reduce a piece of work to the time and place of its author’s life, but to read texts as scenes of transcendence, as ground for new experiences, as exercises of transformation, as experiments of going beyond accustomed relations to things, to others, and to oneself. Taken as a whole, I shall conclude, Foucault’s inquiries profess a patient effort of giving form to his impatience for freedom.

To clear an original imaginative space for oneself is to swerve from others so as to overcome one’s precursors: such is the ‘dreadful necessity’ of priority that the norm of originality (as re-inscribed in the current regime of intellectual property

rights) imposes time and again upon Euro-Americans[1]. Clearly, Foucault never insisted on the 'priority of divination'. Just as dangerous as becoming an echo of someone else's music is the perennial danger of becoming one's own echo. Stasis and not so much belatedness appears as the main threat thinkers have to face, and so Foucault insisted on the priority of self-transformation. To clear an imaginative space, Foucault's first choice was to swerve away from himself. Not the misprision of precursors, but the misprision of his own work became his guiding principle.

A penchant for theory.

There is, it seems, a puzzle in the way Michel Foucault sketched his ideas about the body. In a collection of essays programmatically entitled *The Psychic Life of Power,* Judith Butler observes that in Foucault's well-known essay *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* the body primarily appears as 'inscribed surface of events' (Butler, 1997: 91). Conversely, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault seems to question the view of the body as an independent materiality. Here, in *Discipline and Punish* that is, the body no longer appears to constitute 'a static surface or site, which a subsequent investment comes to mark, signify upon, or pervade', as Butler asserts (Butler, 1997: 91).

Now before giving a sense of how American scholars are drawn to handle such puzzles, I shall refer to another puzzle, revealed in the manner Michel Foucault presented his research projects, and point to the way a French scholar, Didier Eribon, recently suggested to resolve it. Significantly, *Folie et Déraison* — or *Histoire de la Folie*, as it was entitled at the occasion of the publication of the second edition in 1972 —, as well as *Naissance de la Clinique*, *Les Mots et les Choses*, and *Surveiller et Punir* are defined by Foucault as inquiries into the limitation of discourse (Foucault, 1963; 1966; 1972; 1975). As Didier Eribon observes, most of Foucault's research projects are formulated essentially in terms of scarcity (Eribon, 2001: 58). The majority of systems of thought Foucault sought to analyze are systems of exclusion, marked by a principle of rarefaction 'both of possible enunciations and of possible modes of enunciation, and even of possible speaking subjects' (Eribon, 2001: 58). In his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France — and that is to say: on the very occasion of the public

legitimatization to pronounce serious speech acts —, Foucault affirms:

> ‘*On sait bien qu’on n’a pas le droit de tout dire, qu’on ne peut pas parler de tout dans n’importe quelle circonstance, que n’importe qui, enfin, ne peut pas parler de n’importe quoi.’* (Foucault, 1971: 11)

Significantly, Foucault additionally points to what he believes constitutes the two main arenas where discourse appears most controlled and restricted: politics and — sexuality.

It is quite astonishing, then, what Foucault offers only a few years later in *La Volonté de Savoir*.

‘*A first survey […] seems to indicate that since the end of the sixteenth century, the “putting into discourse of sex”, far from undergoing a process of restriction, on the contrary has been subjected to a mechanism of increasing incitement*.’ (Foucault, 1990a: 12)

One might construe this shift simply as an ordinary, if crucial revision, based on an unexpected empirical founding. Not surprisingly, different discourses reveal different principles. There are, however, indications that Foucault himself was eager to cast his new book in contrast to earlier projects of his own. As he explains in the introduction to *La Volonté de Savoir*: ‘In short, I would like to disengage my analysis from the privileges generally accorded the economy of scarcity and the principles of rarefaction’ (Foucault, 1990a: 12). Indeed, the first volume of the *Histoire de la Sexualité* can be read as a reversal of a fundamental principle on which Foucault’s prior work was based. The proliferation of discourse and the circulation of knowledge now appears as closely related to the mechanisms of power.

Now puzzles come into view, when apparently contradictory ideas are forced to occur in a common space — the space of commentary, in our case. Accordingly, a standard way of resolving such puzzles is to separate and divide ideas again, attributing them to their place and time of origin. As Didier Eribon remarks, one of the main reasons for Foucault’s fundamental shift is related to the political

situation in France in the 1970s as well as to ‘the new way in which his work was being received’ (Eribon, 2001: 59). Considering Foucault’s penchant for continuous self-transformation and taking into account his insistence on incessant self-detachment, Foucault’s move might not be as surprising as it might seem at first sight.

In the United States, where the concepts of ‘discipline’ and ‘sexuality’ attracted most interest among historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and philosophers, other relocations occurred (Rabinow, 2004: vi). From the American point of view, Foucault developed those two concepts in the context of theoretical reflections on power and the body[2]; Commenting on Foucault’s work, American scholars have frequently been captured by seemingly contradictory formulations discovered in his main books — and some of his essays[3]. Unfamiliar with the French context,they have been inclined to resolve puzzles by other means. That is to say, by constructing another arena where words and things are amendable to particular rearrangements[4]. This arena, I shall argue, is distinctive of a certain kind of reception of Foucault in America. In particular, it allows American scholars to fashion puzzles encountered in the work of Foucault as *theoretical* problems. I shall therefore call this arena ‘Theory’. Now it is important to see that it is the form of the arena itself which constitutes the conditions of the possibility of the appearance of certain kinds of problems — as well as the range of potential solutions. In a sense, then, American scholars produce the very object they are anticipating. As a matter of fact, it is predominantly in the United States where Foucault’s books and essays are read as if they revealed some kind of underlying theoretical unity.

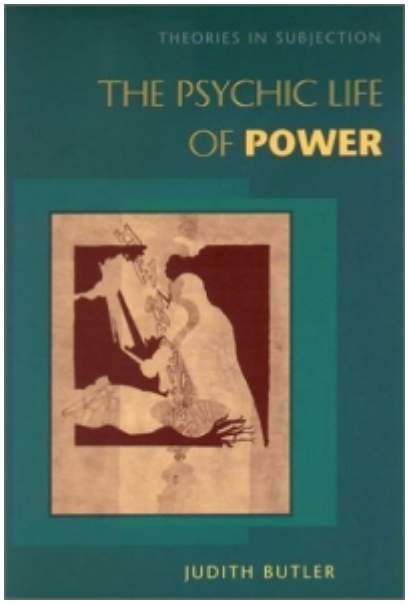
A series of conclusions suggest themselves. Once we assume that it is Foucault’s aim to provide a coherent theory of the body, we are almost inevitably forced to consider the problem of its materiality. The two contradictory formulations of the body now appear as a serious problem, calling for a resolution — a resolution that, at least in America, is likely to be developed in dialog with Freud, Marx, or Hegel, reinforcing the substantialist assumption that ideas have the inherent ability to appear at all sorts of times — just like every commodity can be shipped to all sorts of places. The arena of ‘theory’, however, creates not only the possibility for certain kinds of readings, it also introduces

peculiar norms and forms of demonstration, establishing its own domain of truth and falseness.

The prison: a metaphor.

How, then, do Foucault's *objects* appear in this peculiar arena in which thinkers are expected to elaborate theories? Commenting on a passage in *Discipline and Punish*, Judith Butler observes:

'*Although Foucault is specifying the subjectivation of the prisoner here, he appears also to be privileging the metaphor of the prison to theorize the subjectivation of the body*.' (Butler, 1997: 85)[5]



Butler's basic assumption — that it is Foucault's aim indeed to 'theorize' the subjectivation of the body in *Discipline and Punish* — leads her to the view of the prison as a *metaphor*; a view, of course, Foucault hardly would agree with. If Foucault's ideas, or concepts, as one might prefer to call them, are perceived by American scholars primarily as *theories*, Foucault's historical objects appear as *metaphors*. Accordingly, history is seen as an exploitable archive: a resource providing an unlimited set of metaphors ready to be gathered, mobilized, and exploited as the substance of subsequent theoretical elaborations. The style of reasoning dominant in the arena of theory shall therefore be called allegorical[6].

Clearly, Foucault's objects are not metaphors. It is the *stance* scholars take up towards his books that transforms the prison into an allegory of power, the body, the subject. The assumption that Foucault is saying one thing while suggesting another points to a style of allegorical reading that abounds in Butler's account. That Foucault maintained on several occasions not to be interested in any kind of theory is explained by Butler as an instance of paralipsis (Butler, 2003: 65).Occasionally, American life can be hard on things French, to be sure[7].

As is well known, Foucault himself repeatedly called for a vigorous appropriation and modification of his conceptual tools according to the tactical requirements of particular situations. Thus, in an interview Foucault asserts: 'un livre est fait pour servir à des usages non définis par celui qui l'a écrit. Plus il aura d'usages nouveaux, possibles, imprévus, plus je serai content.' And he continues:

'*Tous mes livres […] sont […] de petites boîtes à outils. Si les gens veulent bien les ouvrir, se servir de telle phrase, telle idée, telle analyse comme d'un tournevis ou d'un desserre-boulon pour court-circuiter, disqualifier, casser les systèmes de pouvoir, y compris éventuellement ceux-là mêmes dont mes livres sont issus… eh bien, c'est tant mieux*.' (Foucault, 2001b: 1588)[8]

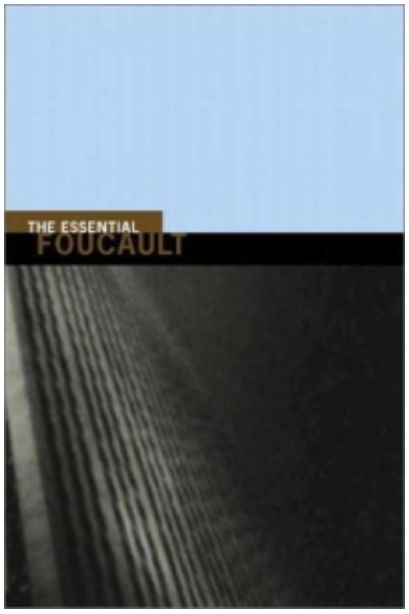
So what's wrong with an allegorical reading of Foucault's books anyway? Two things are to be said. First, Foucault's view of his texts as ready-mades to be used in contemporary struggles as means to confront reigning systems of domination and repression, is clearly based on an analytics of power of Nietzschean descent — an analytics of power Foucault would later prefer to abandon. Second, even this mode of appropriation of Foucault's conceptual innovations, emphasizing that one should take whatever is useful, requires precisely that concepts are not cast as theories in need of correction. Indeed, it seems that the envisioned motion of tactical appropriation and modification is immobilized once readers set out to enclose Foucault's genealogies within theories (of power, the body, subjectivation, sexuality, etc.), running the risk to reduce every historical inquiry to an exposition of examples, to a resource that may be mobilized, assembled, and displayed at will. Once historical objects are relegated to serve their rhetorical function of exposition and demonstration, all is set for the prison to appear as metaphor, ready to be invoked at all sorts of times

in all sorts of places.

In his encounter with Nietzsche, Foucault deliberately avoided presenting his concepts as elements of theories. Indeed, genealogy, as a mode of inquiry, is essentially opposed to any kind of theoretical ambition. Accordingly, ‘genealogy has to be invented anew as situations change’, as Paul Rabinow and Nicolas Rose recently observed (Rainbow and Rose, 2004). The movement that Foucault envisioned was a

‘*movement of thought that invents, makes use of, and modifies conceptual tools as they are set into a relation with specific practices and problems which they themselves help to form in new ways*.’

Eager to keep this movement in motion, we might well stop construing certain kinds of puzzles. If not a theory, what difference did



Foucault’s work introduce in the realm of science? Is there another type of misprision that would allow a different approach to Foucault? Is there a way of swerving from his books while remaining close to his style of reasoning’

The thick of things.

'*[To] fight one's way through the thick of things; that is what I have done, I have fought through the thick of things. There was nothing else for me to do, provided always that freedom was not to be my choice.*'

Franz Kafka

The year 1971 marked not only the publication of Foucault's famous essay *Nietzsche, la Généalogie, l'Histoire*, but also the formation of the 'Groupe d'information sur les prisons'. In May 1970, the French police arrested a group of almost 200 people, all associated with the illegal Maoist political movement 'Gauche prolétarienne' (Gp), accused of continuing to publish *La Cause du Peuple*. A few months later, in September 1970, twenty-nine of the arrested Maoists decided to go on hunger strike in protest at their internment, appealing for the right to be acknowledged as political prisoners. On the occasion of the end of their second hunger strike in January 1971, Michel Foucault, Jean-Marie Domenach and Pierre Vidal-Naquet distributed a manifest to the French press, announcing the formation of a new political movement, the 'Groupe d'information sur les prisons' (Gip).9 The 'I' that distinguishes the Gip from the Gp indicated the small difference, the intellectuals sought to introduce in their engagement with the political situation (Defert, 2001: 320). What exactly was the difference, then'

Foucault will later judge the Maoists's call to be separated from the regular prisoners a crucial political mistake, as it reinforces the Marxist distinction between the proletarians and the Lumpenproletariat within the prison itself, thus confining the critique of the prison to a particular form of internment instead of attacking the penal system as a whole (Foucault, 2001j: 1401). Focusing on the prison and the practice of internment as such, the Gip sought to re-situate the problem raised by the imprisonment of the Maoists and question the taken for granted habit of imprisoning people. The group's goal was to dispel the familiarity of the prison and open it to political action and reflection. During the months following the constitution of the Gip, several revolts occurred in French prisons, in Aix, for instance, but also in Clairvaux, in Lille, in Nancy, in Nîmes, in Poissy, in Lyon and in Toul, drawing the attention of a large public to the miserable

conditions in the prisons. Conversely, the aim of the ‘Groupe d’information sur les prisons’ was, as Foucault and his friends stated in their declaration, to mobilize not universal intellectuals but specific intellectuals: psychiatrists, physicians, journalists, lawyers, and social workers.

The manifesto published by the Gip is based on a diagnosis of the present:

> ‘*Peu d’informations se publient sur les prisons; c’est l’une des régions cachées de notre système social, l’une des cases noires de notre vie. Nous avons le droit de savoir, nous voulons savoir*.’ (Foucault, 2001e: 1043)

Occasionally, lawyers, journalists, physicians, psychiatrists and social workers join the movement as well as former prisoners. Later on, Robert Castel, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Donzelot, Claude Mauriac, Jean-Claude Passeron, and Jacques Rancière enter the Gip. In the months following the formation of the Gip, a series of related political movements emerged independently, the ‘Groupe d’information sur les asiles (Gia), the ‘Groupe d’information des travailleurs sociaux’ (Gits), the ‘Groupe d’information et de soutien des travailleurs immigrés’ (Gisti), and the ‘Groupe d’information sur la santé’ (Gis).[10]

Clearly, the goal of the GIP was neither to provide a general theory of oppression, nor to suggest another reform of the prison, but rather to conduct local struggles, establishing the phenomenon of the prison as legitimate object of public deliberation and political action. Accordingly, the production and circulation of information emerged as the central element of the struggle. As Philippe Artières puts it:

> ‘*Foucault et le Groupe d’information sur les prisons étaient parvenus à faire sortir l’information de détention grâce à une série d’enquêtes et à faire entrer la prison dans le champ de l’actualité*.’ (Artières, 2001: 103)

Significantly, scientific inquiry itself appeared as a political act.

‘*Le Gip plaçait ainsi les lutes pour l’information au centre de son action en développant à partir de sa création une série d’enquêtes dites “enquêtes-intolérance”*.’ (Artières, 2001: 105)

But what kind of information was envisioned? The manifesto of the Gip asserts:

> ‘*Nous nous proposons de faire savoir ce qu’est la prison: qui y va, comment et pourquoi on y va, ce qui se passe, ce qu’est la vie des prisonniers et celle, également, du personnel de surveillance, ce que sont les bâtiments, la nourriture, l’hygiène, comment fonctionnent le règlement intérieur, le contrôle médical, les ateliers; comment on en sort et ce que c’est, dans notre société, d’être l’un de ceux qui en sont sortis*.’

The information aspired to by the Gip, then, was primarily related to the question of everyday life in prisons. What Foucault and his friends had in mind was related to what one might call the experience of the prison. This experience, however, was not in need of theoretical reflection. As Domenbach, Foucault and Vidal-Naquet underline, they are not interested in raising the consciousness of the prisoners at all. In contrast to the Marxist concept of the *Lumpenproletariat* as an inert mass of reactionary subjects, the consciousness of oppression seemed already present among prisoners.

> ‘*Or ce que les intellectuels ont découvert depuis la poussée récente, c’est que les masses n’ont pas besoin d’eux pour savoir; elles savent parfaitement, clairement, beaucoup mieux qu’eux; et elles le disent fort bien. Mais il existe un système de pouvoir qui barre, interdit, invalide ce discours et ce savoir*.’ (Foucault, 2001d: 1176)

For the very reason that power seeks to repress knowledge, trying to keep things secret, the only way of opposing it is to assemble, circulate and re-legitimate the experiences of the prisoners11. Why, when and how punishment had become the ‘most hidden part of the penal process’, is a question Foucault will address in detail in *Surveiller and Punir*, published in 1975 (Foucault, 1995: 9).

As Foucault maintains: ‘Il s’agit de laisser la parole à ceux qui ont une expérience de la prison.’ (Foucault, 2001k: 1043). Rather than following the example of the universal intellectual who speaks in the name of others, the Gip followed the model of the labor movement: the prisoners are asked to conduct their own studies on the conditions of internment. ‘Ces enquêtes sont faites non pas de l’extérieur par un groupe de techniciens: les enquêteurs, ici, sont les enquêtés eux-mêmes.’ (Foucault, 2001g: 1064). Already in May 1971, the Gip was ready to publish its first study, entitled *Enquête dans vingt prisons* (Foucault, 2001g: 1064). The fourth and last study, on the problem of suicide, appeared in January 1973 in collaboration with Gilles Deleuze. Significantly, the booklets were intended to bring about a certain affect among its readers: ‘Notre enquête n’est pas faite pour accumuler des connaissances, mais pour accroître notre intolérance et en faire une intolérance active.’ (Foucault, 2001k: 1044). The group thus called its studies ‘enquête-intolérance’. Needless to say that it was not the group’s objective to suggest another humanization of the penal system12.

The end of the Gip came in December 1972, when Foucault and his friends decided to dissolve the group. Serge Livrozet, a former prisoner and author of *De la Prison à la Révolte* (for which Michel Foucault composed a preface), established a prisoners’ action committee, the ‘Comité d’action des prisonniers’ as it was called, led by prisoners themselves, and so the immediate goal of the Gip had been achieved: to let the prisoners speak for themselves. Reason enough for the group to announce their dissolution.

In *Surveiller and Punir*, published in 1975, Foucault describes, as is well known, the disappearance of the practice of torture as a public spectacle and analyzes the emergence of the modern penal system. Concomitantly, Foucault’s book provides elements of a genealogy of the modern individual, seen as the product of a technology of power Foucault calls ‘discipline’. The book, of course, grew out of Foucault’s engagement with the Gip; it proposes, however, a different understanding of power.

> ‘*We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it “excludes”, it “represses”, it “censors”, it “abstracts”, it “masks”, it “conceals”. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it*

> *produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production*.' (Foucault, 1995: 194)

The modern penal system and its regime of disciplinary power is neither repressive nor destructive. It is, rather, incredibly productive, it turns individuals into 'cases', it establishes standard methods of examination, it seeks ways of comparison, it produces data, it accumulates files, and develops techniques of documentation and storage. What the book announces, then, is another transformation.

Askesis.

'*History does not simply analyze or interpret forces: it modifies them*.'

Michel Foucault

In a series of lectures, delivered at the Collège de France from January to March 1976, entitled *'Il faut défendre la société'*, Foucault undertakes the analysis of the norms and forms of a particular discourse13. In *Surveiller et punir*, Foucault famously reversed Clausewitz' view of war as the continuation of politics by other means. In contrast to Clausewitz, Foucault saw politics as a continuation of war by other means. In 1976, Foucault presented a genealogy of precisely this view of politics (as a form of war). His lectures, thus, allow a different perspective on an essential part of his preceding work. Announcing a reexamination of his prior view of power relations, the 1976 lectures put forward — in part, at least — a genealogy of the norms and forms of his own discourse. Or, more precisely, they provide a historical account of the grid of intelligibility of genealogy. And, lastly, they show Foucault engaged in an effort of self-detachment.

Foucault's primary goal is of analytic kind, as he declares at the outset of his first lecture. He seeks to abandon what he calls 'le modèle juridique de la souveraineté', characterized by 1) the notion of the individual as the subject of natural right, 2) the idea of law as the fundamental expression of power, and 3) the attempt at elaborating a vision of the ideal state. Instead of analyzing power

according to the juridical scheme of sovereignty, Foucault proposes a different principle for the analysis of power relations. He asks:

> '*Can we find in bellicose relations, in the model of war, in the schema of struggle or struggles, a principle that can help us understand and analyze political power, to interpret political power in terms of war, struggles, and confrontations*.' (Foucault, 2003: 23)

Characteristic for Foucault's style of reasoning, this *analytic* question is approached from a different angle in the course; it is subjected to *historical* scrutiny. The question now is: Where does this particular grid of intelligibility come from? The distance Foucault traveled comes into view in the way Foucault reformulates his main question later on in the Course Summary:

'*How, when, and in what way did people begin to imagine that it is war that functions in power relations, that an uninterrupted conflict undermines peace, and that the civil order is basically an order of battle. […] How did people begin to perceive a war just beneath the surface of peace? Who tried to find the principle that explained order, institutions, and history in the noise and confusion of war and in the mud of battles? Who was the first to think that war is the continuation of politics by other means*.'

What Foucault ultimately presents in his lectures is an account of how the metaphor of war served as a tool in the political analysis put forward in the historical writings of the 17th and the 18th century, as exemplified by the Levelers and Diggers. For Edward Coke, John Lilburne and Henri de Boulainvilliers, the drive of national history was based on incessant civil war and the dynamics of political life was nothing else but the result of a permanent struggle between antagonist groups and their will to power. What these English and French authors provide in their writings are episodes of conquests, narratives of victories and defeats, and tales of courageous conquerors and coward capitulators.

In the perspective of Coke, Lilburne and Boulainvilliers, all institutions of power are based on war. This is not the view of Hobbes, as one might assume on first sight. In Hobbes, the state is established to end the eternal war characteristic of

the natural state of men.

> ‘*According to this discourse […] it was war that presided over the birth of States: not an ideal war — the war imagined by the philosophers of the state of nature — but real wars and actual battles: the laws were born in the midst of expeditions, conquests, and burning towns; but the war continues to rage within the mechanisms of power, or at least to constitute the secret motor of institutions, laws, and order*.’ (Foucault, 2003: 267-268)

The norms and forms of this particular historical-political discourse do not offer the speaking subject the possibility to claim a transcendental position. In a situation of constant war, the speaking subject is necessarily involved and situated on one particular side. In a polemical situation every claim to universal law is nothing else but another attempt at domination. Truth, in other words, is a weapon. A statement is true if it makes you stronger. ‘The fact that the truth is essentially part of a relationship of force, of dissymmetry, decentering, combat, and war, is inscribed in this type of discourse.’ (Foucault, 2003: 53).

In his lectures entitled *La Volonté de Savoir*, delivered in 1970-1971 at the Collège de France, Foucault refers to Nietzsche’s concept of knowledge as an invention: ‘la connaissance est une invention derrière il y a tout autre chose qu’elle: un jeu d’instincts, d’impulsions, de désirs, de peur, de volonté d’appropriation.’ (Foucault, 2001c: 1111). The scene of knowledge is a polemic situation, opened up by the play of passions and the arithmetics of revenge. In *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Nietzsche unmasks the will to knowledge as a contingent event, concealing the most basic human instincts. Knowledge is exposed as a powerful weapon in an endless war of domination. As a tool it is derivative not of the *agon*, the competition of forces, closely related to the pleasure of excellence that athletics experience when outdoing their opponent, it is derivative of the ontology of the struggle for survival. In search of a final victory, power as an instrument of subjection seeks its own overcoming. Nietzsche’s will to knowledge is haunted by the hypothesis of nihilism.

In *'Il faut défendre la société',* Foucault points to a main principle of the historical discourse he analyzes:

'*An explanation from below, which does not explain things in terms of what is simplest, most elementary, and clearest, but in terms of what is most confused, most obscure, most disorganized, and most haphazard. It uses as an interpretive principle the confusion of violence, passions, hatreds, revenge, and the tissue of the minor circumstances that create defeats and victories*.'

And he concludes:

> '*In short […] the discourse that deciphers war's permanent presence within society is essentially a historico-political discourse, a discourse in which truth functions as a weapon to be used for a partisan victory, a discourse that is darkly critical and at the same time intensely mythical*.' (Foucault, 2003: 269-270)

In referring to the forgotten past of noble victories and in celebrating the great age of lost battles, this discourse takes on mythical qualities. Elaborating and propagating collective rituals of remembrance and forging symbols of a past glory, its relation to history is truly nostalgic. Its goal is not to judge history according to contemporary norms of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, but, rather, to reveal in the movement of history the meaning for present struggles, to incite the passion for revenge and to honor the courage of past generations. In an interview Foucault gave in 1973 to the newspaper *Libération* he argues:

> 'I*l existe dans la tête des ouvriers des expériences fondamentales, issues des grandes luttes: le Front populaire, la Résistance… […] Il serait intéressant […] de regrouper tous ces souvenirs, pour les raconter et surtout pour pouvoir s'en servir et définir à partir de là des instruments de lutes possibles*.' (Foucault, 2001f: 1267)

I point to these echoes and the discontinuities they indicate not to criticize the incoherence of a discourse, but to render visible its motion.

Ethos and Logos.

In the introduction to his recent book *Anthropos Today*, Paul Rabinow provides a compelling interpretation of Foucault's claim that 'equipment is the medium of transformation of logos into ethos' (Rabinow, 2003)14. The claim is to be found in Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France, delivered during the academic year 1981-1982 as *L'Herméneutique du Sujet*. As Rabinow explains, the aim was to 'delineate the genealogy of a different type of relation between thinking and acting than [Foucault] had previously considered'. As we have seen, at the end of the 1970s, Foucault had begun to problematize his Nietzschean conception of the relation between thinking and acting, putting into question his efforts at establishing a counter-discourse, propounding a binary view of power. His detour into ethics during the early 1980s offered him the opportunity to elaborate a different relationship between thinking and acting, taking recourse to late antiquity and the debates in the schools of Epicureans, Stoics and Cynics — not, of course, 'to return to the older solutions, but to find among those solutions a way of formulating a contemporary problem with more clarity'. As Frédéric Gros, the editor of the 1981-82 course, explains, Foucault considered the following question to be of central importance:

> '*Peut-on avoir accès à la vérité sans mettre en jeu l'être même du sujet qui y accède? Peut-on avoir accès à la vérité sans payer le prix d'un sacrifice, d'un ascèse, d'une transformation, d'une purification qui touche à l'être même du sujet*.''

Foucault's answer, of course, was no. What kind of relations one might forge today between thinking and acting, between ethos and logos is not a question one could answer once and for all.

A central aspect of the practice of self-detachment is motion. But motion is vital not only because self-detachment requires a subject to undergo a process of change. Rather, with self-detachment, motion comes into view as an end in itself, valuable for its own sake.

'*[W]hat is philosophy today – philosophical activity, I mean – if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known*.'

Foucault's books and essays, then, are philosophical exercises. 'The object was to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently.' (Foucault, 1990b: 8-9). Setting oneself in motion, then, but where to? And what is the price to pay'

A way out.

'*Dans la lutte des hommes rien de grand n'est jamais passé par les fenêtres, mais tout, toujours, par l'effondrement triomphant des murs*.'

Michel Foucault

'Honored members of the Academy!': thus begins Kafka's short story *A Report to an Academy*. It is the story of a former ape, summoned by an anonymous academy to deliver a detailed report on the life it formerly led as an ape, indicating, in particular, the line it 'had to follow in entering and establishing himself in the world of men.' The former ape, who now calls himself Rotpeter, proudly explains that, five years ago, he was captured in the jungles of the Gold Coast by a German hunting expedition. In a cage on a ship to Europe, he realized that, for the first time in his life, he found himself in circumstances that would allow no way out.

'*Until then I had had so many ways out of everything, and now I had none. I was pinned down. Had I been nailed down, my right to free movement would not have been lessened. Why so' Scratch your flesh raw between your toes, but you won't find the answer. Press yourself against the bar behind you till it nearly cuts you in two, you won't find the answer. I had no way out but I had to devise one, for without it I could not live*.'

Impossible for the ape to continue being what it previously had been. In order to survive, it was forced to become something else. In a state of crisis, on its way to an unknown destination, the ape was obliged by the circumstances of the situation to consider if it could think, see, and act in a different way.

A return to its former home on the Gold Coast, however, was not possible anymore. Rather, the sacrifice it had to pay was to leave behind its place of origin; a sacrifice, notably, that affected the very essence of its being. ‘I could never have achieved what I have done had I been stubbornly set on clinging to my origins, to the remembrances of my youth.’ Nostalgia was no option. For to dream of a golden past is not to find oneself outside, but inside another cage. On the ship to Europe, Rotpeter finally encountered a patient teacher:

‘*I cannot distinguish the men from each other in my recollection, but there was one of them who came again and again, alone or with friends, by day, by night, at all kinds of hours; he would post himself before me […] and give me instructions. […] He would slowly uncork the bottle and then look at me to see if I had followed him; I admit that I always watched him with wildly eager, too eager attention; such a student of humankind no human teacher ever found on earth*.’

Struggling against the limits of its nature, the ape sought to imitate the behavior of the crew on the ship. ‘I repeat: there was no attraction for me in imitating human beings; I imitated them because I needed a way out, and for no other reason.’

A way out, fair enough, but where to? Towards humanity? Towards independence? Towards a life beyond the cage? Towards human freedom? Freedom, though, was not what Rotpeter had in mind when imitating human beings and pondering about a way out on the deck of the ship. As the former ape audaciously explains to the noble gentlemen of the anonymous academy: ‘all too often men are betrayed by the word freedom. And as freedom is counted among the most sublime feelings, so the corresponding disillusionment can be also sublime.’ Freedom, in the sense of autonomy and independence, then, was not what the ape aspired.

'*Only a way out; right or left, or in any direction; I made no other demand; even should the way out prove to be an illusion; the demand was a small one, the disappointment could be no bigger. To get out somewhere, to get out! Only not to stay motionless with raised arms, crushed against a wooden wall*.'

Free as he once had been, Rotpeter had to offer a sacrifice and submit himself to another yoke to gain a way out. A shrouded parody of evolution, Kafka's *Report to an Academy* is the story of a departure, the story of a sacrifice, the story of a being confined to test its limits and become something else, without knowing where all efforts would ultimately lead. Significantly, the way out is not presented as an avenue to abstract freedom, to be achieved by the grand gesture of a final liberation. In search of a way out, Kafka's *Report to an Academy* portrays a path of myriad minor transformations.

Image: © Paul Rebeyrolle, 'L'Arrière-cour'. Avec tous nos remerciements au très accueillant espace Paul Rebeyrolle, Route de Nedde, 87120 Eymoutiers, France.

Résumé

On trouve dans la réception de Michel Foucault aux États-Unis deux concepts fondamentaux : la « discipline » et la « sexualité ». Selon les lectures américaines, Foucault a développé ces deux concepts au sein de réflexions théoriques sur le pouvoir et le corps. En considérant les principes caractéristiques d'une certaine réception de Foucault aux États-Unis, cet article propose autre chose. La vocation de Foucault ne s'articule pas dans les efforts « théoriques », mais dans le travail méticuleux des recherches historiques. C'est elles qui rendent compte du mouvement de la pensée de Foucault.

Notes

[1] Foucault, M. 1998. "What Is an Author?" *in Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology. Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, vol. II*. Edited by J. D.

Faubion, pp. 205-222. New York: The New Press. p. 219.

[2] On the Euro-American insistence on originality see Bloom, H. 1997. *The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[3] Butler, J. 1997. *The Psychic Life of Power*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. p. 91.

[4] *Ibid*. p. 91.

[5] Foucault, M. 1963. *Naissance de la clinique. Une archéologie du regard médical*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. Foucault, M. 1966. *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*. Paris: Gallimard. Foucault, M. 1972. *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*. Paris: Gallimard. Foucault, M. 1975. *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*. Paris: Gallimard.

[6] Eribon, D. 2001. "Michel Foucault's Histories of Sexuality". *GLQ* 7:31-86. p. 58.

[7] *Ibid*. p. 58.

[8] Foucault, M. 1971. *L'ordre du discours*. Paris: Gallimard. p. 11.

[9] Foucault, M. 1990a. *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books. p. 12.

[10] Ibid. p. 12.

[11] Eribon, D. 2001. "Michel Foucault's Histories of Sexuality". *GLQ* 7:31-86. p. 59.

[12] Rabinow, P. 2004. "Une ombre sur les recherches américaines", *in Le Monde*, pp. VI.

[13] See the examples assembled by Halperin, D. M. 1998. "Forgetting Foucault. Acts, Identities, and the History of Sexuality". *Representations* 63:93-120. Compare as well Halperin, D. M. 1995. *Saint Foucault. Towards a Gay*

Hagiography. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[14] By and large, the reception of Foucault in America is restricted to his main books. A collection of comments on Foucault (by Colin Gordon, Ian Hacking, Martin Jay, Nancy Fraser, Paul Patton, John Rajchman, Richard Rorty, Edward Said, Jana Sawicki, Alan Sheridan, Hayden White, and others) is provided by Smart, B. 1994. *Michel Foucault. Critical Assessments [volume I, II, & III]*. London/New York: Routledge. Compare as well Gutting, G. Editor. 1994. *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. As well as Hoy, D. C. Editor. 1986. *Foucault. A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[15] Certainly, Foucault would have been the first to reject the qualification of his work as French by any means (although for other reasons). Nonetheless, the main frame of reference and the bulk of the historical material explored in *Histoire de la Folie*, *Naissance de la Clinique*, *Les Mots et les Choses*, and *Surveiller et Punir* is French as well as most of Foucault's interlocutors: Louis Althusser, Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Pierre Bourdieu, Georges Canguilhem, Gilles Deleuze, Georges Dumézil, Jean Hyppolite, Pierre Klossowski, Claude Mauriac, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Paul Veyne.

[16] Butler, J. 1997. *The Psychic Life of Power*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. p. 85. As concerns Butler's engagement with Foucault see as well Butler, J. 1993. *Bodies That Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York/London: Routledge, —. 1999. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York/London: Routledge.

[17] For the concept of "style of reasoning" see Hacking, I. 1982. "Language, Truth and Reason", *in Rationality and Relativism*. Edited by M. Hollis and S. Lukes, pp. 48-66. Cambridge: MIT Press. Hacking, I. 2002. Inaugural Lecture: Chair of Philosophy and History of Scientific Concepts at the Collège de France, 16 January 2001. *Economy and Society* 31:1-14.

[18] Butler, J. 2003. "Noch einmal: Körper und Macht", *in Michel Foucault. Zwischenbilanz einer Rezeption*. Edited by A. Honneth and M. Saar, pp. 52-67. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag. p. 65.

[19] I wish to underline that this is *not* a general critique of Butler's important work, but rather a critique of the way she construes Foucault in her books, especially in "The Psychic Life of Power". I take her approach as exemplary of a certain interpretation of Foucault in America.

[20] Foucault, M. 2001b. "Des supplices aux cellules", *in Dits et écrits 1954-1988, vol. I 1954-1975*. Edited by D. Defert and F. Ewald, pp. 1584-1588. Paris: Gallimard. p. 1588. See as well Foucault, M. 2001h. "Prisons et asiles dans le méchanisme du pouvoir", *in Dits et écrits 1954-1988, vol. I 1954-1975*. Edited by D. Defert and F. Ewald, pp. 1389-1393. Paris: Gallimard. pp. 1391-1392.

[21] Rabinow, P., and N. Rose. 2004. "Foucault Today", *in Essential Foucault. Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*. Edited by P. Rabinow and N. Rose, pp. vii-xxxv. New York: The New Press.

[22] As concerns the history of the GIP see the excellent collection of documents recently published by Artières, P., L. Quéro, and M. Zancarini-Fournel, eds. 2003. *Le groupe d'information sur les prisons. Archives d'une lutte, 1970-1972*. Paris: Éditions de l'IMEC. Compare as well Artières, P. 2001. "L'ombre des prisonniers sur le toit. Les héritages du GIP", *in L'infréquentable Michel Foucault. Renouveaux de la pensée critique*. Edited by D. Eribon, pp. 101-111. Paris: EPEL. As well as the chapter on the GIP in Eribon, D. 1989. *Michel Foucault*. Paris: Flammarion.

[23] Defert, D. 2001. "L'émergence d'un nouveau front: les prisons", *in Le groupe d'information sur les prisons. Archives d'une lutte, 1970-1972*. Edited by P. Artières, L. Quéro, and M. Zancarini-Fournel, pp. 315-326. Paris: Éditions de l'IMEC. P. 320.

[24] Foucault, M. 2001j. "À propos de la prison d'Attica", *in Dits et écrits 1954-1988, vol. I 1954-1975*. Edited by D. Defert and F. Ewald, pp. 1393-1404. Paris: Gallimard. p. 1401.

[25] Foucault, M. 2001e. "Manifeste du G.I.P.", *in Dits et écrits 1954-1988, vol. I 1954-1975*. Edited by D. Defert and F. Ewald, pp. 1042-1043. Paris: Gallimard. p. 1043.

[26] On several occasions, Foucault himself took part at the meetings of the «Groupe d'information sur la santé», created by physicians in favor of abortion. In 1973, the GIS published a small booklet entitled *Oui, nous avortons*. See Foucault, M. 2001a. "Convoqués à la P.J." *in Dits et écrits 1954-1988, vol. I 1954-1975*. Edited by D. Defert and F. Ewald, pp. 1313-1315. Paris: Gallimard. Abortion was legalized in France in 1975.

[27] Artières, P. 2001. "L'ombre des prisonniers sur le toit. Les héritages du GIP", *in L'infréquentable Michel Foucault. Renouveaux de la pensée critique*. Edited by D. Eribon, pp. 101-111. Paris: EPEL. p. 103

[28] Ibid. p. 105.

[29] Foucault, M. 2001d. "Les intellectuels et le pouvoir (entretien avec G. Deleuze)", *in Dits et écrits 1954-1988, vol. I 1954-1975*. Edited by D. Defert and F. Ewald, pp. 1174-1183. Paris: Gallimard. p. 1176.

[30] For an invocation of secrets as an essential mechanism of power see Foucault, M. 2001i. "À propos de l'enfermement pénitentiaire", *in Dits et écrits 1954-1988, vol. I 1954-1975*. Edited by D. Defert and F. Ewald, pp. 1305-1313. Paris: Gallimard.

[31] Foucault, M. 1995. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books. p. 9.

[32] Foucault, M. 2001k. "Sur les prisons", *in Dits et écrits 1954-1988, vol. I 1954-1975*. Edited by D. Defert and F. Ewald, pp. 1043-1044. Paris: Gallimard. p. 1043.

[33] Foucault, M. 2001g. "Préface", *in Dits et écrits 1954-1988, vol. I 1954-1975*. Edited by D. Defert and F. Ewald, pp. 1063-1065. Paris: Gallimard. p. 1064.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Foucault, M. 2001k. "Sur les prisons," in *Dits et écrits 1954-1988, vol. I 1954-1975*. Edited by D. Defert and F. Ewald, pp. 1043-1044. Paris: Gallimard. p. 1044.

[36] As Foucault will observe a few years later in *Discipline and Punish*: «Prison "reform" is virtually contemporary with the prison itself: it constituted, as it were, its programme. From the outset, the prison was caught up in a series of accompanying mechanisms, whose purpose was apparently to correct it, but which seem to form part of its very functioning, so closely that they have been bound up with its existence throughout its long history.» Foucault, M. 1995. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books. p. 234. And: «The prison has always formed part of an active field in which projects, improvements, experiments, theoretical statements, personal evidence and investigations have proliferated. The prison institution has always been a focus of concern and debate. » Foucault, M. 1995. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books. p. 235.

[37] Foucault, M. 1995. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books. p. 194.

[38] On Foucault's courses at the Collège de France see Rabinow, P. 1997. "Introduction. The History of Systems of Thought", *in Ethics. Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, vol. I*. Edited by P. Rabinow, pp. xi-xlii. New York: The New Press. Foucault, M. 1997. *"Il faut défendre la société". Cours au Collège de France, 1976*. Paris: Gallimard/Seuil.

[39] Foucault, M. 2003. *"Society Must Be Defended". Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*. New York: Picador. p. 23.

[40] *Ibid*. p. 267-268.

[41] *Ibid*. p. 53.

[42] Foucault, M. 2001c. "La volonté de savoir", *in Dits et écrits 1954-1988, vol. I 1954-1975*. Edited by D. Defert and F. Ewald, pp. 1108-1112. Paris: Gallimard. p. 1111.

[43] Foucault, M. 2003. *"Society Must Be Defended". Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*. New York: Picador. pp. 269-270.

[44] Foucault, M. 2001f. “Pour une chronique de la mémoire ouvrière”, *in Dits et écrits 1954-1988, vol. I 1954-1975*. Edited by D. Defert and F. Ewald, pp. 1267-1268. Paris: Gallimard. p. 1267.

[45] Rabinow, P. 2003. *Anthropos Today. Reflections on Modern Equipment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. On Foucault’s detour into ethics see James Faubion’s excellent essay Faubion, J. D. 2001. “Toward an Anthropology of Ethics. Foucault and the Pedagogies of Autopoiesis”. *Representations* 74:83-104. Compare as well Rajchman, J. 1986. “Ethics after Foucault”. *Social Text* 13/14:165-183. And Rajchman, J. 1998. “Crisis”. *Representations* 28:90-98.

[46] Foucault, M. 1990b. *The Use of Pleasure*. New York: Vintage Books. pp. 8-9.

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