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The Archaeology of Knowledge

AND THE DISCOURSE ON LANGUAGE

MICHEL FOUCAULT

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PART I

Introduction

Introduction

For many years now historians have preferred to turn their attention to long periods, as if, beneath the shifts and changes of political events, they were trying to reveal the stable, almost indestructible system of checks and balances, the irreversible processes, the constant readjustments, the underlying tendencies that gather force, and are then suddenly reversed after centuries of continuity, the movements of accumulation and slow saturation, the great silent, motionless bases that traditional history has covered with a thick layer of events. The tools that enable historians to carry out this work of analysis are partly inherited and partly of their own making: models of economic growth, quantitative analysis of market movements, accounts of demographic expansion and contraction, the study of climate and its long-term changes, the fixing of sociological constants, the description of technological adjustments and of their spread and continuity. These tools have enabled workers in the historical field to distinguish various sedimentary strata; linear successions, which for so long had been the object of research, have given way to discoveries in depth. From the political mobility at the surface down to the slow movements of 'material civilization', ever more levels of analysis have been established: each has its own

peculiar discontinuities and patterns; and as one descends to the deepest levels, the rhythms become broader. Beneath the rapidly changing history of governments, wars, and famines, there emerge other, apparently unmoving histories: the history of sea routes, the history of corn or of gold-mining, the history of drought and of irrigation, the history of crop rotation, the history of the balance achieved by the human species between hunger and abundance. The old questions of the traditional analysis (What link should be made between disparate events? How can a causal succession be established between them? What continuity or overall significance do they possess? Is it possible to define a totality, or must one be content with reconstituting connexions?) are now being replaced by questions of another type: which strata should be isolated from others? What types of series should be established? What criteria of periodization should be adopted for each of them? What system of relations (hierarchy, dominance, stratification, univocal determination, circular causality) may be established between them? What series of series may be established? And in what large-scale chronological table may distinct series of events be determined?

At about the same time, in the disciplines that we call the history of ideas, the history of science, the history of philosophy, the history of thought, and the history of literature (we can ignore their specificity for the moment), in those disciplines which, despite their names, evade very largely the work and methods of the historian, attention

has been turned, on the contrary, away from vast unities like 'periods' or 'centuries' to the phenomena of rupture, of discontinuity. Beneath the great continuities of thought, beneath the solid, homogeneous manifestations of a single mind or of a collective mentality, beneath the stubborn development of a science striving to exist and to reach completion at the very outset, beneath the persistence of a particular genre, form, discipline, or theoretical activity, one is now trying to detect the incidence of interruptions. Interruptions whose status and nature vary considerably. There are the *epistemological acts and thresholds* described by Bachelard: they suspend the continuous accumulation of knowledge, interrupt its slow development, and force it to enter a new time, cut it off from its empirical origin and its original motivations, cleanse it of its imaginary complicities; they direct historical analysis away from the search for silent beginnings, and the never-ending tracing-back to the original precursors, towards the search for a new type of rationality and its various effects. There are the *displacements* and *transformations* of concepts: the analyses of G. Canguilhem may serve as models; they show that the history of a concept is not wholly and entirely that of its progressive refinement, its continuously increasing rationality, its abstraction gradient, but that of its various fields of constitution and validity, that of its successive rules of use, that of the many theoretical contexts in which it developed and matured. There is the distinction, which we also owe to Canguilhem, between the *microscopic* and

macroscopic scales of the history of the sciences, in which events and their consequences are not arranged in the same way: thus a discovery, the development of a method, the achievements, and the failures, of a particular scientist, do not have the same incidence, and cannot be described in the same way at both levels; on each of the two levels, a different history is being written. *Recurrent redistributions* reveal several pasts, several forms of connexion, several hierarchies of importance, several networks of determination, several teleologies, for one and the same science, as its present undergoes change: thus historical descriptions are necessarily ordered by the present state of knowledge, they increase with every transformation and never cease, in turn, to break with themselves (in the field of mathematics, M. Serres has provided the theory of this phenomenon). There are the *architectonic unities* of systems of the kind analysed by M. Guéroult, which are concerned not with the description of cultural influences, traditions, and continuities, but with internal coherences, axioms, deductive connexions, compatibilities. Lastly, the most radical discontinuities are the breaks effected by a work of theoretical transformation 'which establishes a science by detaching it from the ideology of its past and by revealing this past as ideological'.[1] To this should be added, of course, literary analysis, which now takes as its unity, not the spirit or sensibility of a period, nor 'groups', 'schools', 'generations', or 'movements', nor even the personality of

the author, in the interplay of his life and his 'creation', but the particular structure of a given *œuvre*, book, or text.

And the great problem presented by such historical analyses is not how continuities are established, how a single pattern is formed and preserved, how for so many different, successive minds there is a single horizon, what mode of action and what substructure is implied by the interplay of transmissions, resumptions, disappearances, and repetitions, how the origin may extend its sway well beyond itself to that conclusion that is never given – the problem is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of lasting foundations, but one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations. What one is seeing, then, is the emergence of a whole field of questions, some of which are already familiar, by which this new form of history is trying to develop its own theory: how is one to specify the different concepts that enable us to conceive of discontinuity (threshold, rupture, break, mutation, transformation)? By what criteria is one to isolate the unities with which one is dealing; what is *a* science? What is an *œuvre*? What is *a* theory? What is *a* concept? What is *a* text? How is one to diversify the levels at which one may place oneself, each of which possesses its own divisions and form of analysis? What is the legitimate level of formalization? What is that of interpretation? Of structural analysis? Of attributions of causality?

In short, the history of thought, of knowledge, of philosophy, of literature seems to be seeking, and discovering, more and more discontinuities, whereas history itself appears to be abandoning the irruption of events in favour of stable structures.

But we must not be taken in by this apparent interchange. Despite appearances, we must not imagine that certain of the historical disciplines have moved from the continuous to the discontinuous, while others have moved from the tangled mass of discontinuities to the great, uninterrupted unities; we must not imagine that in the analysis of politics, institutions, or economics, we have become more and more sensitive to overall determinations, while in the analysis of ideas and of knowledge, we are paying more and more attention to the play of difference; we must not imagine that these two great forms of description have crossed without recognizing one another.

In fact, the same problems are being posed in either case, but they have provoked opposite effects on the surface. These problems may be summed up in a word: the questioning of the *document.* Of course, it is obvious enough that ever since a discipline such as history has existed, documents have been used, questioned, and have given rise to questions; scholars have asked not only what these documents meant, but also whether they were telling the truth, and by what right they could claim to be doing so, whether they were sincere or deliberately misleading, well

informed or ignorant, authentic or tampered with. But each of these questions, and all this critical concern, pointed to one and the same end: the reconstitution, on the basis of what the documents say, and sometimes merely hint at, of the past from which they emanate and which has now disappeared far behind them; the document was always treated as the language of a voice since reduced to silence, its fragile, but possibly decipherable trace. Now, through a mutation that is not of very recent origin, but which has still not come to an end, history has altered its position in relation to the document: it has taken as its primary task, not the interpretation of the document, nor the attempt to decide whether it is telling the truth or what is its expressive value, but to work on it from within and to develop it: history now organizes the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders it, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, defines unities, describes relations. The document, then, is no longer for history an inert material through which it tries to reconstitute what men have done or said, the events of which only the trace remains; history is now trying to define within the documentary material itself unities, totalities, series, relations. History must be detached from the image that satisfied it for so long, and through which it found its anthropological justification: that of an age-old collective consciousness that made use of material documents to refresh its memory; history is the work expended on material documentation (books, texts,

accounts, registers, acts, buildings, institutions, laws, techniques, objects, customs, etc.) that exists, in every time and place, in every society, either in a spontaneous or in a consciously organized form. The document is not the fortunate tool of a history that is primarily and fundamentally *memory*; history is one way in which a society recognizes and develops a mass of documentation with which it is inextricably linked.

To be brief, then, let us say that history, in its traditional form, undertook to 'memorize' the *monuments* of the past, transform them into documents, and lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say; in our time, history is that which transforms *documents* into *monuments*. In that area where, in the past, history deciphered the traces left by men, it now deploys a mass of elements that have to be grouped, made relevant, placed in relation to one another to form totalities. There was a time when archaeology, as a discipline devoted to silent monuments, inert traces, objects without context, and things left by the past, aspired to the condition of history, and attained meaning only through the restitution of a historical discourse; it might be said, to play on words a little, that in our time history aspires to the condition of archaeology, to the intrinsic description of the monument.

This has several consequences. First of all, there is the surface effect already mentioned: the proliferation of discontinuities in the history of ideas, and the emergence

of long periods in history proper. In fact, in its traditional form, history proper was concerned to define relations (of simple causality, of circular determination, of antagonism, of expression) between facts or dated events: the series being known, it was simply a question of defining the position of each element in relation to the other elements in the series. The problem now is to constitute series: to define the elements proper to each series, to fix its boundaries, to reveal its own specific type of relations, to formulate its laws, and, beyond this, to describe the relations between different series, thus constituting series of series, or 'tables': hence the ever-increasing number of strata, and the need to distinguish them, the specificity of their time and chronologies; hence the need to distinguish not only important events (with a long chain of consequences) and less important ones, but types of events at quite different levels (some very brief, others of average duration, like the development of a particular technique, or a scarcity of money, and others of a long-term nature, like a demographic equilibrium or the gradual adjustment of an economy to climatic change); hence the possibility of revealing series with widely spaced intervals formed by rare or repetitive events. The appearance of long periods in the history of today is not a return to the philosophers of history, to the great ages of the world, or to the periodization dictated by the rise and fall of civilizations; it is the effect of the methodologically concerted development of series. In the history of ideas, of thought and of the sciences, the same

mutation has brought about the opposite effect; it has broken up the long series formed by the progress of consciousness, or the teleology of reason, or the evolution of human thought; it has questioned the themes of convergence and culmination; it has doubted the possibility of creating totalities. It has led to the individualization of different series, which are juxtaposed to one another, follow one another, overlap and intersect, without one being able to reduce them to a linear schema. Thus, in place of the continuous chronology of reason, which was invariably traced back to some inaccessible origin, there have appeared scales that are sometimes very brief, distinct from one another, irreducible to a single law, scales that bear a type of history peculiar to each one, and which cannot be reduced to the general model of a consciousness that acquires, progresses, and remembers.

Second consequence: the notion of discontinuity assumes a major role in the historical disciplines. For history in its classical form, the discontinuous was both the given and the unthinkable: the raw material of history, which presented itself in the form of dispersed events – decisions, accidents, initiatives, discoveries; the material, which, through analysis, had to be rearranged, reduced, effaced in order to reveal the continuity of events. Discontinuity was the stigma of temporal dislocation that it was the historian's task to remove from history. It has now become one of the basic elements of historical analysis. Its role is threefold. First, it constitutes a deliberate operation on the part of the historian

(and not a quality of the material with which he has to deal): for he must, at least as a systematic hypothesis, distinguish the possible levels of analysis, the methods proper to each, and the periodization that best suits them. Secondly, it is the result of his description (and not something that must be eliminated by means of his analysis): for he is trying to discover the limits of a process, the point of inflexion of a curve, the inversion of a regulatory movement, the boundaries of an oscillation, the threshold of a function, the instant at which a circular causality breaks down. Thirdly, it is the concept that the historian's work never ceases to specify (instead of neglecting it as a uniform, indifferent blank between two positive figures); it assumes a specific form and function according to the field and the level to which it is assigned: one does not speak of the same discontinuity when describing an epistemological threshold, the point of reflexion in a population curve, or the replacement of one technique by another. The notion of discontinuity is a paradoxical one: because it is both an instrument and an object of research; because it divides up the field of which it is the effect; because it enables the historian to individualize different domains but can be established only by comparing those domains. And because, in the final analysis, perhaps, it is not simply a concept present in the discourse of the historian, but something that the historian secretly supposes to be present: on what basis, in fact, could he speak without this discontinuity that offers him history – and his own history – as an object? One of the

most essential features of the new history is probably this displacement of the discontinuous: its transference from the obstacle to the work itself; its integration into the discourse of the historian, where it no longer plays the role of an external condition that must be reduced, but that of a working concept; and therefore the inversion of signs by which it is no longer the negative of the historical reading (its underside, its failure, the limit of its power), but the positive element that determines its object and validates its analysis.

Third consequence: the theme and the possibility of a *total history* begin to disappear, and we see the emergence of something very different that might be called a *general history*. The project of a total history is one that seeks to reconstitute the overall form of a civilization, the principle – material or spiritual – of a society, the significance common to all the phenomena of a period, the law that accounts for their cohesion – what is called metaphorically the 'face' of a period. Such a project is linked to two or three hypotheses; it is supposed that between all the events of a well-defined spatio-temporal area, between all the phenomena of which traces have been found, it must be possible to establish a system of homogeneous relations: a network of causality that makes it possible to derive each of them, relations of analogy that show how they symbolize one another, or how they all express one and the same central core; it is also supposed that one and the same form of historicity operates upon economic structures, social institutions and customs,

the inertia of mental attitudes, technological practice, political behaviour, and subjects them all to the same type of transformation; lastly, it is supposed that history itself may be articulated into great units – stages or phases – which contain within themselves their own principle of cohesion. These are the postulates that are challenged by the new history when it speaks of series, divisions, limits, differences of level, shifts, chronological specificities, particular forms of rehandling, possible types of relation. This is not because it is trying to obtain a plurality of histories juxtaposed and independent of one another: that of the economy beside that of institutions, and beside these two those of science, religion, or literature; nor is it because it is merely trying to discover between these different histories coincidences of dates, or analogies of form and meaning. The problem that now presents itself – and which defines the task of a general history – is to determine what form of relation may be legitimately described between these different series; what vertical system they are capable of forming; what interplay of correlation and dominance exists between them; what may be the effect of shifts, different temporalities, and various rehandlings; in what distinct totalities certain elements may figure simultaneously; in short, not only what series, but also what 'series of series' – or, in other words, what 'tables' it is possible to draw up. A total description draws all phenomena around a single centre – a principle, a meaning, a spirit, a world-view, an overall

shape; a general history, on the contrary, would deploy the space of a dispersion.

Fourth and last consequence: the new history is confronted by a number of methodological problems, several of which, no doubt, existed long before the emergence of the new history, but which, taken together, characterize it. These include: the building-up of coherent and homogeneous *corpora* of documents (open or closed, exhausted or inexhaustible *corpora*), the establishment of a principle of choice (according to whether one wishes to treat the documentation exhaustively, or adopt a sampling method as in statistics, or try to determine in advance which are the most representative elements); the definition of the level of analysis and of the relevant elements (in the material studied, one may extract numerical indications; references – explicit or not – to events, institutions, practices; the words used, with their grammatical rules and the semantic fields that they indicate, or again the formal structure of the propositions and the types of connexion that unite them); the specification of a method of analysis (the quantitative treatment of data, the breaking-down of the material according to a number of assignable features whose correlations are then studied, interpretative decipherment, analysis of frequency and distribution); the delimitation of groups and sub-groups that articulate the material (regions, periods, unitary processes); the determination of relations that make it possible to characterize a group (these may be numerical or logical relations; functional, causal, or

analogical relations; or it may be the relation of the 'signifier' (*signifiant*) to the 'signified' (*signifié*).

All these problems are now part of the methodological field of history. This field deserves attention, and for two reasons. First, because one can see to what extent it has freed itself from what constituted, not so long ago, the philosophy of history, and from the questions that it posed (on the rationality or teleology of historical development (*devenir*), on the relativity of historical knowledge, and on the possibility of discovering or constituting a meaning in the inertia of the past and in the unfinished totality of the present). Secondly, because it intersects at certain points problems that are met with in other fields – in linguistics, ethnology, economics, literary analysis, and mythology, for example. These problems may, if one so wishes, be labelled structuralism. But only under certain conditions: they do not, of themselves, cover the entire methodological field of history, they occupy only one part of that field – a part that varies in importance with the area and level of analysis; apart from a number of relatively limited cases, they have not been imported from linguistics or ethnology (as is often the case today), but they originated in the field of history itself – more particularly, in that of economic history and as a result of the questions posed by that discipline; lastly, in no way do they authorize us to speak of a structuralism of history, or at least of an attempt to overcome a 'conflict' or 'opposition' between structure and historical development: it is a long time now since historians uncovered, described,

and analysed structures, without ever having occasion to wonder whether they were not allowing the living, fragile, pulsating 'history' to slip through their fingers. The structure/development opposition is relevant neither to the definition of the historical field, nor, in all probability, to the definition of a structural method.

This epistemological mutation of history is not yet complete. But it is not of recent origin either, since its first phase can no doubt be traced back to Marx. But it took a long time to have much effect. Even now – and this is especially true in the case of the history of thought – it has been neither registered nor reflected upon, while other, more recent transformations – those of linguistics, for example – have been. It is as if it was particularly difficult, in the history in which men retrace their own ideas and their own knowledge, to formulate a general theory of discontinuity, of series, of limits, unities, specific orders, and differentiated autonomies and dependences. As if, in that field where we had become used to seeking origins, to pushing back further and further the line of antecedents, to reconstituting traditions, to following evolutive curves, to projecting teleologies, and to having constant recourse to metaphors of life, we felt a particular repugnance to conceiving of difference, to describing separations and dispersions, to dissociating the reassuring form of the identical. Or, to be more precise, as if we found it difficult to construct a theory, to draw general conclusions, and even

to derive all the possible implications of these concepts of thresholds, mutations, independent systems, and limited series – in the way in which they had been used in fact by historians. As if we were afraid to conceive of the *Other* in the time of our own thought.

There is a reason for this. If the history of thought could remain the locus of uninterrupted continuities, if it could endlessly forge connexions that no analysis could undo without abstraction, if it could weave, around everything that men say and do, obscure synthesis that anticipate for him, prepare him, and lead him endlessly towards his future, it would provide a privileged shelter for the sovereignty of consciousness. Continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject: the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to him; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity; the promise that one day the subject – in the form of historical consciousness – will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, and find in them what might be called his abode. Making historical analysis the discourse of the continuous and making human consciousness the original subject of all historical development and all action are the two sides of the same system of thought. In this system, time is conceived in terms of totalization and revolutions are never more than moments of consciousness.

In various forms, this theme has played a constant role since the nineteenth century: to preserve, against all decentrings, the sovereignty of the subject, and the twin figures of anthropology and humanism. Against the decentring operated by Marx – by the historical analysis of the relations of production, economic determinations, and the class struggle – it gave place, towards the end of the nineteenth century, to the search for a total history, in which all the differences of a society might be reduced to a single form, to the organization of a world-view, to the establishment of a system of values, to a coherent type of civilization. To the decentring operated by the Nietzschean genealogy, it opposed the search for an original foundation that would make rationality the *telos* of mankind, and link the whole history of thought to the preservation of this rationality, to the maintenance of this teleology, and to the ever necessary return to this foundation. Lastly, more recently, when the researches of psycho-analysis, linguistics, and ethnology have decentred the subject in relation to the laws of his desire, the forms of his language, the rules of his action, or the games of his mythical or fabulous discourse, when it became clear that man himself, questioned as to what he was, could not account for his sexuality and his unconscious, the systematic forms of his language, or the regularities of his fictions, the theme of a continuity of history has been reactivated once again; a history that would be not division, but development (*devenir*); not an interplay of relations, but an internal

dynamic; not a system, but the hard work of freedom; not form, but the unceasing effort of a consciousness turned upon itself, trying to grasp itself in its deepest conditions: a history that would be both an act of long, uninterrupted patience and the vivacity of a movement, which, in the end, breaks all bounds. If one is to assert this theme, which, to the 'immobility' of structures, to their 'closed' system, to their necessary 'synchrony', opposes the living openness of history, one must obviously deny in the historical analyses themselves the use of discontinuity, the definition of levels and limits, the description of specific series, the uncovering of the whole interplay of differences. One is led therefore to anthropologize Marx, to make of him a historian of totalities, and to rediscover in him the message of humanism; one is led therefore to interpret Nietzsche in the terms of transcendental philosophy, and to reduce his genealogy to the level of a search for origins; lastly, one is led to leave to one side, as if it had never arisen, that whole field of methodological problems that the new history is now presenting. For, if it is asserted that the question of discontinuities, systems and transformations, series and thresholds, arises in all the historical disciplines (and in those concerned with ideas or the sciences no less than those concerned with economics and society), how could one oppose with any semblance of legitimacy 'development' and 'system', movement and circular regulations, or, as it is sometimes put crudely and unthinkingly, 'history' and 'structure'?

The same conservative function is at work in the theme of cultural totalities (for which Marx has been criticized, then travestied), in the theme of a search for origins (which was opposed to Nietzsche, before an attempt was made to transpose him into it), and in the theme of a living, continuous, open history. The cry goes up that one is murdering history whenever, in a historical analysis – and especially if it is concerned with thought, ideas, or knowledge – one is seen to be using in too obvious a way the categories of discontinuity and difference, the notions of threshold, rupture and transformation, the description of series and limits. One will be denounced for attacking the inalienable rights of history and the very foundations of any possible historicity. But one must not be deceived: what is being bewailed with such vehemence is not the disappearance of history, but the eclipse of that form of history that was secretly, but entirely related to the synthetic activity of the subject; what is being bewailed is the 'development' (*devenir*) that was to provide the sovereignty of the consciousness with a safer, less exposed shelter than myths, kinship systems, languages, sexuality, or desire; what is being bewailed is the possibility of reanimating through the project, the work of meaning, or the movement of totalization, the interplay of material determinations, rules of practice, unconscious systems, rigorous but unreflected relations, correlations that elude all lived experience; what is being bewailed, is that ideological use of history by which one tries to restore to man everything that

has unceasingly eluded him for over a hundred years. All the treasure of bygone days was crammed into the old citadel of this history; it was thought to be secure; it was sacralized; it was made the last resting-place of anthropological thought; it was even thought that its most inveterate enemies could be captured and turned into vigilant guardians. But the historians had long ago deserted the old fortress and gone to work elsewhere; it was realized that neither Marx nor Nietzsche were carrying out the guard duties that had been entrusted to them. They could not be depended on to preserve privilege; nor to affirm once and for all – and God knows it is needed in the distress of today – that history, at least, is living and continuous, that it is, for the subject in question, a place of rest, certainty, reconciliation, a place of tranquillized sleep.

At this point there emerges an enterprise of which my earlier books *Histoire de la folie (Madness and Civilization), Naissance de la clinique*, and *Les Mots et les choses (The Order of Things)*[2] were a very imperfect sketch. An enterprise by which one tries to measure the mutations that operate in general in the field of history; an enterprise in which the methods, limits, and themes proper to the history of ideas are questioned; an enterprise by which one tries to throw off the last anthropological constraints; an enterprise that wishes, in return, to reveal how these constraints could come about. These tasks were outlined in a rather disordered way, and their general articulation was never clearly

criticisms. Generally speaking, *Madness and Civilization* accorded far too great a place, and a very enigmatic one too, to what I called an 'experiment', thus showing to what extent one was still close to admitting an anonymous and general subject of history; in *Naissance de la clinique*, the frequent recourse to structural analysis threatened to bypass the specificity of the problem presented, and the level proper to archaeology; lastly, in *The Order of Things*, the absence of methodological sign-posting may have given the impression that my analyses were being conducted in terms of cultural totality. It is mortifying that I was unable to avoid these dangers: I console myself with the thought that they were intrinsic to the enterprise itself, since, in order to carry out its task, it had first to free itself from these various methods and forms of history; moreover, without the questions that I was asked,[4] without the difficulties that arose, without the objections that were made, I may never have gained so clear a view of the enterprise to which I am now inextricably linked. Hence the cautious, stumbling manner of this text: at every turn, it stands back, measures up what is before it, gropes towards its limits, stumbles against what it does not mean, and digs pits to mark out its own path. At every turn, it denounces any possible confusion. It rejects its identity, without previously stating: I am neither this nor that. It is not critical, most of the time; it is not a way of saying that everyone else is wrong. It is an attempt to define a particular site by the exteriority of its vicinity; rather than trying to reduce others to silence,

by claiming that what they say is worthless, I have tried to define this blank space from which I speak, and which is slowly taking shape in a discourse that I still feel to be so precarious and so unsure.

'Aren't you sure of what you're saying? Are you going to change yet again, shift your position according to the questions that are put to you, and say that the objections are not really directed at the place from which you are speaking? Are you going to declare yet again that you have never been what you have been reproached with being? Are you already preparing the way out that will enable you in your next book to spring up somewhere else and declare as you're now doing: no, no, I'm not where you are lying in wait for me, but over here, laughing at you?'

'What, do you imagine that I would take so much trouble and so much pleasure in writing, do you think that I would keep so persistently to my task, if I were not preparing – with a rather shaky hand – a labyrinth into which I can venture, in which I can move my discourse, opening up underground passages, forcing it to go far from itself, finding overhangs that reduce and deform its itinerary, in which I can lose myself and appear at last to eyes that I will never have to meet again. I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write.'

[1] L. Althusser, *For Marx*, London, Allen Lane; New York, Pantheon, 1969, p. 168.

[2] *Madness and Civilization*, New York, Random House, 1965; London, Tavistock, 1967; *The Order of Things*, London, Tavistock; New York, Pantheon, 1970. A translation of *Naissance de la clinique* is in press.

[3] The English 'knowledge' translates the French *'connaissance'* and *'savoir'*. *Connaissance* refers here to a particular corpus of knowledge, a particular discipline – biology or economics, for example. *Savoir*, which is usually defined as knowledge in general, the totality of *connaissances*, is used by Foucault in an underlying, rather than an overall, way. He has himself offered the following comment on his usage of these terms:

'By *connaissance* I mean the relation of the subject to the object and the formal rules that govern it. *Savoir* refers to the conditions that are necessary in a particular period for this or that type of object to be given to *connaissance* and for this or that enunciation to be formulated.'

Throughout this translation I have used the English word, followed, where the meaning required it, by the appropriate French word in parenthesis (Tr.).

[4] In particular, the first pages of this introduction are based on a reply to questions presented by the *Cercle d'Épistémologie* of the E.N.S. (cf. *Cahiers pour l'analyse*, no. 9). A sketch of certain developments was also given in reply to readers of the review *Esprit* (avril 1968).

PART II

The Discursive Regularities

CHAPTER 1

The Unities of Discourse

The use of concepts of discontinuity, rupture, threshold, limit, series, and transformation present all historical analysis not only with questions of procedure, but with theoretical problems. It is these problems that will be studied here (the questions of procedure will be examined in later empirical studies – if the opportunity, the desire, and the courage to undertake them do not desert me). These theoretical problems too will be examined only in a particular field: in those disciplines – so unsure of their frontiers, and so vague in content – that we call the history of ideas, or of thought, or of science, or of knowledge.

But there is a negative work to be carried out first: we must rid ourselves of a whole mass of notions, each of which, in its own way, diversifies the theme of continuity. They may not have a very rigorous conceptual structure, but they have a very precise function. Take the notion of tradition: it is intended to give a special temporal status to a group of phenomena that are both successive and identical (or at least similar); it makes it possible to rethink the dispersion of history in the form of the same; it allows a

In any case, these divisions – whether our own, or those contemporary with the discourse under examination – are always themselves reflexive categories, principles of classification, normative rules, institutionalized types: they, in turn, are facts of discourse that deserve to be analysed beside others; of course, they also have complex relations with each other, but they are not intrinsic, autochthonous, and universally recognizable characteristics.

But the unities that must be suspended above all are those that emerge in the most immediate way: those of the book and the *œuvre*. At first sight, it would seem that one could not abandon these unities without extreme artificiality. Are they not given in the most definite way? There is the material individualization of the book, which occupies a determined space, which has an economic value, and which itself indicates, by a number of signs, the limits of its beginning and its end; and there is the establishment of an *œuvre*, which we recognize and delimit by attributing a certain number of texts to an author. And yet as soon as one looks at the matter a little more closely the difficulties begin. The material unity of the book? Is this the same in the case of an anthology of poems, a collection of posthumous fragments, Desargues' *Traité des Coniques*, or a volume of Michelet's *Histoire de France*? Is it the same in the case of Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés*, the trial of Gilles de Rais, Butor's *San Marco*, or a Catholic missal? In other words, is not the material unity of the volume a weak, accessory unity in relation to the discursive unity of which it is the

support? But is this discursive unity itself homogeneous and uniformly applicable? A novel by Stendhal and a novel by Dostoevsky do not have the same relation of individuality as that between two novels belonging to Balzac's cycle *La Comédie humaine*; and the relation between Balzac's novels is not the same as that existing between Joyce's *Ulysses* and the *Odyssey*. The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network. And this network of references is not the same in the case of a mathematical treatise, a textual commentary, a historical account, and an episode in a novel cycle; the unity of the book, even in the sense of a group of relations, cannot be regarded as identical in each case. The book is not simply the object that one holds in one's hands; and it cannot remain within the little parallelepiped that contains it: its unity is variable and relative. As soon as one questions that unity, it loses its self-evidence; it indicates itself, constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse.

The problems raised by the *œuvre* are even more difficult. Yet, at first sight, what could be more simple? A collection of texts that can be designated by the sign of a proper name. But this designation (even leaving to one side problems of attribution) is not a homogeneous function: does the name of an author designate in the same way a text that he has published under his name, a text that he has presented under

a pseudonym, another found after his death in the form of an unfinished draft, and another that is merely a collection of jottings, a notebook? The establishment of a complete *œuvre* presupposes a number of choices that are difficult to justify or even to formulate: is it enough to add to the texts published by the author those that he intended for publication but which remained unfinished by the fact of his death? Should one also include all his sketches and first drafts, with all their corrections and crossings out? Should one add sketches that he himself abandoned? And what status should be given to letters, notes, reported conversations, transcriptions of what he said made by those present at the time, in short, to that vast mass of verbal traces left by an individual at his death, and which speak in an endless confusion so many different languages (*langages*)?[1] In any case, the name 'Mallarmé' does not refer in the same way to his *thèmes* (translation exercises from French into English), his translations of Edgar Allan Poe, his poems, and his replies to questionnaires; similarly, the same relation does not exist between the name Nietzsche on the one hand and the youthful autobiographies, the scholastic dissertations, the philological articles, *Zarathustra, Ecce Homo*, the letters, the last postcards signed 'Dionysos' or 'Kaiser Nietzsche', and the innumerable notebooks with their jumble of laundry bills and sketches for aphorisms. In fact, if one speaks, so undiscriminately and unreflectingly of an author's *œuvre*, it is because one imagines it to be defined by a certain expressive function. One is admitting that there

distant presence of the origin, but treated as and when it occurs.

These pre-existing forms of continuity, all these syntheses that are accepted without question, must remain in suspense. They must not be rejected definitively of course, but the tranquillity with which they are accepted must be disturbed; we must show that they do not come about of themselves, but are always the result of a construction the rules of which must be known, and the justifications of which must be scrutinized: we must define in what conditions and in view of which analyses certain of them are legitimate; and we must indicate which of them can never be accepted in any circumstances. It may be, for example, that the notions of 'influence' or 'evolution' belong to a criticism that puts them – for the foreseeable future – out of use. But need we dispense for ever with the '*œuvre*', the 'book', or even such unities as 'science' or 'literature'? Should we regard them as illusions, illegitimate constructions, or ill-acquired results? Should we never make use of them, even as a temporary support, and never provide them with a definition? What we must do, in fact, is to tear away from them their virtual self-evidence, and to free the problems that they pose; to recognize that they are not the tranquil locus on the basis of which other questions (concerning their structure, coherence, systematicity, transformations) may be posed, but that they themselves pose a whole cluster of questions (What are they? How can they be defined or limited? What distinct types of laws can they obey? What articulation are

reading: nevertheless they form a finite grouping. The question posed by language analysis of some discursive fact or other is always: according to what rules has a particular statement been made, and consequently according to what rules could other similar statements be made? The description of the events of discourse poses a quite different question: how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?

It is also clear that this description of discourses is in opposition to the history of thought. There too a system of thought can be reconstituted only on the basis of a definite discursive totality. But this totality is treated in such a way that one tries to rediscover beyond the statements themselves the intention of the speaking subject, his conscious activity, what he meant, or, again, the unconscious activity that took place, despite himself, in what he said or in the almost imperceptible fracture of his actual words; in any case, we must reconstitute another discourse, rediscover the silent murmuring, the inexhaustible speech that animates from within the voice that one hears, re-establish the tiny, invisible text that runs between and sometimes collides with them. The analysis of thought is always *allegorical* in relation to the discourse that it employs. Its question is unfailingly: what was being said in what was said? The analysis of the discursive field is orientated in a quite different way; we must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits,

of speech, and also on the other hand it opens up to itself a residual existence in the field of a memory, or in the materiality of manuscripts, books, or any other form of recording; secondly, because, like every event, it is unique, yet subject to repetition, transformation, and reactivation; thirdly, because it is linked not only to the situations that provoke it, and to the consequences that it gives rise to, but at the same time, and in accordance with a quite different modality, to the statements that precede and follow it.

But if we isolate, in relation to the language and to thought, the occurrence of the statement/event, it is not in order to spread over everything a dust of facts. It is in order to be sure that this occurrence is not linked with synthesizing operations of a purely psychological kind (the intention of the author, the form of his mind, the rigour of his thought, the themes that obsess him, the project that traverses his existence and gives it meaning) and to be able to grasp other forms of regularity, other types of relations. Relations between statements (even if the author is unaware of them; even if the statements do not have the same author; even if the authors were unaware of each other's existence); relations between groups of statements thus established (even if these groups do not concern the same, or even adjacent, fields; even if they do not possess the same formal level; even if they are not the locus of assignable exchanges); relations between statements and groups of statements and events of a quite different kind (technical, economic, social, political). To reveal in all its purity the

the 'sciences of man'. But it is only a provisional privilege. Two facts must be constantly borne in mind: that the analysis of discursive events is in no way limited to such a field; and that the division of this field itself cannot be regarded either as definitive or as absolutely valid; it is no more than an initial approximation that must allow relations to appear that may erase the limits of this initial outline.

[1] The English word 'language' translates the French *'langue'* (meaning the 'natural' languages: French. English, etc.) and *'langage'* (meaning either 'language in general' or 'kinds of language': philosophical, medical language, etc.). Where the meaning would otherwise be unclear, I have added the original French word in brackets. (Tr.)

CHAPTER 2

Discursive Formations

I have undertaken, then, to describe the relations between statements. I have been careful to accept as valid none of the unities that would normally present themselves to anyone embarking on such a task. I have decided to ignore no form of discontinuity, break, threshold, or limit. I have decided to describe statements in the field of discourse and the relations of which they are capable. As I see it, two series of problems arise at the outset: the first, which I shall leave to one side for the time being and shall return to later, concerns the indiscriminate use that I have made of the terms statement, event, and discourse; the second concerns the relations that may legitimately be described between the statements that have been left in their provisional, visible grouping.

There are statements, for example, that are quite obviously concerned – and have been from a date that is easy enough to determine – with political economy, or biology, or psychopathology; there are others that equally obviously belong to those age-old continuities known as grammar or medicine. But what are these unities? How can we say that the analysis of headaches carried out by

self-enclosed truth; mental illness was constituted by all that was said in all the statements that named it, divided it up, described it, explained it, traced its developments, indicated its various correlations, judged it, and possibly gave it speech by articulating, in its name, discourses that were to be taken as its own. Moreover, this group of statements is far from referring to a single object, formed once and for all, and to preserving it indefinitely as its horizon of inexhaustible ideality; the object presented as their correlative by medical statements of the seventeenth or eighteenth century is not identical with the object that emerges in legal sentences or police action; similarly, all the objects of psychopathological discourses were modified from Pinel or Esquirol to Bleuler: it is not the same illnesses that are at issue in each of these cases; we are not dealing with the same madmen.

One might, perhaps one should, conclude from this multiplicity of objects that it is not possible to accept, as a valid unity forming a group of statements, a 'discourse, concerning madness'. Perhaps one should confine one's attention to those groups of statements that have one and the same object: the discourses on melancholia, or neurosis, for example. But one would soon realize that each of these discourses in turn constituted its object and worked it to the point of transforming it altogether. So that the problem arises of knowing whether the unity of a discourse is based not so much on the permanence and uniqueness of an object as on the space in which various objects emerge and are

continuously transformed. Would not the typical relation that would enable us to individualize a group of statements concerning madness then be: the rule of simultaneous or successive emergence of the various objects that are named, described, analysed, appreciated, or judged in that relation? The unity of discourses on madness would not be based upon the existence of the object 'madness', or the constitution of a single horizon of objectivity; it would be the interplay of the rules that make possible the appearance of objects during a given period of time: objects that are shaped by measures of discrimination and repression, objects that are differentiated in daily practice, in law, in religious casuistry, in medical diagnosis, objects that are manifested in pathological descriptions, objects that are circumscribed by medical codes, practices, treatment, and care. Moreover, the unity of the discourses on madness would be the interplay of the rules that define the transformations of these different objects, their non-identity through time, the break produced in them, the internal discontinuity that suspends their permanence. Paradoxically, to define a group of statements in terms of its individuality would be to define the dispersion of these objects, to grasp all the interstices that separate them, to measure the distances that reign between them – in other words, to formulate their law of division.

Second hypothesis to define a group of relations between statements: their form and type of connexion. It seemed to me, for example, that from the nineteenth century medical