

## FOUCAULT REMEMBERED BY SURPRISE

Those of us who attended the seminars Foucault gave at the Summer Institute for Semiotics and Structural Studies in June of 1982 will perhaps remember his admission that, for him, surprise was foremost among the feelings produced by the material that he had been discussing. In fact, at this time, Foucault proposed that the spiritual, philosophic and monastic writings of late antiquity (primarily those of Seneca, Epictetus, Galen and Cassian) would not be so interesting if they did not appear so "silly." It is probably not incorrect to view this as supplying a singularly apt intimation of Foucault's methodology, provided one follows Foucault's books, that is, his archaeologies, along the pragmatic dimension they occupy. For it is the question of what one can do with a book, and what others have done with books—a question which thereby exceeds the Book—that interested Foucault, as well as contemporaries such as Deleuze and Lyotard.

It is in this respect that one can glimpse what the important term "archaeology" designated in Foucault's work. More than a metaphor for what it means to write or re-write history, it names the space (and not the 'depth') given to the practice of using history to live and think in our times. So many have been disappointed who wanted to read into Foucault a memorialization of madness, criminality, delinquency and sexual pathology, where there was only a selection of marginalia; and those who wanted to glean from his politics the sense of a system were confronted with a silent movement deconstructing any politics conducted on the stage of reason. In short, the archaeology of knowledge is a set of questions that no longer bears upon what will count as objectivity or science, but upon a map of the present produced, in a sense, by surprises, which makes truth into a politically charged record of what it omits to say.

The sad and untimely end of Foucault's life and career came as three new books were nearing publication: *Le Souci de Soi*, *L'Usage des Plaisirs*, and *Les Aveux de la Chair*. Departing from the familiar periodization of the previous works, these books examine in large part the composition of ascetic manuals and the conduct of spiritual direction which culminated with the Stoic and Christian practitioners (doctors and writers) of late antiquity. Foucault's is a new appraisal of what we take to be the hermeneutical articulation of the anxious, dualist self of Christian culture. His work in this area can be expected to have an ambivalent, or at least a fractured relationship to previous historical accounts, since it brings into play not the conditions of unity or filiation of ideas and practices (for example, between stoic, Christian and psychoanalytic techniques), but the disparities that make them exclusive of one another. It seems that for Foucault, psychoanalytic, and finally, archaeological research underscored these disparities since each starts from the assumption that knowledge is strange, that it obeys laws that put into question the position of the novelist, doctor, critic or historian as one who is authorized to exercise inventiveness, representational discourse and the divulging of secrets. For this reason it is interesting that, along with Freud's work, Foucault's stories are written as if all their secrets always bear upon that 'present' which we take to be most public.

Along with Lacan, Foucault had earlier shown that the type of authority which had been 'medicalized' in the 19th century was just as much of a metaphor as madness. Thus although it was to Freud's credit to have recognized the metaphoricality of madness, namely, that it was resistant to the judgements of normality made about it in the previous century, it remained to specify the strange protocols of psychiatry, and the link between the

formation of clinical procedures and a certain political reality that required the designation of madness as 'mental illness.' Contrary to what has often been claimed, Foucault was not concerned with a deep proximity between madness and reason, but with how the question of their relationship was decisively transformed by the 19th century's codification of the effects of social dysfunction and disorder. Since the madman now had a complicity with something underlying his illness, since he was supposed to inwardly know something about its truth, he could now free himself from his unbound freedom only so long as he accepted, in the name of therapeutic utility, the need to control his deviant proclivities and sublimate his creative excesses. Thus, although Freud was able to challenge the romantic myth of the "gentle constraints" of nature's economy (while remaining a liberal), he did so at the price of introducing the doctor's authority directly and politically into the decision about what is good or bad for individuals.

In his later work (beginning with *Discipline and Punish*) Foucault shows how what we now call 'social work' became a relay in a generalized tactics of power. It is well known that police methods, surveillance, procedures of internal and national security, are all reinforced as a function of a specializing and colonizing capitalism. For his part, however, Foucault emphasized that this disciplinary power needed to enforce a continuity between a "perpetual penalty" operating through the supervision of illegality (or the quasi-criminal realm of delinquency) and the role of "exercise" in training, work and education. It is under these conditions, and no longer under the old pastoral forms, that the machinery of 'liberalism,' still in the name of the curing of souls, operates in helping professions, correctional institutions and schooling.

One consequence that Foucault continued to draw from this is that the present-day political practice of liberating one's desire cannot be considered the same as a rejection of power, any more than the negative sanctions of a moral code can be said to represent power. Instead this politics is caught up in the "injunction to talk about sex" which, for the first time in the Christian world, becomes obligatory for truth, and not simply for the expiation of sins. He claimed that power in modern society attaches itself to the problem of how one is supposed to become the subject of his own actions, and ever more cynically enforces ties one is supposed to have in relation to his body, identity and individuality. Moreover, power cannot be said to coincide with the repressive operations of the state since it does not directly care about "who sleeps with whom"—it is more cynical than that—which means it is just as likely to encourage the pathologies of 'sex' to insert themselves in the consumption of therapy and the medicalization of one's body.

Perhaps the kind of analysis that Foucault displaced most forcefully is the one conducted by consensual models of society that have tried to analyze power. The formation of knowledge about individuals and their factors of life and well-being, despite the claims of liberalism resting on certain historical assumptions, has really been governed by the conditions under which strategies of power have been invested and been made more expedient. It is in this political direction that Foucault has questioned the "right to speak history" authenticated, as it is, by truth's putative normality. For him, truth was and is not normal, and this was most singularly demonstrated by his politics of the historical field which was held in the grip of such a "surprise."

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