

Considerations on Marxism, Phenomenology and Power. Interview with Michel Foucault; Recorded on April 3rd, 1978

Translated by Chloë Taylor and Martin Boucher

Editor's Note: This is the transcription of an interview with Foucault, conducted by Paul Patton and Colin Gordon on 3 April 1978. It was translated by Chloë Taylor and Martin Boucher, under the editorial supervision of Alain Beaulieu, and published in *Foucault Studies* 14, September 2012, ahead of the French publication in *Cités* 52, December 2012. I have removed Beaulieu's 'Presentation' of the text as it is largely irrelevant, but one should note his comment that the 'transcription of the recorded interview is available at the Bancroft Library under the call number "BANC MSS 90/136z, 1:2."' He has conducted minor edits, which I have retained. I have removed Colin Gordon's 'Introduction' for the same reason, though the reader may be interested to learn that the original typescript for this interview 'was quoted by Jacques Langrange in his editorial postface to *Le Pouvoir Psychiatrique* (355, and 361 note 28).' Lastly, I have removed the indicators of when each page of the typescript begins.

**Gordon:** A question that is often asked among your English-language readers is: What is your view of the relation or the absence of a relation between your current and recent work and what is understood as Marxism, or quite simply with Marx?

**Foucault:** Do you mean to ask me what the relations are that I have myself established between my work and Marxism? I would tell you that I haven't established any. I haven't established any relations with Marxism since it seems to me that Marxism is a reality so complex, so tangled, that is made up of so many successive historical layers, that is equally taken up by so many political strategies, not to mention by so many small group strategies, that in the end it doesn't interest me to know what Marxism there is in my work and what my relations are to Marxism. The relations between my work and Marx are an entirely different matter. If you like I would say very crudely, to put things in a caricatural manner: I situate my work in the lineage of the second book of *Capital*. I would say very roughly that there is a whole tradition of analysis and reflection on Book 1 of *Capital*, which is to say on the commodity, on the market, on the abstraction involved in the commodity-form and the abstraction of human existence that flows from it. There is a long tradition that one finds in France in the work of Lefebvre, one could say to a certain point that Marcuse too is still situated within this current of critique. As for myself, what interests me about Marx, at least what I can say has inspired me, is Book 2 of *Capital*; that is to say everything that concerns the analyses of the genesis of capitalism, and not of capital, that are first of all historically concrete, and secondly the analyses of the historical conditions of the development of capitalism particularly on the side of the establishment, of the development of structures of power and of the institutions of power. So if one recalls, once more very schematically, the first book [on] the genesis of capital, the second book [on] the history, the genealogy of capitalism, I would say that it is through Book 2, and for instance in what I wrote on discipline, that my work is all the same intrinsically linked to what Marx writes. I would quite simply add by way of parenthesis that I have been careful not to make any references that I could have made to Marx, because references to Marx in the intellectual and political climate of France today function not at all as indicators of origin but as marks of affiliation. It's a way of saying, don't touch me, you see that I am a real man of the left, that I am a Marxist, the proof is that I cite Marx. So I prefer secret citations of Marx, that the Marxists themselves are not able to recognise, rather than what a lot of people unfortunately do, namely to say things that have nothing to do with Marxism, but then add a little footnote citing Marx and then that's it, the text has taken on a political meaning. I hate these signs of affiliation, I prefer to make fewer rather than more citations of Marx.

**Gordon:** You recounted in your interview with Fontana and Pasquino how the point of departure of your works was, among other things, a break with phenomenology that, with the increasing popularity of Hegelian studies, was dominant in post-war French philosophy. There is a series of linked questions. How can one explain this strong influence of phenomenology in this period? Do you consider this effort to overturn or to break with phenomenology as a determining orientation for your works up

until, say, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*? Were certain criticisms of phenomenology made at this time in French thought important for you, for instance those of Jean Cavallès? Finally, was it in part in order to undermine this philosophy that you have so often posed the problem of visibility, of the knowing gaze, the eye of the king or of power that sees everything (Tuke, the clinic, *Las Meninas*, natural history, the panopticon...): let us say so many “histories of the eye”?

**Foucault:** It is absolutely true that at the time that I was studying the only form, the only two forms of philosophy that seemed possible to us, I don't even say that they were dominant, the only two domains of possibility were Hegel — and Marx — and then there was phenomenology, which had always functioned in France, always developed as a philosophy of the subject. There would be a whole little quasi-anecdotal but very interesting story to tell about the fact that Husserl was absolutely not known in France before 1927. And once Husserl arrives in France, once he is finally recognised in France, and gives lectures under the auspices of the *Société Française de Philosophie*, what does he talk about? What does he do? The *Cartesian Meditations*! Which means that France only knew Husserl via an angle which I am not sure was, or represented, the main line of phenomenology. Because in particular, the whole fundamental problem of phenomenology was ultimately a problem of logic: how to found logic. We were not so familiar with all that in France, we knew instead a Husserl who inscribed himself here, it seems to me, if not ingratiatingly, at least with a degree of dexterity, in the Cartesian tradition. In any case, that was the phenomenology that we were taught.

Ok, and then in counterposition to that, one had Marx. And the people who were my teachers, or who for me were asking the important or significant questions, were those who tried to see how it was possible to do something by working between, or with the help of both phenomenology and Marxism. So there was Tran Duc Thao, there was Desanti, and then there was, tied to that as well, and a bit in the same perspective, there was Cavallès. That is to say all those who wanted to create a philosophy of the sciences in which the problem of the status and the foundation of the concept should be posed: but did it need to be posed in terms of the philosophy of the subject? So that is absolutely the horizon, if you like, of my studies, and relative to that the *History of Madness*, which was my first book, basically a very minor book, quasi-ironic, but which I would still very much have liked to have had taken seriously, was at bottom a way of saying this: for so many years, we have been trying to see how it was possible to write a history, at the same time concrete, real, materialist, a history of the sciences, a history of rationalities, a history of idealities: a materialist history of idealities; can one write a materialist history of mathematics, can one write a materialist history of theoretical physics? I want to say that the results that were presented to us were never very convincing, even if I was interested in the style of these people [inaudible passage]. In the materialist history of theoretical physics, it soon came down to talking about the Florentine hydraulic engineers [*les fontainiers de Florence*], and then these materialist histories of [inaudible word] which weren't entirely convincing... If you want the theme, it was this: if one takes much less elevated forms of scientificity, forms of scientificity in gestation as it were, in their most unsophisticated and empirical forms, and tried to see how things happen at this level, and how we can write a materialist history of empirical knowledge in forms that are still very irrational, still very unformalised, still sullied with empiricism, with ideology, etc.: and obviously medicine and psychiatry seemed to me in any case a very useful example to consider, since at this level it was much easier to engage, to interconnect a materialist analysis of the conditions of possibility of a scientific discourse, if you like, with the forms in which this scientific discourse was formulated. And, seriously, the *History of Madness* was very much a kind of invitation, well at least a suggestion to Marxist researchers, or in any case to researchers close to the horizon that we were speaking about before, to say to them, okay, let's try now to take up the same problem again (genesis of rationalities, materialist genesis of rationalities), but taking these sciences as our examples. But when I tell you that, I give myself a ridiculous and pretentious role as pioneer, as if I were the first, whereas in fact Canguilhem, in writing the history of sciences and the history of medicine had also, and long before me, tried to pose the problem in these terms, picking up a certain number of themes particular to the philosophy of the concept of Cavallès, but playing out this same type of problem and of analysis at the level of biology. That's a bit how things happened, if you like.

And then what is striking is that for a very long time Marxists didn't attach any importance to the work of Canguilhem, and it was only Althusser who forced his students to interest themselves in Canguilhem, and as for the *History of Madness*, there wasn't a single Marxist review, not a single Marxist, etc., to react to it. It didn't exist. Well, basically that was the climate.<sup>1</sup>

**Patton:** What do you think today of the idea that one can make a distinction between scientific knowledge and non-scientific knowledge strictly in terms of the conceptual structure of scientificity? That is to say, do you still accept the idea of a threshold of scientificity, for instance? And what should the role played by this enterprise of epistemological demarcation be? You often allude to the physical and mathematical sciences, for example in *Discipline and Punish*, or in a recent lecture where you spoke about the notion of force.<sup>2</sup> Do you believe that the question of political investment in the physical sciences should be posed otherwise, by other means than the way you have posed this question for the human sciences?

**Foucault:** So, I will answer this last question right away, and I will say yes, absolutely, it is certainly not by the same means that one can write, let's say, a political history, or the history of political investments in the theoretical sciences, and of the political investments of something in those kinds of knowledge such as psychiatry or criminology, things like that where I think something else is necessary. For the rest, and even starting with what I just said to you, I confess that I would be very much at a loss for a clear, definitive, unequivocal response to the series of questions that you just asked me. And I believe that these are questions that remain unanswered and whose analysis remains completely uncultivated. This whole history of thresholds, of ruptures, of discontinuities, it's a history that for many of us is a bit poisoned. I mean that the use and abuse of the notion of threshold, rupture, discontinuity, break, this abuse has corresponded at a certain point with something that I think is important, and that was the possibility of breaking free from phenomenology. From the moment that you posed the problem in terms of phenomenology, you allowed yourself on the one hand regionalities, ideal regions, but also, on the other hand, a constitutive, founding subject, intuiting or seeing these different regional essences; discontinuity of domains, identity of the subject and the constitutive structures brought into play by the subject. I think that the notion of rupture permitted us to break free both from these regional discontinuities, from these regional specificities shall we say, and from this identity of the subject. It allowed a problem to emerge that I would not at all say has been resolved, but that was worth posing, and that was so worth posing that it still does not appear to have been resolved, and which is precisely this unevenness between the fields of knowledge, which differ not only because they have different objects, but which differ from each other in the forms of scientificity, the different levels of scientificity. I know a mathematician who happens to be my colleague at the Collège and who is, I believe, a very good mathematician, his name is Jean-Pierre Serres, and who, when he speaks of his biologist colleagues says, "oh yes, those people who deal with little creatures," and for him there is no difference between a psycho-physiologist and a geneticist, they all deal with little creatures. I mean that from the perspective of a certain kind of scientific discourse, it is absolutely certain that there is no relevant structural difference. And if you take things on the contrary from below, because my material is down below, at that level, it does not seem possible to me to treat as the same type of discourse, nor as two forms of scientific discourse, and certainly not as two states in the same kind of development of scientific discourse, knowledges like for example psychology and genetics. So what is this difference that is not simply regional, that is not simply a chronological difference in the stages of development, that involves the functioning of rationality: that is what I think is in question. Everyone says what needs to be done and what has never been done, or rather what we have always tried to do, and that with which philosophy occupies itself,

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault did not mention here some brief suggestions about the genealogy of the natural sciences he put forward a few years earlier in his lectures on "Truth and juridical forms", the article "La casa della follia," and the course summary of the lectures on *Psychiatric Power*. — Gordon

<sup>2</sup> I think that what I was alluding to here were Foucault's remarks in the lecture of 22 March about the contemporaneous discovery of force in political and natural scientific thought (Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 296). — Patton

it is really the interrogation of what rationality is, both as a universal structure and at the same time as a particular form in Western history. All of philosophy has done no more than reflect on that. Okay... in there each of us works away in his little corner, his little corner. I don't know if that satisfied you as a response... Not entirely?

**Patton:** There is one thing that you didn't talk about. In fact I believe they are the questions that you posed in the journal *Hérodote*. You suggested there another way of seeing the division between scientific and non-scientific knowledges and at the same time you also proposed an idea about the function of this distinction; it is in fact a way of disqualifying a certain knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

**Foucault:** I don't remember very well what was in this journal *Hérodote*... I would ask you what your current question is...

**Patton:** Yes, the question that I wanted to ask was above all about the role of this business of making a distinction between scientific and non-scientific knowledge.

**Foucault:** To make a clean and binary demarcation between on one side forms of discourses, types of analyses, types of practices that count as scientific, and on the other side those that don't, I think that absolutely does not work. On the other hand, it seems to me, and I tried unsuccessfully to point this out in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, that precisely from within a type of discursive practice one can identify perfectly well the moment at which one reaches something that one could call a threshold of scientificity. For example, within the framework of medicine it seems to me that one can recognise well enough that when you read a book of medicine from the eighteenth century, up until around 1750, not anatomy or physiology, but a book of medicine, you practically cannot know what they are talking about. They are not the same objects, nor the same kinds of gaze, nor the same divisions of things. So, with respect to medicine today you cannot even say that it is true or false. It falls outside of the relevant difference between true and false. I would say that, consequently, it is not part of the field of medical scientificity. On the other hand, roughly since Bichat, Laennec, etc., you have a medical discourse that a contemporary doctor could say is between 70% and 95% false. But if they can say that it is false, it is because they recognise the same objects. It's because of the procedures of verification or of falsification that one can apply to these genres, I would say that this is how the threshold of scientificity is crossed. So there it is, roughly, there is no homogenous, general threshold of scientificity for all discourses, but rather you have types of discourse for which the transformation was such that as of a certain moment they functioned according to rules of verification sufficiently homogenous and stable that in certain cases we could say "it's false," and in other cases we could say "I cannot say if it's true or if it's false" because it is not the same kind of object, it is not the form of conceptualisation that is relevant for me.

**Gordon:** In your interview with Fontana and Pasquino, you spoke of how analyses of power that had until then been blocked, became possible for you and for others following May '68 and the struggles that followed. This turning point is obviously very clear in your writings, with the thematisations, since *The Order of Discourse*, of power or rather of relations of power, as central questions. And indeed one also sees that the word, the concept of power has made its fortune everywhere these last years, let us say as a kind of floating signifier in intellectual discourses. That is to say a signifier that seems to say at the same time too much and not enough. And this is a change that, perhaps, creates a problem in itself. Could you then try to tell us how this possibility of making a discourse on power explicit was crucial for you and, on the other hand, do you believe that we can eliminate the risks that this word "power" seems to comprise as a noun tending always, obviously against your will, towards the

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<sup>3</sup> In the interview in *Power/Knowledge* he alludes at one point to the Althusserian enterprise of drawing the line between science and ideology, only to distance himself from this (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, edited by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 65). But in the questions he posed to *Hérodote* he goes further and asks whether the effort to demarcate science from ideology is not a way of disqualifying certain forms of knowledge, or more generally an effect of power linked to the institutionalisation of knowledge in universities etc. (*Dits et écrit*, Tome III, 94). It was the latter comment I was alluding to here. A very similar comment about the enterprise of proving the scientificity of Marxism appears in the lecture of 7 Jan 1976 (Foucault, *Society must be Defended* (New York: Picador, 2003) 10). — Patton

designation of a systematic, massive, unavoidable, and perhaps fascinating, seductive presence of *Power*? In short, do you believe that this very word “power” will remain insurmountable in your coming works?

**Foucault:** Now that’s the good question! So, quickly I’d say, you know, you have noticed, I never spoke of *Power*. I never spoke of *Power*, I never did an analysis of *Power*, I never said what *Power* is, which was interpreted by certain active minds to mean that I was making a kind of absolute of it, of transcendental power, of hidden divinity, etc. Okay, when we look at things, if I never define power, and so if I don’t speak about *Power*, what do I do instead? I study things like a psychiatric asylum, the forms of constraint, exclusion, elimination, disqualification, let us say, the reason that is always precisely embodied, embodied in the form of a doctor, a medical knowledge, a medical institution, etc., exercised on madness, illness, unreason, etc., what I study is an architecture, a spatial disposition, what I study are the disciplinary techniques, the modalities of training, the forms of surveillance, still in much too broad terms, but... what are the practices that one puts in play in order to govern men, that is, to obtain from them a certain way of conducting themselves? That is to say that each time it is something precise, concrete, that is of the order of domination, constraint, coercion, etc. all things that one could put, if one likes, under the category of power, but this notion of power repels me much more than those who reproach me for using it, and it is precisely as a way of undertaking a real, concrete, precise critique of this shadowy notion of power that I speak of these different things, and that I study *them*. Put otherwise, it is absolutely true that it seemed to me that the analysis of what are called mechanisms of power, that is to say of the extraordinarily varied field of mechanisms of coercion, of domination, of exclusion, etc., the catalogue is indefinite, it seemed to me that this would be an interesting perspective for understanding a certain number of things that other analyses didn’t allow us to understand, and in particular what I was talking about before, to know how to do a materialist history of idealities or of rationalities. In any case, it seemed to me that the link between these materialities and these idealities, these materialities and these rationalities, were to be found much more on the side of relations of power than on the side of economic relations. This is what I was doing unknowingly in the *History of Madness*, where it seemed to me that for instance the problem of unemployment, the problem of vagrancy, the problem of employment, the obligation to put people to work, was certainly what was at the bottom of what happened in this putting out of circulation of mad people, of all abnormal people if you like, in the later part of the 17th century. But what made it possible to constitute something like psychiatry, with the pretention to rationality, the pretention to scientificity peculiar to this pseudoscience, it seemed to me that that could not simply be explained by the fact that one wanted to coerce the unemployed, that one wanted to eliminate [them], but that it was out of something else, which was this machinery of exclusion, of surveillance, of training, of therapy, etc., that there came to be constituted the hospital — first confinement, then the hospital, then psychiatry. That is the relation of power as principle of intelligibility, of the relationship between materiality and rationality. But once again, this theme of the relation of power as principle of intelligibility, power as the unique substance, is for me what must absolutely be destroyed, and I want at every instant to substitute the precise and concrete analysis of forms taken by this domination, its subjectifications [*assujettissement*], its constraints, etc... That is to say that I am the most radical enemy that one can imagine of the idea of power, and I don’t ever speak about power, and I speak from the possibilities of intelligibility given by the analysis of mechanisms of power on the condition that one never speaks of *Power*, but rather speaks of different instruments, tools, relations, techniques, etc., that allow for domination, subjectification, constraint, coercion, etc. I hate power, I hate the idea of power, and that is what people don’t understand, you get these completely naïve critiques that say “aha, he doesn’t define power.” I say, power is not to be defined; it is not to be defined because it does not exist.

**Gordon:** In England there is sometimes a certain reading of your recent work that says, ah yes, it’s a sociology of power, but...

**Foucault:** That has nothing to do with it. Oh well, to tell the truth my fault is that I’ve never been able to explain very well what I do. It is certain, I still believe that it is clear at the level of formulations, it is

not clear, how to put it, at the level of significations. And it seemed to me for instance that in *History of Sexuality, Volume 1* I explained very clearly that for me the point of view of power is a point of view of method, that there was no substantification of power, that it was a way of approaching things. Nothing more. I believe that I said it extremely clearly. But the opposite meaning kept being reproduced...

[The interview is halted for some time, then resumed]

**Foucault:** When I say that relations of power are at the same time multiform, extensive, coextensive to social relations, hence omnipresent, people generally interpret that as saying that for me power is omnipotent [*tout-puissant*], that in the end omnipresence is omnipotence [*toute-puissance*]. When I say that power, that relations of power are omnipresent, it means precisely the opposite of the affirmation that *Power* is omnipotent [*tout-puissant*]. The opposite, why? Because when I speak of relations of power, I do not speak of power; a relation of power is a relationship between someone who is looking to dominate or is dominating, or has some instruments of domination, and then somebody else, or a series of other people that are, with respect to this power, in a situation of being dominated, of refusing this domination, to flee from this domination, to do battle with it, or to the contrary to accept it too. It is the relations of power then, and not *Power*. And when I say that relations of power are omnipresent, I do not mean that power is omnipotent, I want to say that these relations of power that we can effectively find at each instant, in family relations, in sexual relations, in pedagogical relations, in relations of knowledge, etc., these relations would not have been established if power was omnipotent, or if there was such a thing as omnipotence. That there are techniques of power, that there are instruments of power, that there are these unstable relations, dangerous, reversible, fragile, evidently proves that there is not at any point in the social body, and certainly not at its centre, something that is omnipotent. In the end, it appears to me quite evident, it appeared to me to be quite evident that when I said things like that, I did not think it was necessary to specify that it meant that there could not be any element that was omnipotent. And I wouldn't say [inaudible word] more, it is something that is absurd, absurd. In general, if we assume things [like]... an omnipotent sovereign whose orders, injunctions, commands would effectively be followed to the letter, this would exclude from the social body through which he exercises this sovereignty the existence of these thousands of relations of power that establish themselves between people that rebel, that contest, etc. It's just because God is not omnipotent [*tout-puissant*] that evil exists! That is to say it is because there is no omnipotent power that there are omnipresent relations of power.

**Gordon:** Then it's a shame that in England we must still wait for the translation of *History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, because there you are quite clear on this point.

**Foucault:** Oh, very clear, you know in France it changed nothing. The same misreading that existed before continued to exist after. But that is for the reason we spoke about this morning; currently in France the intellectual arena is so saturated with polemical relations that it is impossible to make oneself heard. The only problem is to know in what camp we are, with whom, in what system of allegiance, in what system of hostility, etc. We are truly in a world of enemies, in the sense that Mme. Khodorovitch was saying earlier. That is what I find truly striking, the way in which, how could I say, the model, I do not mean Marxist, but the Soviet model, in all its odious character, was diffused through French political groups, and not only French political groups but throughout the whole intellectual world. We do not simply have interlocutors, or people with whom we do not agree, we critique them only to denounce them as enemies, we must find the enemy, we must name the enemy, that one is the enemy, the main enemy, the accessory, the enemy's enemy — in the end, it is of little importance. That is politicisation in the "catastrophic" sense of the word, and if I am in favour of the politicisation of analysis, I am just as much against the politicisation of human relationships, in the sense that it would produce, as the system's keystone, the necessity to find the enemy and to unmask the enemy in every individual with whom we disagree.

**Gordon:** Well then, to turn now to the notion of resistance, evidently the misunderstandings are symmetric with those about power. We agree with you that there is no binary division between apparatuses [*dispositifs*] of power and actions and sites of resistance, neither between the genealogies

of those devices, these apparatuses [*dispositifs*] and what we call the memory, the history of revolts. People have still sometimes commented that the place occupied by the question of resistance is somewhat minor in your recent books (if not in your courses where it seems the situation is different), so can one also do, or even do you yourself think of also doing genealogies of forms of resistance that could potentially teach us as much as the genealogies of forms of power?

**Foucault:** Okay so, first, I have never pretended to write the history of everything, and I find nothing more deplorable than the objection that amounts to saying: “but you did not talk about that...” The question is valid and admissible only if one says: to speak about what you spoke about, one needed also, or first, to speak about this or that. So one might say, but how can we talk of relations of power if we do not at the same time talk about the phenomenon of resistance, since precisely for me power is not on one side and resistance on the other, but you have a reciprocal concatenation, there is power only where there is resistance. Well there, at this point my answer would be this. Basically it seems to me that in the analyses I carried out, for example in *History of Madness*, in *Discipline and Punish* too, I do not think I erased or denied the existence of resistances, I do not think I said that the mechanisms of power develop in some way by themselves, without resting on, without having the objective, without rebounding against, without being modified by the phenomenon of resistance. In *Discipline and Punish* I follow part of the situation of criminality in the 18th century as it appeared to the eyes of contemporaries themselves, and as it could consequently function as a kind of strategic field in which one had to develop other systems of penal justice than those that were currently in use. But it is absolutely true that I did not speak directly here about these resistances, in terms of their principle, of their own proper movements, of their motivation. I did not talk about it, why? Because until now my problem has been the one I was speaking about this morning, to know in what measure the point of view of relations of power can help us resolve the question of the genesis of rationalities, or of rationalities, or of idealities, or of the scientificity starting from, say, a materialist history. Otherwise stated, it is the genesis of truth, it is the genesis of rationality. Now, I think that that is without a doubt an important point that will need to be examined further; I am far from being finished with it. It seems to me that here we have in fact what is characteristic of this western rationality, namely that it was essentially formed from inside relations of power, and in terms of institutional elements that could crystallise relations of power, that is to say that there was a dominant reason, and a domination of reason. It is evident in the case of madness. So, it is very interesting to see how, from the inside of devices [*appareils*] through which the domination of madness was assured, the discourse of madness still made its way, was heard, it spoke, it cried out, and then came to be reinterpreted. So, from Esquirol if you like, from Pinel to psychoanalysis, there is there, passing through interesting stages like that of Leuret fighting with his patients, or like Charcot’s hysterics etc., there has been a whole movement by which psychiatry still... and the rationality of psychiatry, if you like, has been worked on by the discourse of its patients, or in any case traversed by it, concerned with it. I think that that is something important. However, I want to say that in general, for the essential, the genesis of rationality is precisely the genesis of a dominant reason, and so it situates itself, it lodges itself inside a phenomenon of domination, hence it is not so much on the side of resistance that we ought to look if we want to see the genesis of rationality. But once again, all that I do is partial, it has no vocation to totality. I try to displace myself as often as possible in the domain that concerns me at the time, to see things otherwise, so yes this problem, take for example the subject of sexuality, it’s one of the points that appears quite clear to me, take if you like the example of children. It seems to me that the phenomenon, which is obvious, of the preoccupation, more and more marked, more and more sustained, more and more restricting of the sexuality of children, in its specificity and the signification invested in it, this is a phenomenon that has not ceased to grow since the 17th century, and which, I think, constituted a veritable colonisation of the child in the name of sexuality. So, in what forms did this concern manifest itself? Well, for sure it manifested itself through in a whole discourse, at the same time moralising, medical, scientific — self-proclaimed as such — on this phenomenon. I think, this remains to be seen, this is what I want to find out, it seems that at the same time and by the same token, if you like, at the same time as resistance and effect, there was a veritable ignition of childhood

sexuality, and that in one sense children responded to the discourse of masturbation with masturbation, and that there occurred a sort of eroticisation of their own bodies that was the effect of this anxiety brought to bear on their bodies by their parents, by the doctor, by their environment, that was also a response of protest.

**Gordon:** Like with the possessed?

**Foucault:** Well, that has been studied. But, if you like, in the current state in my current work, which is not finished, that is not entirely written, at this current stage of my work, I would be ready enough to say that in the end people in the 18th century were not entirely wrong, not even those of the 19th when they said "but there is a modern sickness that has become widespread, which is childhood masturbation!" I am ready enough to believe that before that, the child did not masturbate: but what I mean to say is that this sort of enormous system constructed around masturbation, of a game between parents and children, the body of the parent and the body of the child, the sex of the children and the gaze of the parents, this entire game did not exist, and the eroticisation of the bodies of children was much weaker, and indeed that the pleasures they had either by themselves or with each other, certainly did not have, perhaps at any rate did not have the dramatic nature, the affective intensity and consequently the psychological weight that they can have now. In fact, children touched their sexual organs as if they were scratching their ears, because it pleased them, because they felt a need, it was done, *hop!* And then we started this grand theatre, of which we can say, it seems to me, that we have here a phenomenon of resistance completely correlated to the systems of power that were destined to stifle it, and which only served to incite it.

**Gordon:** Moving back now a bit more to philosophy: one of the original aspects of your work seems to have been the effort to communicate the two-way relations between on the one side historical, concrete relations or objects, and on the other side conceptual frameworks, the categories that render them intelligible, decipherable. It is then probably not without pertinence to note a certain Kantian echo in some of your key concepts: the historical *a priori*, the analytic of power, grids and frameworks of decipherment that allow for the intelligibility, even the constitution of historical objects. And in your course of this year, you have the principle of *raison d'état* in the 17th century, at once as the regulatory principle of a program of governmental power, and similarly also as an explicative matrix in a genealogy of, say, the art of good state government. Hence I wanted to say this: does this Kantian line in your technical vocabulary correspond to a constant way of guiding your research, that is to say a sort of critical epistemology of history, but which replaces the transcendental inside the field of objects?

**Foucault:** If you will, what I do is always situated at the level of what we were talking about this morning, within the problem of the genesis of rationality, of idealities, within this problem which is that of phenomenology, but which is also that of Kant, which is not exactly that of Descartes precisely, which is the relationship between subject and object. Where I establish myself farthest in relation to phenomenology, it is to the extent that what I try to do is rather the correlative constitution, throughout history, of objects and the subject. And, if you will, what appears interesting to me in this guiding line which is that of power, not at all to make of power this instance etc., ... but as a grid of analysis, that is what it seems to me we can do, from this analytical grid we can at once reconstruct the way possible objects of knowledge are constituted, and on the other hand how the subject constitutes itself, that is to say, what I call subjectification [*l'assujettissement*], a word I know is difficult to translate to English, because it rests on a play on words, subjectification [*assujettissement*] in the sense of the constitution of the subject, and at the same time the way in which we impose on a subject relations of domination...

**Gordon:** ...subjection...

**Foucault:** ...that's it, and or if you would like, to return to the Kantian model, at the point where Kant would say the law, I would say, what are the historical relations of domination, relations that are therefore changing, transformable, that have constituted the subject as subject? That is to say, as subject for knowledge, but as subject in relation to a master, a sovereign, an instance of whatever kind, that dominates it. That's it. And then it is this double historicity of object and of subject that



seems to me can be grasped, without too many philosophical paradoxes, starting from the moment where we take as our guideline the mechanisms of power that are developed in a society. That's it. When I say 'without philosophical paradox,' I am not sure that philosophically all that holds together. You can see the challenge: not to sacrifice the mobility of one term to that of the other, that is to say, to avoid doing a history of psychological variations of the subject via what we might call a material, fixed history of objects; not to do a historical phenomenology of different intuitions of the world, different modes of perceiving objects, while maintaining a fixed subject. And how to find a correlation between the constitution of objects and the constitution of subjects.

**Gordon:** Then this mobility of categories, it is not a whim on your part?

**Foucault:** Let's say this is where, if you like, a bit paradoxically, Nietzsche comes to inhabit a Kantian problem, or a Husserlian problem, and it is precisely here, through this, that Nietzsche is very important to me. Because Nietzsche was basically very Kantian, in some ways. He was very Kantian, and then at the same time his problem was: there is a history of truth and there is a history of the subject, and this history of truth, this history of the subject, where can we find it, well it's in the direction of the will to power, that is to say, indeed finally in the direction of relations of power.

**Gordon:** In any case, your refusal of an ontology of power, it is wholly in the Kantian spirit.

**Foucault:** Yes, yes.

**Gordon:** So, we would now like to consider some questions on genealogy and history, which means two or three different things: the possibility of a genealogy of historical discourse, the relation between genealogy and historians' history, and then maybe the question of genealogy as history of the present. So the first question: among the university disciplines and in the intellectual, cultural world, history enjoys a considerably prestigious place in France, and popular historians are often enough called upon to serve as oracles of society, with history as some kind of reservoir of social wisdom. About ten years ago, after the publication of *The Order of Things*, you spoke once or twice about a future work that would have been called something like "The Past and the Present [*Le Passé et le présent*]," which would be something like an archaeology of historical reason... Well then, how do you think we could conceive of a genealogy of history itself, genealogy of the historian's discourses and practices today, and what would it be able to teach us about the role, the function currently occupied by historians' discourses?

**Foucault:** Listen, now I am very embarrassed to answer your question, for a very simple reason, I am in the process of writing a text for historians, we are due to have a discussion with historians like Michelle Perrot,<sup>4</sup> and either I will have to explain to you all that I will tell them or that I say nothing, so I am in an awkward situation.

**Gordon:** Alright, and for the question of genealogy and history, their reciprocal relationship — do we skip that? Very well, it's a matter quite simply of... genealogy is not history but it has some relations with history, that is...

**Foucault:** ...Let's say that what I call genealogy is a kind of... in so far as what I try to do, again, it's not a history of everything and of anything, but it's precisely that of systems of rationality, of rational domination, rationality as domination, within which we are caught, and which I myself make use of in my own discourse; it's with respect to this circularity, between what I talk about, that within which I am caught, and that which I make use of that I don't have a historical discourse, on one hand, where it is liable to this circularity, to a most immediate philosophical disqualification. No philosopher can admit it, and no historian could be comfortable with it. Well, that's what it is, what I call genealogy, that is to say a genealogy of ourselves, it's our own history.

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<sup>4</sup> A few weeks later, on May 20th, Foucault took part in a discussion with historians organised by the *Société d'histoire de la Révolution française*, chaired by Maurice Agulhon. The edited discussion was published, together with two other related short texts by Foucault, in *L'Impossible prison* edited by Michelle Perrot (Paris: Seuil, 1980); English translation: "Questions of Method" (translated by Colin Gordon), *I&C 8* (1981), reprinted in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, Peter Miller (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1990) and *Essential Writings 3: Power*, edited by James Faubion (New York: New Press, 2000). — Beaulieu

**Gordon:** What I understood as the relationship between genealogy and history is perhaps this: it seems to me that there is a number of types of exchanges between the two, which permits that, let's say in any case that genealogy serves as a centre for the creation of fictions, as you have called them; or to see hypotheses, reference points, new objects, that we can at most pass on to the historians saying 'there you have it,' 'try to do something with that,' or likewise, 'here, some questions that could interest you.' Nevertheless, the question that interests me is if all this must reflect in some sense on the historian's conception of history, that is to say, must it not change the historian's gaze a bit, as much as give him, provide him new objects, ideas, motivations, that is to say, finally, can we in one sense leave to history the responsibility of truth?

**Foucault:** Ah yes, but again we fall into the stuff that I will discuss with them, it's absolutely true that historians make use of — after having long made use of a principle of causality that is a bit monotonous and that is not very interesting — presently make use of a despotic principle of social reality, in the name of which there is no reality but the reality with which they occupy themselves, and that I find to be currently, or if you will, precisely that, this kind of profound social reality: the economy, famine, thirst... the principle of reality, historical reality, as in being the history of this... largely, human satisfactions, needs, well then when they touch on that bottom line, for them that's reality, in relation to which everything else is storyboard, abstraction. No but this whole question... history bores me. I can never bring myself to tell them, historians irritate me, but it's nice, they do what they do...

**Gordon:** At last, if I dare approach it, the history of the present, that is to say...

**Foucault:** But it's still history!

**Gordon:** Ah yes... no what I was going to say is that the present, it is not a question for historian's history, anyway the history of the present is a term that we find in *Discipline and Punish* whose meaning is quite clear — I think. Only, there is a certain reservation in terms of having the feeling of, say a detour, a very fundamental one, very massive and very long, in the past, to truly have the means to target...

**Foucault:** For me it is a history that is not clear, this history of the present, it is not clear and at the same time it concerns me greatly. Quite simply, this: really when I wrote *History of Madness* I did not say this at all. To, like to magnify the thing: When I wrote *History of Madness*, I truly was writing a history book, it was so much a book of history that in my mind it had to be the first chapter, or the start of a study, that would lead all the way to the present. Certainly I wrote the thing on the basis of a certain experience, goodness me just as, after all, when people write about peasants of Western France, without a doubt, it is that they have a certain relationship with peasantry, after all the relationship that I could have with the hospital, that was some kind of relationship with experience, but really I wrote a history book. Now this book functioned in France, it was perceived early on by psychiatrists as a current critique of the current system of psychiatry. And they took it as an assault. And it continues! The other day someone...

**Gordon:** You're still getting letters?

**Foucault:** Still the letters! But the other day there were some guys who had made a film on the psychiatric hospital, and they showed some psychiatrists. I know nothing about the people, nothing about the film, they showed some psychiatrists. And some psychiatrists who previously had been interviewed in this film recognised themselves, saw themselves on screen, not recognising themselves in what they saw, made a fuss, and said: "no, we do not want these sequences aired if you leave them like that," as the director of the film told me on the phone afterwards, because before then I didn't know him, he told me that the head of these psychiatrists, of this organisation of theirs, went into a trance saying, 'but all that it's Foucault's fault, who will deliver us from this guy, we've had it up to here,' etc., Ok but really, as a book, it suffices to read it, it is a question of, not the psychiatric hospital, [but] of institutions of confinement between 1669 and 1791. So, that is really something that came back to me through this question you have just asked me. How can they take that as an offence in the present? And how could it function like that, well one can try to explain it, in the end this book could come to function like this only through a kind substitution, since in France there was no Laing, there was no Cooper, there was no real antipsychiatric practice. Finally, this book served a bit like a relay

with problems posed by Laing and Cooper, that's entirely possible. But, it remains that a history book can function at least in France, I would not say elsewhere, like some violence done to the present. So what is it about this book? It has without a doubt something to do with the specific structure of the science, of the rationality in question. Because if you tell physicists the worst horrors in the history of physics, tell them all the vile abominations through which physics or chemistry came to birth, they would laugh, they would think it very good, they wouldn't hit the roof. Tell that to a psychoanalyst, tell it to a psychiatrist, to a sociologist how that all happened — they will feel hurt. The point is, then, that these different types of knowledges do not have the same relationship to their histories. That is to say that they cannot accept that we discredit their history, something with which they no doubt feel a connection. And so here we find one of the criteria for a threshold of scientificity which we spoke about this morning: from the moment where a science can admit to the worst horrors of its own history, that is because it's a science! As long as it feels offended when we tell its own history, it's really that it is not a science in the sense of mathematics. But, my goodness, that would be a whole subject. It's the same with the prison. If one retells the history of prisons down to 1830, people cannot help but receive it as a systematic, raging critique of the current system, about which not a word is said in the book. Well, I did actually add some indications about this, saying, these problems have continued... but why not?

**Gordon:** But with *Discipline and Punish* this reaction must not have entirely surprised you?

**Foucault:** No, it's...it surprised me with *History of Madness*. With the other, no, since... the manoeuvre on my part was at the same time more conscious and cruder. I regret it... after all, my manoeuvre, what manoeuvre? What manoeuvre? Well there is something there, but I do not know what to answer...