

Hayden White

# The Content of the Form

*Narrative Discourse and  
Historical Representation*

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*Lefait n'a jamais qu'une existence linguistique.*

BARTHES

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FOR MARGARET . . . *perche'nascesse una margherita.*

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## Preface

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The essays in this volume represent some of the work I have done over the last seven years in historiography and theory of narrative and on the problem of representation in the human sciences. I have entitled the collection *The Content of the Form* because all of the essays deal, in one way or another, with the problem of the relation between narrative discourse and historical representation.

This relation becomes a problem for historical theory with the realization that narrative is not merely a neutral discursive form that may or may not be used to represent real events in their aspect as developmental processes but rather entails ontological and epistemic choices with distinct ideological and even specifically political implications. Many modern historians hold that narrative discourse, far from being a neutral medium for the representation of historical events and processes, is the very stuff of a mythical view of reality, a conceptual or pseudoconceptual "content" which, when used to represent real events, endows them with an illusory coherence and charges them with the kinds of meanings more characteristic of oneiric than of waking thought.

This critique of narrative discourse by recent proponents of scientific historiography is of a piece with the rejection of narrativity in literary modernism and with the perception, general in our time, that real life can never be truthfully represented as having the kind of formal coherency met with in the conventional, well-made or fabulistic story. Since its invention by Herodotus, traditional historiography has featured predominantly the belief that history itself consists of a congeries of lived stories, individual and collective, and that the principal

task of historians is to uncover these stories and to retell them in a narrative, the truth of which would reside in the correspondence of the story told to the story lived by real people in the past. Thus conceived, the literary aspect of the historical narrative was supposed to inhere solely in certain stylistic embellishments that rendered the account vivid and interesting to the reader rather than in the kind of poetic inventiveness presumed to be characteristic of the writer of fictional narratives.

According to this view, it was possible to believe that whereas writers of fictions invented everything in their narratives—characters, events, plots, motifs, themes, atmosphere, and so on—historians invented nothing but certain rhetorical flourishes or poetic effects to the end of engaging their readers' attention and sustaining their interest in the true story they had to tell. Recent theories of discourse, however, dissolve the distinction between realistic and fictional discourses based on the presumption of an ontological difference between their respective referents, real and imaginary, in favor of stressing their common aspect as semiological apparatuses that produce meanings by the systematic substitution of signifieds (conceptual contents) for the extra-discursive entities that serve as their referents. In these semiological theories of discourse, narrative is revealed to be a particularly effective system of discursive meaning production by which individuals can be taught to live a distinctively "imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence," that is to say, an unreal but meaningful relation to the social formations in which they are indentured to live out their lives and realize their destinies as social subjects.

To conceive of narrative discourse in this way permits us to account for its universality as a cultural fact and for the interest that dominant social groups have not only in controlling what will pass for the authoritative myths of a given cultural formation but also in assuring the belief that social reality itself can be both lived and realistically comprehended as a story. Myths and the ideologies based on them presuppose the adequacy of stories to the representation of the reality whose meaning they purport to reveal. When belief in this adequacy begins to wane, the entire cultural edifice of a society enters into crisis, because not only is a specific system of beliefs undermined but the very condition of possibility of socially significant belief is eroded. This is why, I think, we have witnessed across the whole spectrum of the human sciences over the course of the last two decades a pervasive interest in the nature of narrative, its epistemic authority, its cultural function, and its general social significance.

Lately, many historians have called for a return to narrative repre-

sentation in historiography. Philosophers have sought to justify narrative as a mode of explanation different from, but not less important than, the nomological-deductive mode favored in the physical sciences. Theologians and moralists have recognized the relation between a specifically narrativistic view of reality and the social vitality of any ethical system. Anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and psychoanalysts have begun to reexamine the function of narrative representation in the preliminary description of their objects of study. And cultural critics, Marxist and non-Marxist alike, have commented on the death of the great "master narratives" that formerly provided precognitive bases of belief in the higher civilizations and sustained, even in the early phases of industrial society, utopistic impulses to social transformation. And indeed, a whole cultural movement in the arts, generally gathered under the name post-modernism, is informed by a programmatic, if ironic, commitment to the return to narrative as one of its enabling presuppositions.

All of this can be taken as evidence of the recognition that narrative, far from being merely a form of discourse that can be filled with different contents, real or imaginary as the case may be, already possesses a content prior to any given actualization of it in speech or writing. It is this "content of the form" of narrative discourse in historical thought that is examined in the essays in this volume.

I have considerably revised the essays on Foucault, Jameson, and Ricoeur in order to take into account new work by these authors that appeared after their original publication. I have also changed the last essay so that it can be read without reference to the volume in which it originally appeared.

## Acknowledgments

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The essays included in this volume are revisions of pieces that appeared originally in the following places:

- "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980).
- "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," *History and Theory* 23, no. 1 (1984).
- "The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation," *Critical Inquiry* 9, no. 1 (1982).
- "Droysen's *Historik*: Historical Writing as a Bourgeois Science," *History and Theory* 19, no. 1 (1980).
- "Foucault's Discourse," in *Structuralism and Since: From Lévi-Strauss to Derrida*, ed. John Sturrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
- "Getting Out of History: Jameson's Redemption of Narrative," *Diacritics* 12 (Fall 1982).
- "The Rule of Narrativity: Symbolic Discourse and the Experiences of Time in Ricoeur's Thought," in *A la recherche du sens/In Search of Meaning*, ed. Théodore F. Geraets (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1985).
- "The Context in the Text: Method and Ideology in Intellectual History," in *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives*, ed. Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

## 1. The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality

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To raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself. So natural is the impulse to narrate, so inevitable is the form of narrative for any report on the way things really happened, that narrativity could appear problematical only in a culture in which it was absent—or, as in some domains of contemporary Western intellectual and artistic culture, programmatically refused. Considered as panglobal facts of culture, narrative and narration are less problems than simply data. As the late (and profoundly missed) Roland Barthes remarked, narrative "is simply there like life itself . . . international, transhistorical, transcultural."<sup>1</sup> Far from being a problem, then, narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling,<sup>2</sup> the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific. We may not be able fully to comprehend specific thought patterns of another culture, but we have relatively less difficulty understanding a story coming from another culture, however exotic that culture may appear to us. As Barthes says, narrative is *translatable* without fundamental damage," in a way that a lyric poem or a philosophical discourse is not.

This suggests that far from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning, narrative is a meta-code, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted. Arising, as Barthes says, between our experience of the world and our

efforts to describe that experience in language, narrative "ceaselessly substitutes meaning for the straightforward copy of the events recounted." And it would follow that the absence of narrative capacity or a refusal of narrative indicates an absence or refusal of meaning itself.

But what kind of meaning is absent or refused? The fortunes of narrative in the history of historical writing give us some insight into this question. Historians do not have to report their truths about the real world in narrative form. They may choose other, nonnarrative, even antinarrative modes of representation, such as the meditation, the anatomy, or the epitome. Tocqueville, Burckhardt, Huizinga, and Braudel, to mention only the most notable masters of modern historiography, refused narrative in certain of their historiographical works, presumably on the assumption that the meaning of the events with which they wished to deal did not lend itself to representation in the narrative mode.<sup>3</sup> They refused to tell a story about the past, or rather, they did not tell a story with well-marked beginning, middle, and end phases; they did not impose upon the processes that interested them the form that we normally associate with storytelling. While they certainly narrated their accounts of the reality that they perceived, or thought they perceived, to exist within or behind the evidence they had examined, they did not narrativize that reality, did not impose upon it the form of a story. And their example permits us to distinguish between a historical discourse that narrates and a discourse that narrativizes, between a discourse that openly adopts a perspective that looks out on the world and reports it and a discourse that feigns to make the world speak itself and speak itself as a story.

The idea that narrative should be considered less as a form of representation than as a manner of speaking about events, whether real or imaginary, has been recently elaborated within a discussion of the relationship between discourse and narrative that has arisen in the wake of Structuralism and is associated with the work of Jakobson, Benveniste, Genette, Todorov, and Barthes. Here narrative is regarded as a manner of speaking characterized, as Genette expresses it, "by a certain number of exclusions and restrictive conditions" that the more "open" form of discourse does not impose upon the speaker.<sup>4</sup> According to Genette, Benveniste showed that

certain grammatical forms like the pronoun "I" (and its implicit reference "thou"), the pronomial "indicators" (certain demonstrative pronouns), the adverbial indicators (like "here," "now,"

"yesterday," "today," "tomorrow," etc.) and, at least in French, certain verb tenses like the present, the present perfect, and the future, find themselves limited to discourse, while narrative in the strictest sense is distinguished by the exclusive use of the third person and of such forms as the preterite and the pluperfect.<sup>5</sup>

This distinction between discourse and narrative is, of course, based solely on an analysis of the grammatical features of two modes of discourse in which the "objectivity" of the one and the "subjectivity" of the other are definable primarily by a "linguistic order of criteria." The "subjectivity" of the discourse is given by the presence, explicit or implicit, of an "ego" who can be defined "only as the person who maintains the discourse." By contrast, the "objectivity of narrative is defined by the absence of all reference to the narrator." In the narrativizing discourse, then, we can say, with Benveniste, that "truly there is no longer a 'narrator.' The events are chronologically recorded as they appear on the horizon of the story. No one speaks. The events seem to tell themselves."<sup>6</sup>

What is involved in the production of a discourse in which "events seem to tell themselves," especially when it is a matter of events that are explicitly identified as real rather than imaginary, as in the case of historical representations?<sup>7</sup> In a discourse having to do with manifestly imaginary events, which are the "contents" of fictional discourses, the question poses few problems. For why should not imaginary events be represented as "speaking themselves"? Why should not, *in* the domain of the imaginary, even the stones themselves speak—like Memnon's column when touched by the rays of the sun? But real events should not speak, should not tell themselves. Real events should simply be; they can perfectly well serve as the referents of a discourse, can be spoken about, but they should not pose as the subjects of a narrative. The lateness of the invention of historical discourse in human history and the difficulty of sustaining it in times of cultural breakdown (as in the early Middle Ages) suggest the artificiality of the notion that real events could "speak themselves" or be represented as "telling their own story." Such a fiction would have posed no problems before the distinction between real and imaginary events was imposed upon the storyteller; storytelling becomes a problem only after two orders of events dispose themselves before the storyteller as possible components of stories and storytelling is compelled to exfoliate under the injunction to keep the two orders unmixed in discourse. What we wish to call mythic narrative is under no obligation to keep the two orders of



events, real and imaginary, distinct from one another. Narrative becomes a problem only when we wish to give to real events the form of story. It is because real events do not offer themselves as stories that their narrativization is so difficult.

What is involved, then, in that finding of the "true story," that discovery of the "real story" within or behind the events that come to us in the chaotic form of "historical records"? What wish is enacted, what desire is gratified, by the fantasy that real events are properly represented when they can be shown to display the formal coherency of a story? In the enigma of this wish, this desire, we catch a glimpse of the cultural function of narrativizing discourse in general, an intimation of the psychological impulse behind the apparently universal need not only to narrate but to give to events an aspect of narrativity.

Historiography is an especially good ground on which to consider the nature of narration and narrativity because it is here that our desire for the imaginary, the possible, must contest with the imperatives of the real, the actual. If we view narration and narrativity as the instruments with which the conflicting claims of the imaginary and the real are mediated, arbitrated, or resolved in a discourse, we begin to comprehend both the appeal of narrative and the grounds for refusing it. If putatively real events are represented in a nonnarrative form, what kind of reality is it that offers itself, or is conceived to offer itself, to perception in this form? What would a nonnarrative representation of historical reality look like? In answering this question, we do not necessarily arrive at a solution to the problem of the nature of narrative, but we do begin to catch a glimpse of the basis for the appeal of narrativity as a form for the representation of events construed to be real rather than imaginary.

Fortunately, we have examples aplenty of representations of historical reality that are nonnarrative in form. Indeed, the *doxa* of the modern historiographical establishment has it that there are three basic kinds of historical representation—the annals, the chronicle, and the history proper—the imperfect "historicality" of two of which is evidenced in their failure to attain to full narrativity of the events of which they treat.<sup>8</sup> Needless to say, narrativity alone does not permit the distinction of the three kinds. In order for an account of events, even of past events or of past real events, to count as a proper history, it is not enough that it display all of the features of narrativity. In addition, the account must manifest a proper concern for the judicious handling of evidence, and it must honor the chronological order of the original

occurrence of the events of which it treats as a baseline not to be transgressed in the classification of any given event as either a cause or an effect. But by common consent, it is not enough that an historical account deal in real, rather than merely imaginary, events; and it is not enough that the account represents events in its order of discourse according to the chronological sequence in which they originally occurred. The events must be not only registered within the chronological framework of their original occurrence but narrated as well, that is to say, revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning, that they do not possess as mere sequence.

Needless to say, also, the annals form lacks completely this narrative component, since it consists only of a list of events ordered in chronological sequence. The chronicle, by contrast, often seems to wish to tell a story, aspires to narrativity, but typically fails to achieve it. More specifically, the chronicle usually is marked by a failure to achieve narrative closure. It does not so much conclude as simply terminate. It starts out to tell a story but breaks off *in medias res*, in the chronicler's own present; it leaves things unresolved, or rather, it leaves them unresolved in a storylike way.

While annals represent historical reality as if real events did not display the form of story, the chronicler represents it as if real events appeared to human consciousness in the form of unfinished stories. And the official wisdom has it that however objective a historian might be in his reporting of events, however judicious he has been in his assessment of evidence, however punctilious he has been in his dating of *res gestae*, his account remains something less than a proper history if he has failed to give to reality the form of a story. Where there is no narrative, Croce said, there is no history.<sup>9</sup> And Peter Gay, writing from a perspective directly opposed to the relativism of Croce, puts it just as starkly: "Historical narration without analysis is trivial, historical analysis without narration is incomplete."<sup>10</sup> Gay's formulation calls up the Kantian bias of the demand for narration in historical representation, for it suggests, to paraphrase Kant, that historical narratives without analysis are empty, while historical analyses without narrative are blind. Thus we may ask, What kind of insight does narrative give into the nature of real events? What kind of blindness with respect to reality does narrativity dispell?

In what follows I treat the annals and chronicle forms of historical representation, not as the imperfect histories they are conventionally conceived to be, but rather as particular products of possible conceptions of historical reality, conceptions that are alternatives to, rather

than failed anticipations of, the fully realized historical discourse that the modern history form is supposed to embody. This procedure will throw light on the problems of both historiography and narration alike and will illuminate what I conceive to be the purely conventional nature of the relationship between them. What will be revealed, I think, is that the very distinction between real and imaginary events that is basic to modern discussions of both history and fiction presupposes a notion of reality in which "the true" is identified with "the real" only insofar as it can be shown to possess the character of narrativity.

When we moderns look at an example of a medieval annals, we cannot but be struck by the apparent naïveté of the annalist; and we are inclined to ascribe this naïveté to the annalist's apparent refusal, inability, or unwillingness to transform the set of events ordered vertically as a file of annual markers into the elements of a linear/horizontal process. In other words, we are likely to be put off by the annalist's apparent failure to see that historical events dispose themselves to the percipient eye as stories waiting to be told, waiting to be narrated. But surely a genuinely historical interest would require that we ask not how or why the annalist failed to write a "narrative" but rather what kind of notion of reality led him to represent in the annals form what, after all, he took to be real events. If we could answer this question, we might be able to understand why, in our own time and cultural condition, we could conceive of narrativity itself as a problem.

Volume 1 of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, in the *Scriptores* series, contains the text of the *Annals of Saint Gall*, a list of events that occurred in Gaul during the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries of our era.<sup>11</sup> Although this text is "referential" and contains a representation of temporality<sup>12</sup>—Ducrot and Todorov's definition of what can count as a narrative—it possesses none of the characteristics that we normally attribute to a story: no central subject, no well-marked beginning, middle, and end, no peripeteia, and no identifiable narrative voice. In what are, for us, the theoretically most interesting segments of the text, there is no suggestion of any necessary connection between one event and another. Thus, for the period 709-34, we have the following entries:

- 709. Hard winter. Duke Gottfried died.
- 710. Hard year and deficient in crops.
- 711.

- 712. Flood everywhere.
- 713.
- 714. Pippin, mayor of the palace, died.
- 715. 716. 717.
- 718. Charles devastated the Saxon with great destruction.
- 719.
- 720. Charles fought against the Saxons.
- 721. Theudo drove the Saracens out of Aquitaine.
- 722. Great crops.
- 723.
- 724.
- 725. Saracens came for the first time.
- 726.
- 727.
- 728.
- 729.
- 730.
- 731. Blessed Bede, the presbyter, died.
- 732. Charles fought against the Saracens at Poitiers on Saturday.
- 733.
- 734.

This list immediately locates us in a culture hovering on the brink of dissolution, a society of radical scarcity, a world of human groups threatened by death, devastation, flood, and famine. All of the events are extreme, and the implicit criterion for selecting them for remembrance is their liminal nature. Basic need—food, security from external enemies, political and military leadership—and the threat of their not being provided are the subjects of concern; but the connection between basic needs and the conditions for their possible satisfaction is not explicitly commented on. Why "Charles fought against the Saxons" remains as unexplained as why one year yielded "great crops" and another produced "flood everywhere." Social events are apparently as incomprehensible as natural events. They seem to have the same order of importance or unimportance. They seem merely to have occurred, and their importance seems to be indistinguishable from the fact that they were recorded. In fact, it seems that their importance consists in nothing other than their having been recorded.

And by whom they were recorded we have no idea; nor do we have any idea of when they were recorded. The entry for 725—"Saracens

came for the *first* time"—suggests that this event at least was recorded after the Saracens had come a second time and set up what we might consider to be a genuine narrativist expectation; but the coming of the Saracens and their repulsion is not the subject of this account. Charles's fight "against the Saracens at Poitiers on Saturday" is recorded, but the outcome of the battle is not. And that "Saturday" is disturbing, because the month and day of the battle are not given. There are too many loose ends—no plot in the offing—and this is frustrating, if not disturbing, to the modern reader's story expectations as well as his desire for specific information.

We note further that this account is not really inaugurated. It simply begins with the "title" (is it a title?) *Anni domini*, which stands at the head of two columns, one of dates, the other of events. Visually, at least, this title links the file of dates in the left-hand column with the file of events in the right-hand column in a promise of signification that we might be inclined to take for mythical were it not for the fact that *Anni domini* refers us both to a cosmological story given in Scripture and to a calendrical convention that historians in the West still use to mark the units of their histories. We should not too quickly refer the meaning of the text to the mythic framework it invokes by designating the "years" as being "of the Lord," for these "years" have a regularity that the Christian mythos, with its clear hypotactical ordering of the events it comprises (Creation, Fall, Incarnation, Resurrection, Second Coming), does not possess. The regularity of the calendar signals the "realism" of the account, its intention to deal in real rather than imaginary events. The calendar locates events, not in the time of eternity, not in *kairotic* time, but in chronological time, in time as it is humanly experienced. This time has no high points or low points; it is, we might say, paratactical and endless. It has no gaps. The list of times is full even if the list of events is not.

Finally, the annals do not conclude; they simply terminate. The last entries are the following:

1045. 1046. 1047. 1048. 1049. 1050. 1051. 1052.

1053. 1054. 1055.

1056. The Emperor Henry died; and his son Henry succeeded to the rule.

1057. 1058. 1059. 1060. 1061. 1062. 1063. 1064.

1065. 1066. 1067. 1068. 1069. 1070. 1071. 1072.

The continuation of the list of years at the end of the account does, to be sure, suggest a continuation of the series ad infinitum, or rather, until the Second Coming. But there is no story conclusion. How could there be, since there is no central subject about which a story could be told?

Nonetheless, there must be a story, since there is surely a plot—if by plot we mean a structure of relationships by which the events contained in the account are endowed with a meaning by being identified as parts of an integrated whole. Here, however, I am referring, not to the myth of the Fall and Redemption (of the just parts of humankind) contained in the Bible, but to the list of dates of the years given in the left-hand file of the text, which confers coherence and fullness on the events by registering them under the years in which they occurred. To put it another way, the list of dates can be seen as the signified of which the events given in the right-hand column are the signifiers. The meaning of the events is their registration in this kind of list. This is why, I presume, the annalist would have felt little of the anxiety that the modern scholar feels when confronted with what appear to be gaps, discontinuities, and lack of causal connections between the events recorded in the text. The modern scholar seeks fullness and continuity in an order of events; the annalist has both in the sequence of the years. Which is the more "realistic" expectation?

Recall that we are dealing with neither oneiric nor infantile discourse. It may even be a mistake to call it discourse at all, but it has something discursive about it. The text summons up a "substance," operates in the domain of memory rather than in that of dream or fantasy, and unfolds under the sign of "the real" rather than that of "the imaginary." In fact, it seems eminently rational and, on the face of it, rather prudent in its manifest desire to record only those events about which there could be little doubt as to their occurrence and in its resolve not to interpellate facts on speculative grounds or to advance arguments about how the events are really connected to one another.

Modern commentators have remarked on the fact that the annalist recorded the Battle of Poitiers of 732 but failed to note the Battle of Tours which occurred in the same year and which, as every schoolboy knows, was one of "the ten great battles of world history."<sup>13</sup> But even if the annalist had known of Tours, what principle or rule of meaning would have required him to record it? It is only from our knowledge of the subsequent history of Western Europe that we can presume to rank events in terms of their world-historical significance, and even then that significance is less world historical than simply Western

European, representing a tendency of modern historians to rank events in the record hierarchically from within a perspective that is culture-specific, not universal at all.

It is this need or impulse to rank events with respect to their significance for the culture or group that is writing its own history that makes a narrative representation of real events possible. It is surely much more "universalistic" simply to record events as they come to notice. And at the minimal level on which the annals unfold, what gets put into the account is of much greater theoretical importance for the understanding of the nature of narrative than what gets left out. But this does raise the question of the function in this text of the recording of those years in which "nothing happened." Every narrative, however seemingly "full," is constructed on the basis of a set of events that might have been included but were left out; this is as true of imaginary narratives as it is of realistic ones. And this consideration permits us to ask what kind of notion of reality authorizes construction of a narrative account of reality in which continuity rather than discontinuity governs the articulation of the discourse.

If we grant that this discourse unfolds under a sign of a desire for the real, as we must do in order to justify the inclusion of the annals form among the types of historical representation, we must conclude that it is a product of an image of reality according to which the social system, which alone could provide the diacritical markers for ranking the importance of events, is only minimally present to the consciousness of the writer, or rather, is present as a factor in the composition of the discourse only by virtue of its absence. Everywhere it is the forces of disorder, natural and human, the forces of violence and destruction, that occupy the forefront of attention. The account deals in qualities rather than agents, figuring forth a world in which things happen to people rather than one in which people do things. It is the hardness of the winter of 709, the hardness of the year 710 and the deficiency of the crops of that year, the flooding of the waters in 712 and the imminent presence of death that recur with a frequency and regularity lacking in the representation of acts of human agency. Reality for this observer wears the face of adjectives that override the capacity of the nouns they modify to resist their determinacy. Charles does manage to devastate the Saxons, to fight against them, and Theudo even manages to drive the Saracens out of Aquitaine, but these actions appear to belong to the same order of existence as the natural events which bring either "great" crops or "deficient" harvests, and are as seemingly incomprehensible.

The absence of a principle for assigning importance or significance to events is signaled above all in the gaps in the list of events in the right-hand file, for example in the year 711, in which, it seems, "nothing happened." The overabundance of the waters noted for the year 712 is preceded and followed by years in which also "nothing happened." Which puts one in mind of Hegel's remark that periods of human happiness and security are blank pages in history. But the presence of these blank years in the annalist's account permits us to perceive, by way of contrast, the extent to which narrative strains for the effect of having filled in all the gaps, of having put an image of continuity, coherency, and meaning in place of the fantasies of emptiness, need, and frustrated desire that inhabit our nightmares about the destructive power of time. In fact, the annalist's account calls up a world in which need is everywhere present, in which scarcity is the rule of existence, and in which all of the possible agencies of satisfaction are lacking or absent or exist under imminent threat of death.

The notion of possible gratification is, however, implicitly present in the list of dates that make up the left-hand column. The fullness of this list attests to the fullness of time, or at least to the fullness of the "years of the Lord." There is no scarcity of the years: they descend regularly from their origin, the year of the Incarnation, and roll relentlessly on to their potential end, the Last Judgment. What is lacking in the list of events to give it a similar regularity and fullness is a notion of a social center by which to locate them with respect to one another and to charge them with ethical or moral significance. It is the absence of any consciousness of a social center that prohibits the annalist from ranking the events he treats as elements of a historical field of occurrence. And it is the absence of such a center that precludes or undercuts any impulse he might have had to work up his discourse into the form of a narrative. Without such a center, Charles's campaigns against the Saxons remain simply fights, the invasion of the Saracens simply a coming, and the fact that the Battle of Poitiers was fought on a Saturday as important as the fact that the battle was even fought at all. All this suggests to me that Hegel was right when he opined that a genuinely historical account had to display not only a certain form, namely, the narrative, but also a certain content, namely, a politicosocial order.

In his introduction to his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel wrote:

In our language the term *History* unites the objective with the subjective side, and denotes quite as much the *historia rerum*

*gestarutn*, as the *res gestae* themselves; on the other hand it comprehends not less what has *happened*, than the *narration* of what has happened. This union of the two meanings we must regard as of a higher order than mere outward accident; we must suppose historical narrations to have appeared contemporaneously with historical deeds and events. It is an internal vital principle common to both that produces them synchronously. Family memoirs, patriarchal traditions, have an interest confined to the family and the clan. The *uniform course of events* [my italics] which such a condition implies, is no subject of serious remembrance; though distinct transactions or turns of fortune, may rouse Mnemosyne to form conceptions of them—in the same way as love and the religious emotions provoke imagination to give shape to a previously formless impulse. But it is only the state which first presents subject-matter that is not only *adapted* to the prose of History, but involves the production of such history in the very progress of its own being.<sup>14</sup>

Hegel goes on to distinguish between the kind of "profound sentiments," such as "love" and "religious intuition and its conceptions," and "that outward existence of a political constitution which is enshrined in . . . rational laws and customs." The latter, he says, "is an *imperfect* Present; and cannot be thoroughly understood without a knowledge of the past." This is why, he concludes, there are periods that, although filled with "revolutions, nomadic wanderings, and the strangest mutations," are destitute of any "*objective* history." And their destitution of an objective history is a function of the fact that they could produce "no *subjective* history, no annals."

We need not suppose, he remarks, "that the records of such periods have accidentally perished; rather, because they were not possible, do we find them wanting." And he insists that "only in a State cognizant of Laws, can distinct transactions take place, accompanied by such a clear consciousness of them as supplies the ability and suggests the necessity of an enduring record." When, in short, it is a matter of providing a narrative of real events, we must suppose that a subject of the sort that would provide the impulse to record its activities must exist.

Hegel insists that the proper subject of such a record is the state, but the state is to him an abstraction. The reality that lends itself to narrative representation is the conflict between desire and the law. Where there is no rule of law, there can be neither a subject nor the

kind of event that lends itself to narrative representation. This is not a proposition that could be empirically verified or falsified, to be sure; it is in the nature of an enabling presupposition or hypothesis that permits us to imagine how both "historicity" and "narrativity" are possible. And it authorizes us to consider the proposition that neither is possible without some notion of the legal subject that can serve as the agent, agency, and subject of historical narrative in all of its manifestations, from the annals through the chronicle to the historical discourse as we know it in its modern realizations and failures.

The question of the law, legality, or legitimacy does not arise in those parts of the *Annals of Saint Gall* that we have been considering; at least, the question of human law does not arise. There is no suggestion that the coming of the Saracens represents a transgression of any limit, that it should not have been or might have been otherwise. Since everything that happened did so apparently in accordance with the divine will, it is sufficient simply to note its happening, to register it under the appropriate "year of the Lord" in which it occurred. The coming of the Saracens is of the same moral significance as Charles's fight against the Saxons. We have no way of knowing whether the annalist would have been impelled to flesh out his list of events and rise to the challenge of a narrative representation of those events if he had written in the consciousness of the threat to a specific social system and the possibility of falling into a condition of anarchy against which the legal system might have been erected.

But once we have been alerted to the intimate relationship that Hegel suggests exists between law, historicity, and narrativity, we cannot but be struck by the frequency with which narrativity, whether of the fictional or the factual sort, presupposes the existence of a legal system against which or on behalf of which the typical agents of a narrative account militate. And this raises the suspicion that narrative in general, from the folktale to the novel, from the annals to the fully realized "history," has to do with the topics of law, legality, legitimacy, or, more generally, authority. And indeed, when we look at what is supposed to be the next stage in the evolution of historical representation after the annals form, namely, the chronicle, this suspicion is borne out. The more historically self-conscious the writer of any form of historiography, the more the question of the social system and the law that sustains it, the authority of this law and its justification, and threats to the law occupy his attention. If, as Hegel suggests, historicity as a distinct mode of human existence is unthinkable without the presupposition of a system of law in relation to which a specifically

legal subject could be constituted, then historical self-consciousness, the kind of consciousness capable of imagining the need to represent reality as a history, is conceivable only in terms of its interest in law, legality, and legitimacy, and so on.

Interest in the social system, which is nothing other than a system of human relationships governed by law, creates the possibility of conceiving the kinds of tensions, conflicts, struggles, and their various kinds of resolutions that we are accustomed to find in any representation of reality presenting itself to us as a history. This permits us to speculate that the growth and development of historical consciousness, which is attended by a concomitant growth and development of narrative capability (of the sort met with in the chronicle as against the annals form), has something to do with the extent to which the legal system functions as a subject of concern. If every fully realized story, however we define that familiar but conceptually elusive entity, is a kind of allegory, points to a moral, or endows events, whether real or imaginary, with a significance that they do not possess as a mere sequence, then it seems possible to conclude that every historical narrative has as its latent or manifest purpose the desire to moralize the events of which it treats. Where there is ambiguity or ambivalence regarding the status of the legal system, which is the form in which the subject encounters most immediately the social system in which he is enjoined to achieve a full humanity, the ground on which any closure of a story one might wish to tell about a past, whether it be a public or a private past, is lacking. And this suggests that narrativity, certainly in factual storytelling and probably in fictional storytelling as well, is intimately related to, if not a function of, the impulse to moralize reality, that is, to identify it with the social system that is the source of any morality that we can imagine.

The annalist of Saint Gall shows no concern about any system of merely human morality or law. The entry for 1056, "The Emperor Henry died; and his son Henry succeeded to the rule," contains in embryo the elements of a narrative. Indeed, it is a narrative, and its narrativity, in spite of the ambiguity of the connection between the first event (Henry's death) and the second (Henry's succession) suggested by the particle *and*, achieves closure by its tacit invocation of the legal system, the rule of genealogical succession, which the annalist takes for granted as a principle rightly governing the passing of authority from one generation to another. But this small narrative element, this "narreme," floats easily on the sea of dates that figures succession itself as a principle of cosmic organization. Those of us who know what

was awaiting the younger Henry in his conflicts with his nobles and with the popes during the period of the Investiture Struggle, in which the issue of precisely where final authority on earth was located was fought out, may be irritated by the economy with which the annalist recorded an event so fraught with future moral and legal implications. The years 1057-72, which the annalist simply lists at the end of his record, provided more than enough "events" prefiguring the onset of this struggle, more than enough conflict to warrant a full narrative account of its inception. But the annalist simply ignored them. He apparently felt that he had done his duty solely by listing the dates of the years themselves. What is involved, we might ask, in this refusal to narrate?

To be sure, we can conclude—as Frank Kermode suggested—that the annalist of Saint Gall was not a very good diarist; and such a commonsensical judgment is manifestly justified. But the incapacity to keep a good diary is not theoretically different from the unwillingness to do so. And from the standpoint of an interest in narrative itself, a "bad" narrative can tell us more about narrativity than a good one. If it is true that the annalist of Saint Gall was an untidy or lazy narrator, we must ask what he lacked that would have made him a competent one. What is absent from his account that, if it had been present, would have permitted him to transform his chronology into a historical narrative?

The vertical ordering of events itself suggests that our annalist did not want in metaphoric or paradigmatic consciousness. He does not suffer from what Roman Jakobson calls "similarity disorder." Indeed, all of the events listed in the right-hand column appear to be considered as the same kind of event; they are all metonymies of the general condition of scarcity or overfullness of the "reality" the annalist is recording. *Difference*, significant variation within similitude, is figured only in the left-hand column, the list of dates. Each of these functions as a metaphor of the fullness and completion of the time of the Lord. The image of orderly succession that this column calls up has no counterpart in the events, natural and human, listed on the right-hand side. What the annalist lacked that would have led him to make a narrative out of the set of events he recorded was a capacity to endow events with the same kind of "propositionality" that is implicitly present in his representation of the sequence of dates. This lack resembles what Jakobson calls "contiguity disorder," a phenomenon represented in speech by "agrammatism" and in discourse by a dissolution of "the ties of grammatical coordination and subordination" by which

"word heaps" can be aggregated into meaningful sentences.<sup>15</sup> Our annalist was not, of course, aphasic—as his capacity to contrive meaningful sentences amply shows—but he lacked the capacity to substitute meanings for one another in chains of semantic metonymies that would transform his list of events into a discourse about the events considered as a totality evolving in time.

Now, the capacity to envision a set of events as belonging to the same order of meaning requires some metaphysical principle by which to translate difference into similarity. In other words, it requires a "subject" common to all of the referents of the various sentences that register events as having occurred. If such a subject exists, it is the "Lord" whose "years" are treated as manifestations of His power to cause the events that occur in them. The subject of the account, then, does not exist in time and could not therefore function as the subject of a narrative. Does it follow that in order for there to be a narrative, there must be some equivalent of the Lord, some sacral being endowed with the authority and power of the Lord, existing in time? If so, what could such an equivalent be?

The nature of such a being, capable of serving as the central organizing principle of meaning of a discourse that is both realistic and narrative in structure, is called up in the mode of historical representation known as the chronicle. By common consensus among historians of historical writing, the chronicle is a "higher" form of historical conceptualization and represents a mode of historiographical representation superior to the annals form.<sup>16</sup> Its superiority consists in its greater comprehensiveness, its organization of materials "by topics and reigns," and its greater narrative coherency. The chronicle also has a central subject—the life of an individual, town, or region; some great undertaking, such as a war or crusade; or some institution, such as a monarchy, episcopacy, or monastery. The link of the chronicle with the annals is perceived in the perseverance of the chronology as the organizing principle of the discourse, and this is what makes the chronicle something less than a fully realized "history." Moreover, the chronicle, like the annals but unlike the history, does not so much conclude as simply terminate; typically it lacks closure, that summing up of the "meaning" of the chain of events with which it deals that we normally expect from the well-made story. The chronicle typically promises closure but does not provide it—which is one of the reasons why the nineteenth-century editors of the medieval chronicles denied them the status of genuine "histories."

Suppose that we look at the matter differently. Suppose we grant,

not that the chronicle is a "higher" or more sophisticated representation of reality than the annals, but that it is merely a different kind of representation, marked by a desire for a kind of order and fullness in an account of reality that remains theoretically unjustified, a desire that is, until shown otherwise, purely gratuitous. What is involved in the imposition of this order and the provision of this fullness (of detail) which mark the differences between the annals and the chronicle?

I take as an example of the chronicle type of historical representation the *History of France* by one Richerus of Rheims, written on the eve of the year A.D. 1000 (ca. 998).<sup>17</sup> We have no difficulty recognizing this text as a narrative. It has a central subject ("the conflicts of the French"); a proper geographical center (Gaul) and a proper social center (the archepiscopal see of Rheims, beset by a dispute over which of two claimants to the office of archbishop is the legitimate occupant); and a proper beginning in time (given in a synoptic version of the history of the world from the Incarnation down to the time and place of Richerus's own writing of his account). But the work fails as a proper history, at least according to the opinion of later commentators, by virtue of two considerations. First, the order of the discourse follows the order of chronology; it presents events in the order of their occurrence and cannot, therefore, offer the kind of meaning that a narratologically governed account can be said to provide. Second, probably owing to the "annalistic" order of the discourse, the account does not so much conclude as simply terminate; it merely breaks off with the flight of one of the disputants for the office of archbishop and throws onto the reader the burden for retrospectively reflecting on the linkages between the beginning of the account and its ending. The account comes down to the writer's own "yesterday," adds one more fact to the series that began with the Incarnation, and then simply ceases. As a result, all of the normal narratological expectations of the reader (this reader) remain unfulfilled. The work appears to be unfolding a plot but then belies its own appearance by merely stopping *in pedias res*, with the cryptic notation "Pope Gregory authorizes Arnulfus to assume provisionally the episcopal functions, while awaiting the legal decision that would either confer these upon him or withdraw the right to them" (2:133).

And yet Richerus is a self-conscious narrator. He explicitly says at the outset of his account that he proposes "especially to preserve in writing [ad memoriam recuere scripto specialiter propositum est]" the "wars," "troubles," and "affairs" of the French and, moreover, to write them up in a manner superior to other accounts, especially that of one

Flodoard, an earlier scribe of Rheims who had written an annals on which Richerus has drawn for information. Richerus notes that he has drawn freely on Flodoard's work but that he has often "put other words" in the place of the original ones and "modified completely the style of the presentation [pro aliis longe diversissimo orationis scemate disposuisse]" (1:4). He also situates himself in a tradition of historical writing by citing such classics as Caesar, Orosius, Jerome, and Isidore as authorities for the early history of Gaul and suggests that his own personal observations gave him insight into the facts he is recounting that no one else could claim. All of this suggests a certain self-consciousness about his own discourse that is manifestly lacking in the writer of the *Annals of Saint Gall*. Richerus's discourse is a fashioned discourse, the narrativity of which, compared with that of the annalist, is a function of the self-consciousness with which this fashioning activity is entered upon.

Paradoxically, however, it is this self-conscious fashioning activity, an activity that gives to Richerus's work the aspect of a historical narrative, that decreases its "objectivity" as a historical account—or so the consensus of modern analysts of the text has it. For example, a modern editor of the text, Robert Latouche, indicts Richerus's pride in the originality of his style as the cause of his failure to write a proper history. "Ultimately," Latouche notes, "the *History* of Richerus is not, properly speaking [*proprement parler*], a history but a work of rhetoric composed by a monk . . . who sought to imitate the techniques of Salluste." And he adds, "What interested him was not the material [*matière*], which he molded to fit his fancy, but the form" (lad).

Latouche is certainly right in saying that Richerus fails as a historian supposedly interested in the "facts" of a certain period of history, but he is just as surely wrong in his suggestion that the work fails as a history because of the writer's interest in "form" rather than "matter." By *matière*, of course, Latouche means the referents of the discourse, the events taken individually as objects of representation. But Richerus is interested in "the conflicts of the French [Gallorum congressibus in volumine regerendis]" (1:2), especially the conflict in which his patron, Gerbert, archbishop of Rheims, was currently involved for control of the see. Far from being interested primarily in form rather than matter or content, Richerus was only interested in the latter, for this conflict was one in which his own future was entailed. Where authority lay for the direction of affairs in the see of Rheims was the question that Richerus hoped to help resolve by the composition of his

narrative. And we can legitimately suppose that his impulse to write a narrative of this conflict was in some way connected with a desire on his part to represent (both in the sense of writing about and in the sense of acting as an agent of) an authority whose legitimacy hinged upon the establishment of "facts" of a specifically historical order.

Indeed, once we note the presence of the theme of authority in this text, we also perceive the extent to which the truth claims of the narrative and indeed the very right to narrate hinge upon a certain relationship to authority per se. The first authority invoked by the author is that of his patron, Gerbert; it is by his authority that the account is composed ("imperii tui, pater sanctissime G[erbert], auctoritas seminarium dedit" [1:2]). Then there are those "authorities" represented by the classic texts on which he draws for his construction of the early history of the French (Caesar, Orosius, Jerome, and so on). There is the "authority" of his predecessor as a historian of the see of Rheims, Flodoard, an authority with whom he contests as narrator and on whose style he professes to improve. It is on his own authority that Richerus effects this improvement, by putting "other words" in place of Flodoard's and modifying "completely the style of presentation." There is, finally, not only the authority of the Heavenly Father, who is invoked as the ultimate cause of everything that happens, but the authority of Richerus's own father (referred to throughout the manuscript as "p.m." [*pater meus*] [1:xiv]), who figures as a central subject of a segment of the work and as the witness on whose authority the account in this segment is based.

The problem of authority pervades the text written by Richerus in a way that cannot be ascribed to the text written by the annalist of Saint Gall. For the annalist there is no need to claim the authority to narrate events, since there is nothing problematical about their status as manifestations of a reality that is being contested. Since there is no "contest," there is nothing to narrativize, no need for them to "speak themselves" or be represented as if they could "tell their own story." It is necessary only to record them in the order that they come to notice, for since there is no contest, there is no story to tell. It is because there was a contest that there is something to narrativize for Richerus. But it is not because the contest was not resolved that the quasi narrative produced by Richerus has no closure; for in fact the contest was resolved—by the flight of Gerbert to the court of King Otto and the installation of Arnulfus as archbishop of Rheims by Pope Gregory.

What was lacking for a proper discursive resolution, a narrativizing resolution, was the moral principle in light of which Richerus



might have judged the resolution as either just or unjust. Reality itself has judged the resolution by resolving it as it has done. To be sure, there is the suggestion that a kind of justice was provided for Gerbert by King Otto, who, "having recognized Gerbert's learning and genius, installs him as bishop of Ravenna." But that justice is located at another place and is disposed by another authority, another king. The end of the discourse does not cast its light back over the events" originally recorded in order to redistribute the force of a meaning that was immanent in all of the events from the beginning. There is no justice, only force, or, rather, only an authority that presents itself as different kinds of forces.

I do not offer these reflections on the relation between historiography and narrative as aspiring to anything other than an attempt to illuminate the distinction between story elements and plot elements in the historical discourse. Common opinion has it that the plot of a narrative imposes a meaning on the events that make up its story level by revealing at the end a structure that was immanent in the events all along. What I am trying to establish is the nature of this immanence in any narrative account of real events, events that are offered as the proper content of historical discourse. These events are real not because they occurred but because, first, they were remembered and, second, they are capable of finding a place in a chronologically ordered sequence. In order, however, for an account of them to be considered a historical account, it is not enough that they be recorded in the order of their original occurrence. It is the fact that they can be recorded otherwise, in an order of narrative, that makes them, at one and the same time, questionable as to their authenticity and susceptible to being considered as tokens of reality. In order to qualify as historical, an event must be susceptible to at least two narrations of its occurrence. Unless at least two versions of the same set of events can be imagined, there is no reason for the historian to take upon himself the authority of giving the true account of what really happened. The authority of the historical narrative is the authority of reality itself; the historical account endows this reality with form and thereby makes it desirable by the imposition upon its processes of the formal coherency that only stories possess.

The history, then, belongs to the category of what might be called "the discourse of the real," as against the "discourse of the imaginary" or "the discourse of desire." The formulation is Lacanian, obviously, but I do not wish to push its Lacanian aspects too far. I merely wish

to suggest that we can comprehend the appeal of historical discourse by recognizing the extent to which it makes the real desirable, makes the real into an object of desire, and does so by its imposition, upon events that are represented as real, of the formal coherency that stories possess. Unlike that of the annals, the reality represented in the historical narrative, in "speaking itself," speaks to us, summons us from afar (this "afar" is the land of forms), and displays to us a formal coherency to which we ourselves aspire. The historical narrative, as against the chronicle, reveals to us a world that is putatively "finished," done with, over, and yet not dissolved, not falling apart. In this world, reality wears the mask of a meaning, the completeness and fullness of which we can only imagine, never experience. Insofar as historical stories can be completed, can be given narrative closure, can be shown to have had a plot all along, they give to reality the odor of the ideal. This is why the plot of a historical narrative is always an embarrassment and has to be presented as "found" in the events rather than put there by narrative techniques.

The embarrassment of plot to historical narrative is reflected in the all but universal disdain with which modern historians regard the "philosophy of history," of which Hegel is the modern paradigmatic example. This (fourth) form of historical representation is condemned because it consists of nothing but plot; its story elements exist only as manifestations, epiphenomena of the plot structure, in the service of which its discourse is disposed. Here reality wears a face of such regularity, order, and coherence that it leaves no room for human agency, presenting an aspect of such wholeness and completeness that it intimidates rather than invites imaginative identification. But in the plot of the philosophy of history, the various plots of the various histories that tell us of merely regional happenings in the past are revealed for what they really are: images of that authority that summons us to participation in a moral universe that but for its story form, would have no appeal at all.

This puts us close to a possible characterization of the demand for closure in the history, for the want of which the chronicle form is adjudged to be deficient as a narrative. The demand for closure in the historical story is a demand, I suggest, for moral meaning, a demand that sequences of real events be assessed as to their significance as elements of a moral drama. Has any historical narrative ever been written that was not informed not only by moral awareness but specifically by the moral authority of the narrator? It is difficult to think of any

historical work produced during the nineteenth century, the classic age of historical narrative, that was not given the force of a moral judgment on the events it related.

But we do not have to prejudge the matter by looking at historical texts composed in the nineteenth century. We can perceive the operations of moral consciousness in the achievement of narrative fullness in an example of late medieval historiography, the *Cronica* of Dino Compagni, written between 1310 and 1312 and generally recognized as a proper historical narrative.<sup>18</sup> Dino's work not only "fills in the gaps" that might have been left in an annalistic handling of its subject matter (the struggles between the Black and White factions of the dominant Guelph Party in Florence between 1280 and 1312) and organizes its story according to a well-marked ternary plot structure but achieves narrative fullness by explicitly invoking the idea of a social system to serve as a fixed reference point by which the flow of ephemeral events can be endowed with specifically moral meaning. In this respect, the *Cronica* clearly displays the extent to which the chronicle must approach the form of an allegory, moral or anagogical as the case may be, in order to achieve both narrativity and historicity.

It is interesting to observe that as the chronicle form is displaced by the proper history, certain of the features of the former disappear. First of all, no explicit patron is invoked. Dino's narrative does not unfold under the authority of a specific patron as Richerus's does. He simply asserts his right to recount notable events (*cose notevoli*) that he has "seen and heard" on the basis of a superior capacity of foresight. "No one saw these events in their beginnings [*principi*] more certainly than I," he says. His prospective audience is not, then, a specific ideal reader, as Gerbert was for Richerus, but rather a group that is conceived to share his perspective on the true nature of all events: those citizens of Florence capable, as he puts it, of recognizing "the benefits of God, who rules and governs for all time." At the same time, he speaks to another group, the depraved citizens of Florence, those responsible for the "conflicts" (*discordie*) that had wracked the city for some three decades. To the former, his narrative is intended to hold out the hope of deliverance from these conflicts; to the latter, it is intended as an admonition and a threat of retribution. The chaos of the last ten years is contrasted with more "prosperous" years to come, after the emperor Henry VII has descended on Florence in order to punish a people whose "evil customs and false profits" have "corrupted and spoiled the whole world."<sup>19</sup> What Kermode calls "the weight of meaning" of the events recounted is "thrown forward" onto a future just

beyond the immediate present, a future fraught with moral judgment and punishment for the wicked.<sup>20</sup>

The jeremiad with which Dino's work closes marks it as belonging to a period before which a genuine historical "objectivity," which is to say, a secularist ideology, had been established—so the commentators tell us. But it is difficult to see how the kind of narrative fullness for which Dino Compagni is praised could have been attained without the implicit invocation of the moral standard that he uses to distinguish between those real events worthy of being recorded and those unworthy of it. The events that are actually recorded in the narrative appear to be real precisely insofar as they belong to an order of moral existence, just as they derive their meaning from their placement in this order. It is because the events described conduce to the establishment of social order or fail to do so that they find a place in the narrative attesting to their reality. Only the contrast between the governance and rule of God, on the one side, and the anarchy of the current social situation in Florence, on the other, could justify the apocalyptic tone and narrative function of the final paragraph, with its image of the emperor who will come to chasten those "who brought evil into the world through [their] bad habits." And only a moral authority could justify the turn in the narrative that permits it to come to an end. Dino explicitly identifies the end of his narrative with a "turn" in the moral order of the world: "The world is beginning now to turn over once more [*Ora vi si ricomincia il mondo a revolgere adosso*] . . . : the emperor is coming to take you and despoil you, by land and by sea."<sup>21</sup>

It is this moralistic ending that keeps Dino's *Cronica* from meeting the standard of a modern, "objective" historical account. Yet it is this moralism that alone permits the work to end, or rather to conclude, in a way different from the way the annals and the chronicle forms do. But on what other grounds could a narrative of real events possibly conclude? When it is a matter of recounting the concourse of real events, what other "ending" could a given sequence of such events have than a "moralizing" ending? What else could narrative closure consist of than the passage from one moral order to another? I confess that I cannot think of any other way of "concluding" an account of real events, for we cannot say, surely, that any sequence of real events actually comes to an end, that reality itself disappears, that events of the order of the real have ceased to happen. Such events could only seem to have ceased to happen when meaning is shifted, and shifted by narrative means, from one physical or social space to another. Where moral sensitivity is lacking, as it seems to be in an annalistic

account of reality, or is only potentially present, as it appears to be in a chronicle, not only meaning but the means to track such shifts of meaning, that is, narrativity, appears to be lacking also. Where, in any account of reality, narrativity is present, we can be sure that morality or a moralizing impulse is present too. There is no other way that reality can be endowed with the kind of meaning that both displays itself in its consummation and withholds itself by its displacement to another story "waiting to be told" just beyond the confines of "the end."

What I have been working around to is the question of the value attached to narrativity itself, especially in representations of reality of the sort embodied in historical discourse. It may be thought that I have stacked the cards in favor of my thesis—that narrativizing discourse serves the purpose of moralizing judgments—by my use of exclusively medieval materials. And perhaps I have, but it is the modern historiographical community that has distinguished between the annals, chronicle, and history forms of discourse on the basis of their attainment of narrative fullness or failure to attain it. And this same scholarly community has yet to account for the fact that just when, by its own account, historiography was transformed into an "objective" discipline, it was the narrativity of the historical discourse that was celebrated as one of the signs of its maturation as a fully "objective" discipline—a science of a special sort but a science nonetheless. It is historians themselves who have transformed narrativity from a manner of speaking into a paradigm of the form that reality itself displays to a "realistic" consciousness. It is they who have made narrativity into a value, the presence of which in a discourse having to do with "real" events signals at once its objectivity, its seriousness, and its realism.

What I have sought to suggest is that this value attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary. The notion that sequences of real events possess the formal attributes of the stories we tell about imaginary events could only have its origin in wishes, daydreams, reveries. Does the world really present itself to perception in the form of well-made stories, with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles, and ends, and a coherence that permits us to see "the end" in every beginning? Or does it present itself more in the forms that the annals and chronicle suggest, either as mere sequence without beginning or end or as sequences of beginnings that only terminate and never conclude? And does the world, even the social world, ever really

come to us as already narrativized, already "speaking itself" from beyond the horizon of our capacity to make scientific sense of it? Or is the fiction of such a world, capable of speaking itself and of displaying itself as a form of a story, necessary for the establishment of that moral authority without which the notion of a specifically social reality would be unthinkable? If it were only a matter of realism in representation, one could make a pretty good case for both the annals and chronicle forms as paradigms of ways that reality offers itself to perception. Is it possible that their supposed want of objectivity, manifested in their failure to narrativize reality adequately, has to do, not at all with the modes of perception that they presuppose, but with their failure to represent the moral under the aspect of the aesthetic? And could we answer that question without giving a narrative account of the history of objectivity itself, an account that would already prejudice the outcome of the story we would tell in favor of the moral in general? Could we ever narrativize without moralizing?

## 5. Foucault's Discourse: The Historiography of Anti-Humanism

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The work of Michel Foucault, conventionally labeled as Structuralist but consistently denied by him to be such, is extraordinarily difficult to deal with in any short account. This is not only because his oeuvre is so extensive but also because his thought comes clothed in a rhetoric apparently designed to frustrate summary, paraphrase, economical quotation for illustrative purposes, or translation into traditional critical terminology.

In part, the idiosyncrasy of Foucault's rhetoric reflects a general rebellion of his generation against the *clarté* of their Cartesian heritage. Against the Atticism of the older tradition, the new generation is adamantly "Asiatic." But the thorniness of Foucault's style is also ideologically motivated. His interminable sentences, parentheses, repetitions, neologisms, paradoxes, oxymorons, alternation of analytical with lyrical passages, and combination of scientific with mythic terminology—all appear to be consciously designed to render his discourse impenetrable to any critical technique based on ideological principles different from his own.

It is difficult, however, to specify Foucault's own ideological position. If he detests liberalism because of its equivocation and service to the social status quo, he also despises conservatism's dependence on tradition. And although he often joins forces with Marxist radicals in

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This essay was written six years before Foucault's death in 1984. I have added a section on the two volumes of his *History of Sexuality* that appeared in that year. I refer throughout to the English translations of Foucault's works where they were available to me. These and the French originals are listed at the end of the essay.

specific causes, he shares nothing of their faith in science. The anarchist Left he dismisses as infantile in its hopes for the future and naive in its faith in a benign human nature. His philosophical position is close to the nihilism of Nietzsche. His discourse begins where Nietzsche's, in *Ecce Homo*, left off: in the perception of the "madness" of all "wisdom" and the "folly" of all "knowledge." But there is nothing of Nietzsche's optimism in Foucault. His is a chillingly clear perception of the transiency of all learning, but he draws the implications of this perception in a manner that has nothing in common with Nietzsche's adamant rigor.

And this because there is no center to Foucault's discourse. It is all surface—and intended to be so. For even more consistently than Nietzsche, Foucault resists the impulse to seek an origin or transcendental subject that would confer any specific meaning on existence. Foucault's discourse is willfully superficial. And this is consistent with the larger purpose of a thinker who wishes to dissolve the distinction between surfaces and depths, to show that wherever this distinction arises it is evidence of the play of organized power and that this distinction is itself the most effective weapon power possesses for hiding its operations.

The multifold operations of power are, in Foucault's view, at once most manifest and most difficult to identify in what he takes to be the basis of cultural praxis in general, namely, discourse. *Discourse* is the term under which he gathers all of the forms and categories of cultural life, including, apparently, his own efforts to submit this life to criticism. Thus envisaged, and as he himself says in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969), his own work is to be regarded as "a discourse about discourse" (205). It follows, then, that if we are to comprehend his work on its own terms, we must analyze it *as* discourse—and with all the connotations of circularity, of movement back and forth, that the Indo-European root of this term (*kers*) and its Latinate form (*dis-*, "in different directions," + *currere*, "to run") suggest. Accordingly, I have sought entry into the thicket of Foucault's work and, I hope, a way out of it by concentrating on its nature as discourse.

My approach will be generally rhetorical, and my aim will be to characterize the style of Foucault's discourse. I think we will find a clue to the meaning of his discursive style in the rhetorical theory of tropes. This theory has served as the organizing principle of Foucault's theory of culture, and it will serve as the analytical principle of this essay. Briefly, I argue that the authority of Foucault's discourse derives primarily from its style (rather than from its factual evidence or rigor of

argument); that this style privileges the trope of catachresis in its own elaboration; and that, finally, this trope serves as the model of the world-view from which Foucault launches his criticisms of humanism, science, reason, and most of the institutions of Western culture as they have evolved since the Renaissance.

At the end of *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault's systematic exposition of the analytical principles informing his earlier studies of madness, clinical medicine, and the human sciences, he states that his intention is "to free the history of thought from its subjection to transcendence . . . to cleanse it of all transcendental narcissism; [and free it] from [the] circle of the lost origin" (203). This statement, with its combination of extravagance and obscurity, is typical of Foucault's style and suggests the difficulty of translating his discourse into any other terms. The statement occurs in the course of an imagined exchange between Foucault and his critics (or between two sides of Foucault's own intellectual persona), in which the methods of the Structuralists and those of Foucault are juxtaposed and the differences between them clearly marked.

One issue in the exchange hinges upon what Foucault takes to be the crisis of Western culture. This is a crisis

that concerns that transcendental reflection with which philosophy since Kant has identified itself; which concerns the theme of the origin, that promise of the return, by which we avoid the difference of our present; which concerns an anthropological thought that orders all these questions around the question of man's being, and allows us to avoid an analysis of practice; which concerns all humanistic ideologies; which, above all, concerns the status of the subject. (204)

Structuralism seeks to avoid discussion of this crisis, Foucault says, by "pursuing the pleasant games of genesis and system, synchrony and development, relation and cause, structure and history." The imagined Structuralist (or Foucault's counter-persona) then asks the questions that still remain unanswered in most discussions of Foucault's work: "What then is the title of your discourse? Where does it come from and from where does it derive its right to speak? How could it be legitimated?" (ibid.).

These are fair questions, even when addressed to a thinker to whom fairness is simply another rule imported from the domain of ethics to set restrictions on the free play of desire; and Foucault's answers to them seem curiously weak. It is to his credit as a serious

thinker that he even raises them in his own text, but he takes away in his answers as much as he gives in permitting the questions to be raised. His own discourse, he says, "far from determining the locus in which it speaks, is avoiding the ground on which it could find support." It "is trying to operate a decentering that leaves no privilege to any center . . . it does not set out to be a recollection of the original or a memory of the truth. On the contrary, its task is to *make differences* . . . it is continually making *differentiations*, it is a *diagnosis*" (205-6). And he adds, in that constant repetition of "the same in the different" which is the distinguishing mark of his discourse: "It is an attempt . . . to show that to speak is to do something—something other than to express what one thinks; to translate what one knows, and something other than to play with the structures of a language [*langue*] (209).

What this "something other" may be, however, is more easily defined by what it is not, in Foucault's view. And he ends *The Archeology of Knowledge* with a negative definition of his central object of study in the form of a "message" to his readers:

Discourse is not life: its time is not your time; in it, you will not be reconciled to death; you may have killed God beneath the weight of all that you have said; but don't imagine that, with all that you are saying, you will make a man that will live longer than he. (211)

This "message," consisting of nothing but a series of negations, is also typical of Foucault's discourse, which always tends toward the oracular and intimations of apocalypse. His imagination is "always at the end of an era." But the vision is of what cannot be expected at the end of time. This supreme antiteleologist resists the lure of any definitive ending, just as he delights in beginnings that open in "free play," discoveries of paradoxes, and intimations of the folly underlying any "will to know."

If, however, Foucault's discourses begin in paradox and end in negative apocalypse, their middles are heavy with what Foucault calls "positivity," wide (if seemingly capricious) erudition, solemn disclosures of the "way things really were," aggressive redrawings of the map of cultural history, confident restructurings of the chronicle of "knowledge." And even the most sympathetic reader can legitimately ask, How do these middles relate to the beginnings and endings of Foucault's discourse? Their status is difficult to specify in conventional critical terms, for although these middles do mediate between the

paradoxes that open and the oracular utterances that typically close Foucault's discourses, they have neither the weight of the middle term of a syllogistic argument nor the plausibility of the peripeteia in a narrative.

In fact, Foucault rejects the authority of both logic and conventional narrative. His discourses often suggest a story, but they are never about the same "characters," and the events that comprise them are not linked by laws that would permit us to understand some as causes and others as effects. Foucault's "histories" are as fraught with discontinuities, ruptures, gaps, and lacunae as his "arguments." If he continues to fascinate (some of) us, then, it is not because he offers a coherent explanation or even interpretation of our current cultural incoherence but because he denies the authority that the distinction coherence/incoherence has enjoyed in Western thought since Plato. He seeks, not the "ground," but rather the "space" within which this distinction arose.

Because he seeks a space rather than a ground, Foucault's discourse unfolds seemingly without restraint, apparently without end. There are now nine books, many essays and interviews, prefaces to reprints of older works, manifestoes, and so forth—a flood of what he calls "utterances" (*énoncés*) which threaten to swamp even the most admiring reader. He has recently published the first of a projected six-volume *History of Sexuality*. What are we to make of this interminable "series" of texts? How are we to receive it? What are we to do with it?

If we were to follow what Foucault claims to be his own critical principles, we should not be able to refer the whole body of texts, the oeuvre, to any presiding authorial intention, to any originating event in the life of the author, or to the historical context in which the discourse arises. We should not even be able to speak about its impact or influence on a specific group of readers or to situate Foucault himself within a tradition of discourse. We could not ask, as his most hostile critics have done, whether his statements of fact are true or false, whether his interpretations are valid, or whether his reconstructions of the historical record are plausible. And this because Foucault denies the concreteness of the referent and rejects the notion that there is a reality that precedes discourse and reveals its face to a prediscursive "perception." We cannot, as he reminds us in the passages quoted above, ask, On what authority do you speak? because Foucault sets the free play of his own discourse over against all authority. He aspires to a discourse that is free in a radical sense, a discourse that is self-dissolving of its own authority, a discourse that opens upon a "silence"

in which only "things" exist in their irreducible difference, resisting every impulse to find a sameness uniting them all in any order whatsoever.

One conventional critical concept appears to escape Foucault's meta-critical ire: the concept of style. He does not explicitly make much of this concept, but he invokes it often enough without qualification to permit its use in the effort to characterize, at least in a preliminary way, the nature of his own discourse. Also, when we have eliminated all of the possible "authorities" to whom we might ordinarily appeal in order to delineate the ground of his discourse, we are still left with the constancies that give to his various texts a unitary tone, mode of address, manner of speaking, attack upon the process of *énonciation*, what, in his essay on Robbe-Grillet, he calls its "aspect" and what in other places he calls simply "style."

In an aside in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault defines style as "a certain constant manner of utterance."<sup>1</sup> This definition is revealing of what we should look for in our attempts to characterize Foucault's own, obviously highly self-conscious style. We should not fall victim, however, to any banal distinction in his own terms between style and content, or distinguish between "what is said" and "how it is said," because the saying, the "utterance" (*énonciation*), is what constitutes a "content," a "referent," or an "object" of discourse. Until discourse arises against the silence of mere existence or within the "murmur" of a prelinguistic agitation of things, there is no distinction between signifier and signified, subject and object, sign and meaning. Or rather, these distinctions are products of the discursive "event." But this event remains oblivious to its real purpose, which is merely to be and to mask the arbitrariness of its existence as simple utterance. And the manner of this simultaneous disclosure and concealment in discourse is its style.

Discourse need not have come into existence at all, Foucault tells us. That it did come into existence at a certain time in the order of things suggests its contingency—and points to a time when, like that "humanity" which is a hypostatization of the fictive subject of discourse, it will come to an end. Meanwhile, discourse eludes all determination, logical, grammatical, or rhetorical, precisely insofar as such determinations are themselves products of discourse's capacity to hide its origin in a play of signifiers that are their own signifieds. It is the mode of this play that constitutes the essence of style. When it displays a "certain constant manner" of elaboration, we are in the presence of a discourse with style. And the highest style, it would seem, is that

which self-consciously makes of this play its own object of representation.

So much is shown by Foucault himself in the only one of his works that can legitimately be classified as a stylistic analysis in the conventional sense of the term, his study of the proto-Surrealist writer Raymond Roussel. Here, after a discussion of the traditional rhetorical theory of tropes as set forth by Dumarsais, he remarks: "Le style, c'est, sous le nécessité souveraine des mots employés, la possibilité, masquée et désigné à la fois, de dire la même chose, mais autrement" (*Raymond Roussel*, 25). Foucault goes on to characterize Roussel's language, in terms that we can apply to his own discourse, as "style renversé," which seeks "à dire subrepticement deux choses avec les même mots." Roussel makes of the "twist [*torsion*], that easy turn of words which ordinarily permits them to 'lie' [*bouger*] by virtue of a tropological movement and allows them to enjoy their profound freedom, . . . a pitiless circle which leads words back to their point of departure by the force of a compelling law." The "bending [*flexion*] of the style becomes its circular negation" (25).

This notion of a reversed style would seem to be apt for characterizing the presuppositions of Foucault's own discourse, because like Roussel, Foucault does not wish "doubler le réel d'un autre monde, mais dans les redoublements spontanés du langage, *découvrir* un espace insoupçonné et le *recouvrir* de choses encore jamais dites" (25). Foucault's own discourse takes its source in that "tropological space" which he, like Roussel, considers "comme un blanc ménage dans le langage, et qui ouvre à l'intérieur même du mot son vide insidieux, désertique et piégé." Finally, also like Roussel, Foucault considers this void as "une lacune à étendre le plus largement possible et à mesurer méticuleusement." This "absence" at the heart of language Foucault takes to be evidence of "an absolute vacancy of being, which it is necessary to invest, master, and fill up [*comblé*] by pure invention" (24-25).

The idea of style used to characterize Roussel's discourse appears increasingly in Foucault's own works as a way of characterizing discourse in general. A "certain constant manner of utterance," arising in the "tropological space" which at once reflects and refuses the "vacancy of being," finding its own rule of dispersion in the capacity of words to say the same thing in different ways or to say different things with the same words, circling back upon itself to take its own modality of articulation as its signified, coming to an end as arbitrarily as it began, but leaving a verbal something in the place of the nothing that

occasioned it—all this can stand for discourse as well as style in Foucault's thought. To conceive discourse in this way, Foucault tells us in his inaugural lecture in the Collège de France in 1971, *L'Ordre du discours*, would be to free it from subjection to the myth of "signification."

Eight years earlier, in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), he had asked: "But must the things said, elsewhere and by others, be treated exclusively in accordance with the play of signifier and signified, as a series of themes present more or less implicitly to one another?" And he had concluded that if the "facts of discourse" were "treated not as autonomous nuclei of multiple significations, but as events and functional segments gradually coming together to form a system," then "the meaning of an utterance [*énoncé*] would be defined not by the treasure of intentions that it might contain, revealing and concealing it at the same time, but by the difference that articulates it upon the real or possible statements, which are contemporary with it or to which it is opposed in the linear series of time" (xvii).

The crucial terms in this passage, which points to the possibility of "a systematic history of discourses," are *events*, *functional segments*, *system*, and the notion of the play of *difference* within the system thus constituted. The "regulatory principles of analysis" of discourse, Foucault then makes clear in *L'Ordre du discours*, are the notions of "event, series, regularity, and the possible conditions of existence" (230). *Style* is the name we will give to the mode of existence of word-events arranged in a series displaying regularity and having specifiable conditions of existence. These conditions of existence are not to be sought in some correlation of "what is said" with an "order of things" that preexists and sanctions one "order of words" as against another. They are to be found in two kinds of restraint placed on discourse since the time of its domestication by the Greeks: external, consisting of the repressions or displacements corresponding to those governing the expression of desire or the exercise of power, and internal, consisting of certain rules of classification, ordering, and distribution and certain "rarefactions" which have the effect of masking discourse's true nature as "free play."

What is always at work in discourse—as in everything else—is "desire and power," but in order for the aims of desire and power to be realized, discourse must ignore its basis in them. This is why discourse, at least since the rout of the Sophists by Plato, always unfolds in the service of the "will to truth." Discourse wishes to "speak the

truth," but in order to do this, it must mask from itself its service to desire and power, must indeed mask from itself the fact that it is itself a manifestation of the operations of these two forces (218-20).

Like desire and power, discourse unfolds "in every society" within the context of "external restraints" that appear as "rules of exclusion," rules that determine what can be said and not said, who has the right to speak on a given subject, what will constitute reasonable and what "foolish" actions, what will count as "true" and what as "false" (216-17). These rules limit the conditions of discourse's existence in different ways in different times and places. Whence the distinction, arbitrary but taken for granted in all societies, between "proper," reasonable, responsible, sane, and truthful discourse, on the one side, and "improper," unreasonable, irresponsible, insane, and erroneous discourse, on the other. Foucault himself vacillates between the impulse to justify the discourse of madness, criminality, and sickness (whence his celebration of Sade, Holderlin, Nietzsche, Artaud, Lautréamont, Roussel, Bataille, Blanchot, and so on), on the one hand, and his constantly reaffirmed aim to probe beneath the distinction between proper and improper discourse in order to explicate the ground on which the distinction itself arises, on the other. Despite this vacillation, his probings take the form of "diagnoses" intended to reveal the "pathology" of a mechanism of control that governs discursive and non-discursive activity alike.

As for the internal restraints placed on discourse, the "rarefactions" noted above, all these are functions of the distinction, as false as it is insidious, between an order of words and an order of things, which makes discourse itself possible. What is at work here is some principle of subordination, the vertical equivalent, we might say, of the horizontal principle of exclusion operative in the external restraints. At the base of every principle of subordination operative in discourse is the distinction between the signifier and the signified, or rather the fiction of the adequacy of the former to the latter in every "proper" discourse. Whence the conventionalist theories of discourse that seek to obscure its status as mere event in order to ground it in a subject (the author), an originating experience (such as writing or reading), or an activity (discourse conceived as mediation between perception and consciousness, or between consciousness and the world, as in philosophical or scientific theories of language).

These conventionalist theories, Foucault argues, must be dismissed as mere manifestations of the power of discourse to nullify itself by "placing itself at the disposal of the signifier" (228). All of this,

reflective of a profound "logophobia" (229) in Western culture, has the effect of averting the very real "powers and dangers" of discourse (216). These derive from the capacity of discourse to reveal, in the free play of words, the arbitrariness of every rule and norm, even those on which society itself, with its rules of exclusion and hierarchical order, is founded. In order to free discourse from these restraints and to open it up once more to the Sadean project of saying everything that can be said in as many ways as it can be said—in order to preside over the dissolution of discourse by closing the gap opened up by the distinction between "words and things"—Foucault undertakes to expose the dark underside of every discursive formation purporting to serve "the will of truth."

This was the more or less clearly stated purpose of Foucault's earlier books, *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), and *The Order of Things* (1966). These dealt with the discourses of psychiatry, medicine, and the human sciences, respectively, and the ways that official discourse perceived, classified, and distributed such insubstantial "things" as "sanity," "health," "knowledge" at different times in the history of Western culture. These books sought to demonstrate that the distinctions between madness and sanity, sickness and health, and truth and error were always a function of the modality of discourse prevailing in centers of social power at different periods. In Foucault's view, this modality was, in turn, less a product of an autonomous exchange between hypothesis and observation, or theory and practice, than the basis of whatever theory and practice prevailed in a given period. And it followed for him that, finally, the modern history of Western man's "will to knowledge" had been less a progressive development towards "enlightenment" than a product of an endless interaction between desire and power within the system of exclusions which made different kinds of society possible.

This structure of deception and duplicity underlying all discourse was more systematically explicated in *The Archeology of Knowledge* and *The Discourse on Language*; and it has been further illuminated and specified in the two books that have appeared since these two essays: *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (1975); and *La Volonté de savoir*, the first volume of the projected *History of Sexuality* (1976). The two most recent works are manifestly studies of the relation between the desire for power and the power of desire as revealed in the controls exercised by society over two social types that have threatened its authority throughout time: the criminal and the sexual deviant. In the practices of incarceration and exclusion, respectively,



the power of discourse is confirmed by its creation of the human types with which these practices are intended to deal. Thus envisaged, both works are studies of the "discourse of power" in conflict with the "discourse of desire."

Wherever Foucault looks, he finds nothing but discourse; and wherever discourse arises, he finds a struggle between those groups that claim the "right" to discourse and those groups that are denied the right to their own discourse. In *Surveiller et punir* and *La Volonté de savoir*, Foucault comes out more fully on the side of the victims of this discourse of power and against the "authority" of those who exercise the power of "exclusion" under the guise of a simple service to "truth." But the authority of his own discourse still remains unspecified. What, we may still ask, are its modality, its "right," and its relation to the order of discourse of the time and place in which it arises?

Thus far, I have touched only the surface of Foucault's own discourse and suggested that its claim to authority must, according to his own theory, derive from the "certain constant manner of utterance," that is to say, the style, that characterizes it. This style, again on his own terms, cannot be identified as that of a discipline, because Foucault refuses the conventional titles philosopher, historian, sociologist of knowledge, and so forth. It cannot be identified with those looser groupings that he calls "fellowships of discourse," since in his major works he resolutely ignores the work of most of his contemporaries (*Discourse on Language*, 225-26). And most certainly it cannot be linked to any doctrinal orthodoxy of a religious or sectarian sort.

If Foucault were writing this, he might situate his discourse, and classify its style, by reference to what he himself calls the *épistème* of our age, that is to say, "the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems" of knowledge (*Archeology of Knowledge*, 191). But once more, according to Foucault's theory, the *épistème* of an age cannot be known by those who work under its aegis. In any event, according to him, we are at the end of one epistemic configuration and at the beginning of another. We exist in the gap between two *épistèmes*, one dying, the other not yet born—of which, however, the "mad" poets and artists of the last century and a half were the heralds.

The virtually unquestioned authority that Foucault grants to these heralds suggests the tradition of discourse to which he would wish to belong—if *tradition* were an honorific term to him, and if it could be

used to classify a group of artists as different as Hölderlin, Goya, Nietzsche, Van Gogh, Rilke, Artaud, Bataille, Blanchot, and above all Sade. Foucault values the brilliant opacity, the dark superficiality, the casual profundity of those writers who inhabit the silent places left by the discourse of "normal" men. His debt to them would permit us to place him among the anarchists—if he shared their Utopian optimism—or among the nihilists—if he possessed any standard by which to justify his preference for "nothing" over "something." But Foucault has none of the directness of his heroes. He cannot say anything directly, because he has no confidence in the power of words to represent either "things" or "thoughts."

It is not surprising, then, that Foucault's own discourse tends to assume the form of what Northrop Frye calls the "existential projection" of a rhetorical trope into a metaphysics. This rhetorical trope is catachresis, and Foucault's style not only displays a profusion of the various figures sanctioned by this trope, such as paradox, oxymoron, chiasmus, hysteron proteron, metalepsis, prolepsis, antonomasia, paronomasia, antiphrasis, hyperbole, litotes, irony, and so on; his own discourse stands as an abuse of everything for which "normal" or "proper" discourse stands. It looks like history, like philosophy, like criticism, but it stands over against these discourses as ironic antithesis. It even assumes a position superior to that of Foucault's own heroes, for Foucault's "discourse about discourses" seeks to effect the dissolution of Discourse itself. This is why I call it catachretic.

In traditional rhetorical theory, the notion of catachresis (in Latin, *abusio*; in English, *misuse*) presupposes the distinction between the literal and the figurative meanings of words, or more generally, the validity of the distinction between "proper" and "improper" usage. Since for Foucault all words have their origin in a "tropological space" in which the "sign" enjoys a "freedom . . . to alight" upon any aspect of the entity it is meant to signify, then the distinction between literal and figurative meanings goes by the board—except as an indication of the power of discourse to constitute "literality" through the application of a consistent rule of signification. This means that all verbal constructions are basically catachretic, inasmuch as no union of any signifier with any signified is "natural" or given by "necessity." Literal meaning, like "proper" usage, is the product of the application of a norm, social in nature, hence arbitrary, rather than a result of the operation of a law (see *The Order of Things*, 110-15).

But Foucault seems to agree with the eighteenth-century rhetoricians and with Pierre Fontanier, the nineteenth-century systematizer

of their theories, that the kinds of relationships the sign may have with the entity it is intended to represent are limited to four, depending on whether the sign "alights" on (1) "some internal element" of the entity to be represented by it, (2) some point "adjacent" to the entity, (3) some figure "similar" to the entity, or (4) some figure manifestly "dissimilar" to it. This classification yields what Foucault himself calls the "fundamental figures so well known to rhetoric: synecdoche, metonymy, and catachresis (or metaphor, if the analogy is less immediately perceptible)" (113-14). Each represents a different modality of construing the relation between signs and the things they are meant to signify.

Catachresis enjoys a privileged place in Foucault's own conception of tropes, because for him, no two things are similar to one another in their particularity. All language therefore constitutes an abuse insofar as it gives a single name to things different in their "internal natures," their location in space, or their external attributes. It is all catachretic in origin, although the myth of literal or "proper" meaning obscures this origin and thereby permits the reduction of catachresis to the status of a figure of rhetoric that arises out of a simple misuse of "proper" speech. It follows that if discourse takes its origin in a "topological space," it must unfold within one or another of the fundamental modalities of figuration in which a relationship between "words and things" can be construed. Consequently, the style of a discourse, its "certain constant manner of utterance," can be characterized in terms of the dominant trope that establishes the originary relation between "words and things" and determines "what can be said" about things in "proper" discourse.

Foucault goes even further: the dominant trope of a given community of discourse determines both "what can be seen" in the world and "what can be known" about it. Topology thus constitutes the basis of what Foucault calls the *épistème* of an age in the history of thought and expression. It also provides him with a way of characterizing the sequence of *épistèmes* that makes up the "history" of thought about the topics he has analyzed in his major books: madness, clinical medicine, the human sciences, incarceration, and sexuality. This theory of tropes is what underlies and therefore clarifies his own characterization of his "archeological" method: "What archeology wishes to uncover is primarily the play of analogies and difference" (*Archeology of Knowledge*, 160).

"Analogies and differences. . . ." In the beginning, Foucault's enabling myth tells us, everything was simply what it was. "Sameness," or analogy, arose with speech, the gathering of different things under a

single name. This gave birth to the concepts of the type, the proposition, and knowledge conceived as the classification of the Different in terms of Sameness, Similitude, or Resemblance. "All error," says Kant in his *Logic*, echoing Bacon and anticipating Darwin, "has its origin in resemblance." Foucault expands this dictum. For him, resemblance is also the source of everything that passes for truth or knowledge. The perception of the Same in the Different, or of Sameness in the interplay of Similarities and Differences as it appears in any aggregate of entities, lies at the base of myth, religion, science, and philosophy alike. But not only this: the perception of Sameness is the basis of social praxis too, of that manipulation of Sameness and Difference which permits the social group, first, to identify itself as a unity and, then, to disperse itself into a hierarchy of more or less different groupings, some "more alike" than others, some more sane, more healthy, more rational, more normal, more human, than others.

The perception of "the Same in the Different" and of "the Different in the Same" is the origin of all hierarchy in social practice, as it is the origin of syntax in grammar and logic in thought. Hierarchy itself derives from that Fall of man into language, and the capacity of speech to "say two things with the same words" or "the same thing with different words." Discourse arises when this capacity of speech becomes highly developed, formalized, submitted to rules, and unfolds under the aegis of a normative concept such as "the permitted versus the prohibited," "the rational versus the irrational," or "the true versus the false." But the limit on what can be said, and *a fortiori* what can be seen and thought, is set by the "error" that resides at the heart of any verbal representation of the "real."

This limit is reached when Difference asserts its rights against Sameness, or as Nietzsche says, when Dionysiac individuation rebels against Apollonian unities. Then discourse, motivated by the "will to truth" which informs it, shifts to another mode of construing the relation between "words and things." Typically, in Foucault's schema, every "discursive" formation undergoes a finite number of such shifts before reaching the limits of the *épistème* that sanctions its operations. This number corresponds to the fundamental modes of figuration identified by the theory of topology: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony (which is here understood as self-conscious catachresis).

Thus, for example, in *Madness and Civilization*, the "discourse on madness" that unfolds in the West between the late Middle Ages and our own time is shown to go through four phases. First, in the

sixteenth century, madness is removed from its status as a sign of sanctity, repository of a divine truth, and simultaneously differentiated from and identified with a specifically human wisdom, as in the character of the Wise Fool and the *topos* of the "praise of folly." Then, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, what Foucault calls the Classical age, madness is set over against reason in the mode of contiguity or adjacency, in the way that, in the formal thought of the age, humanity was set over against bestiality, or reason against unreason. This mode of conceiving the relation between madness and sanity is reflected in (and finds its confirmation in) the treatment of those designated as insane, who are not only expelled from society by virtue of their "differentness" but also "confined" in special places at the limits of society, "hospitals," where they are imprisoned and "treated" along with those other "dangerous" deviants from the social norm, criminals and paupers.

Then, in the nineteenth century, the relationship between madness and sanity changes again, reflected in the reforms of Pinel and Tuke, who "liberated" the insane from association with criminals and paupers, defined them as simply "sick" rather than essentially different from their "healthier" counterparts, and identified their "illness" with a phase in the development of the human organism, as either an arrested form of, or regression to, childhood. The insane were thus at once re-identified with "normal" humanity, by being identified with one of the latter's phases of development, hence defined as being essentially the same as the latter and at the same time differentiated from it as requiring a special kind of treatment, usually punitive but always physical, cultivated in the special "asylums" set up for the insane.

Finally, in the twentieth century, a new way of construing the relation between madness and sanity crystallizes, represented above all by Freud and psychoanalysis, in the theory of which the distinction between sanity and insanity is once more weakened, and the similarities between the two stressed; and the notion of neurosis is elaborated as intermediary between the two extremes. Foucault honors Freud as the first modern man to "listen" to what the insane were saying, to try to find the reason in their unreason, the method in their madness. On the other hand, while Freud delivered the patient from "the existence of the asylum," he did not liberate him from the authority of the doctor himself, that combination of scientist and thaumaturge. In the "psychoanalytical situation," Foucault maintains, "alienation becomes disalienating because, in the doctor, it becomes a subject" (278).

The failure to abolish this authoritarian structure, he concludes,

both sets the limit on what psychoanalysis can achieve and reveals the "irony" of its claims to liberate, because although psychoanalysis can "unravel some of the forms of madness, it remains a stranger to the sovereign enterprise of unreason" (278). The extent of its alienation from this "enterprise" is to be measured by its failure to comprehend the heralds of radical freedom, those seers whom sane society nullifies under the name of the "mad artist."

Since the end of the 18th century, the life of unreason no longer manifests itself except in the lightning-flash of words such as those of Hölderlin, of Nerval, of Nietzsche, or of Artaud— forever irreducible to those alienations that can be cured, resisting by their own strength that gigantic moral imprisonment which we are in the habit of calling, doubtless by antiphrasis, the liberation of the insane by Pinel and Tuke. (278)

Foucault's own catachretic reflection on the condition of sanity in the modern world takes its authority from those "lightning-flashes" which, in the works of art where they appear, "open a void, a moment of silence, a question without an answer, [and] provoke a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself" (288). His celebration of madness is "beyond irony," since it credits the existence of a "silence" before the "differentiation" of madness and sanity occurred.

Ruse and new triumph of madness: the world that thought to measure and justify madness through psychology must justify itself before madness, since in its struggles and agonies it measures itself by the excess of works like those of Nietzsche, of Van Gogh, of Artaud. And nothing in itself, especially not what it can know of madness, assures the world that it is justified by such works of madness. (289)

Arising in that "topological space" in which words can "alight" freely on whatever aspect of the thing they are intended to signify, the history of the "discourse on madness" displays the possible modalities of this "alightment." The modes and the tropes that underlie them are, successively, resemblance (metaphor), adjacency (metonymy), essentiality (synecdoche), and what might be called doubling (irony). In its modern phase the discourse on madness takes the form of a duplicity, of a doubling effect, in which madness is identified with both normality and genius, is at once brought back into the world in the form of the patient and further alienated from it in the form of the mad poet;

at once defined as sickness and deviation from the norm and tacitly recognized as a standard against which the norm can be measured. Foucault takes his stand in the breach, the gap, the void that opens up between these two faces of madness and asks, By what authority do we presume to "speak" of either?

The question of authority, the assumption of the power to force conformity to social norms, has increasingly moved to the center of Foucault's own discourse in the books that followed *Madness and Civilization*, from his study of the "discourse on sickness" (*The Birth of the Clinic*) to his studies of the "discourse on criminality" (*Surveiller et punir*) and the "discourse on sexuality" (*Histoire de la sexualité*). And it is this question that is at the heart of his most influential work, his study of the "discourse on humanity" (*The Order of Things*).

*The Order of Things* is about the use and abuse of the "authority" of the "human sciences." In it Foucault wishes to show that the disciplines that deal with man as a social and cultural being are as little scientific as those conceptions of the body that have successively informed medical practice from the sixteenth century to our own day. *The Order of Things* is denser than Foucault's other "historical" books, because in it he deals with discourses that are more theoretical than practical, or at least discourses that do not have the immediate applicability that such discourses as "psychiatry, medicine, and penology" do. Consequently, he is compelled to consider the epistemological authority of the theoretical disciplines that the "human sciences" comprise. This authority he invests in the *épistème* of an age or a community of discourses, the deep but unacknowledged mode of relating "words and things" that gives to these discourses their coherence, within and between themselves.

As in the book on madness, so, too, in *The Order of Things* Foucault identifies four distinct periods of epistemic coherency: the sixteenth century, the *âge classique*, the nineteenth century, and our own age. Each period is studied "vertically," that is, archeologically, rather than "horizontally" or historically. The strategy is to work from texts or fragments of texts produced during a given period, without any concern for the biographies of the authors who wrote them, with the sole aim of identifying a distinctive "discursive mode" shared by all the important texts of an age or epoch.

An "important" text, of course, is one that displays evidence of the appearance of a discursive mode different from that which prevailed in the preceding age. Foucault is less concerned with the

"classic" text, the text that is fully systematized and realized in accordance with the *épistème* that sanctions its discourse, than with the text that marks out a new domain of inquiry, or rather constitutes new "positivities" and "empiricities" on the basis of a new conceptualization of consciousness's relation to the world. Thus, for example, in his analyses of the sciences of biology, economics, and philology in the nineteenth century, he is less interested in—indeed, all but ignores—Darwin, Marx, and Wilamowitz than in Cuvier, Ricardo, and Bopp. The latter trio are regarded as the true "inventors" of the new domains of inquiry—biology, economics, and philology, respectively.

Before the appearance of these three thinkers, Foucault argues, the "sciences" of biology, economics, and philology did not exist. No more than "man" existed as an object of study prior to the late eighteenth century. Before this time, "natural history," "wealth," and "general grammar" were the principal domains of the field of "human sciences," just as before the late eighteenth century, the concept of "man" was obscured by the more general concept of "creation" or the "order of things" of which the "human thing" was but one, and by no means a privileged, instance.

It is folly, then, Foucault argues, to imagine, as conventional historians of ideas are inclined to do, that there are discrete disciplines developing over long periods of time that have the same objects of inquiry, with only the names by which these objects are called changing and the laws governing them progressively becoming clearer as "error" is eliminated and "fact" replaces "superstition" or mere "speculation." For what shall count as error and what as truth, what as fact and what as fancy—these change as arbitrarily as the modes of discourse and the originating *épistèmes* undergo "mutation."

One can, of course, speak of the "influence" of one thinker or another, of precursors and incarnators of intellectual traditions, and even of "genealogies" of ideas, if one wishes; but one should do so with the full realization that such concepts are legitimate only within the epistemic presuppositions of nineteenth-century discourse, a discourse that is not even that of our intellectual fathers but, at best, that of our grandfathers. For new "master disciplines" in the human sciences were constituted on the eve of our own era, in ethnology, psychoanalysis, and linguistics, all of which orient their "true" practitioners, not along the horizontal axis of "befores and afters," as nineteenth-century historicist disciplines did, but along the vertical axis of "surfaces and depths"—and continually point to the insoluble mystery that the notion of a depth without a bottom calls forth.

Knowledge in the human sciences thus no longer takes the form of the search for Similarities and Resemblances (as it did in the sixteenth century), Contiguities and Tables of Relationships (as it did in the Classical age), or Analogies and Successions (as it did in the nineteenth century), but rather Surfaces and Depths—generated by the return to consciousness of the nameless "silence" which underlies and makes possible the forms of all discourse, even that of "science" itself. This is why, in our age, knowledge tends to take the form either of Formalizations or Interpretations and unfolds within an awareness of consciousness's incapacity ever to locate its own origin and of language's inability to reveal a subject; and this because of the inevitable interposition of discourse between the Subject and its putative subject matter. This is why "the whole curiosity of our thought now resides in the question: What is language, and how can we find a way round it in order to make it appear in itself, in all its plenitude?" (*Order of Things*, 306).

But this curiosity can never be satisfied, Foucault maintains, because "the object of the human sciences is not language (though it is spoken by men alone); it is that being [man] which, from the interior of language by which he is surrounded, represents to himself, by speaking, the sense of the words or propositions he utters, and finally provides himself with a representation of language itself" (353). Not even the modern science of linguistics can specify "what language must be in order to structure . . . what is . . . not in itself either word or discourse, and in order to articulate itself on the pure forms of knowledge" (382). Indeed, it is not in science at all but in literature, and a literature "dedicated to language," that "we are led back to the place that Nietzsche and Mallarmé signposted when the first asked: Who speaks?, and the second saw his glittering answer in the Word itself" (382).

A literature so dedicated "gives prominence, in all their empirical vivacity, to the fundamental forms of finitude," the most fundamental form of which is death (383-84). This literature, which presses beyond madness to "that formless, mute, unsignifying region where language can find its freedom" (383), signals the "disappearance of Discourse" (385), and with it, the "disappearance of man." For "man had been a figure occurring between two modes of language; or, rather, he was constituted only when language, having been situated within representation and, as it were, dissolved in it, freed itself from that situation only at the cost of its own fragmentation: man composed his own figure in the interstices of that fragmented language" (386).

That "man" of which humanists speak so eloquently and confidently is thus considered to have no specific being in the world, no essence, no objectivity. The history of the human sciences shows us efforts to locate the nature of "man" in his being as "living, producing, and speaking" animal; but these "living, producing, speaking" themselves dissolve and escape identification, behind the discourses intended to reveal their substance—only to reappear in a new guise, as the subject of new "sciences," when a given notion of "life, labor, or language" finds its limit in language itself.

The crucial change, or rather "mutation," in the history of Western thought, Foucault contends in *The Order of Things*, is that which "situated language within representation," charged words with the task of serving as transparent and unambiguous signs of the "things" that made up "reality." This elevation of words to a special status among "things" created a gap within which "Classical" discourse, the discourse of the Enlightenment, could unfold. Hidden behind its status as simple "representation" of the real, this discourse was able to offer its own form as the obscure content of reality. And because discourse was thus privileged, reality inevitably took on the aspects of the linguistic mode in which it was presented to consciousness. Since in the eighteenth century language was regarded as timeless, as having no history, and universal, as being governed everywhere by the same grammatical and syntactical rules, then not only knowledge but also its object, "man," was considered to be characterized by this same timelessness and universality of determination. Accordingly, knowledge aspired to the construction of "Tables," in which the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of "reality" would be revealed, its simple elements named, its species and genera unambiguously determined, and its combinatory rules made manifest.

This dream of a *mathesis universalis* has remained the legacy of the sciences, both physical and social, ever since. Its inadequacy to reality became evident, however, at the furthest limit of its development in the nineteenth century, when names were seen to be variable for what they could designate, when the taxonomies revealed their incapacity to accommodate certain "borderline" cases or "monsters," and when the combinatory rules failed of all precise prediction. In the early nineteenth century, it dawned on Western man that not only he but language also had a "history." But Foucault does not view this intensification of "historical consciousness" as an advance in learning, a progressive movement in the history of thought caused by the realization of the "error" contained in the earlier conception of knowledge

(329). On the contrary, the new historical sense was a function of a profound "time-anxiety," a realization that the Classical age had no place for time in its *épistème*, or rather, that it had purchased its certitude at the expense of any awareness of the reality of time, of the finitude of existence.

Whence the radical reconstitution of the whole domain of knowledge in the nineteenth century, its reconceptualization in terms, not of Contiguity and the (spatialized) Table, but of Analogy and (temporal) Succession (218-19)—evidence of a hope that "things" were at least affiliated in time if not related in space. Whence, too, therefore, the proliferation of those great philosophies of history (of Hegel, Marx, and so many others) and of even more of those concrete "historical narratives" (of Ranke, Mommsen, Michelet, and so on), in which the age abounded (334). "Life, labor, and language" were also historicized in the nineteenth century, in the hope that by the study of their evolution in time, their deeper unities would be discovered. But this enterprise, carried out most completely in biology, economics, and philology, was as doomed to failure as that of the Classical age. For the "origin" that it relentlessly pursued just as relentlessly receded from any positive identification (333). The historical approach to the study of "life, labor, and language" revealed neither the Origin nor the Subject of these activities; all it revealed, wherever "knowledge" looked, was infinite Difference and endless Change.

This apprehension of the play of Difference and Change, Foucault maintains, motivates the leading "human sciences" of our century: ethnology, psychoanalysis, and linguistics. All of these disciplines privilege language and hence approach closer to the void in which discourse arises than did their earlier counterparts (382). However, in their propensity to divide their objects (culture, consciousness, and language) into a "surface" and a "depth," and in their faith in their capacity to discover a Subject lurking in those depths, they too reveal their bondage to the myth of Sameness (340). This is why Foucault, in the preface to *The Order of Things*, characterizes his book as "a history of resemblance, . . . a history of the Same" (xxiv); and why, at the end of this book, he writes: "It is apparent how modern reflection . . . moves towards a certain thought of the Same—in which Difference is the same thing as identity" (315). Over against the Same-Different distinction (or rather, meta-distinction, for this dyad is what justifies "distinction" itself) he sets the notion of the Other, whose history provides the ironic antithesis to that of the Same. This Other's history is inscribed within the "discourses" on madness, sickness,

criminality, and sexuality, on the basis of which it has always been "shut away" (xxiv).

Foucault's work since *The Order of Things* can thus be understood as a specification and amplification of the insight with which **that** book ended:

Man has not been able to describe himself as a configuration in the *épistème* without thought at the same time discovering, both in itself and outside itself, at its borders yet also in its very warp and woof, an element of darkness, an apparently inert density in which it is embedded, an unthought which it contains entirely, yet in which it is also caught. The unthought (whatever name we give it) is not lodged in man like a shrivelled-up nature or a stratified history; it is, in relation to man, the Other: the Other that is not only a brother but a twin, not of man, nor in man, but beside him and at the same time, in an identical newness, in an unavoidable duality. (326)

*The Order of Things* is a "history of the Same—of that which, for a given culture, is both dispersed and related, therefore to be distinguished by kinds and to be collected together into identities." *Surveiller et punir* and *La Volonté de savoir*, like *Madness and Civilization* and *The Birth of the Clinic*, are histories of "the Other," that which is "shut away" and hidden "in order to reduce its otherness," that which is regarded, always pre-judicially, as the abnormal (xxiv).

In 1973, Foucault published the results of a collective investigation, made by his students in a seminar, of a famous early nineteenth-century murder, *Moi, Pierre Rivière, ayant égorgé ma mère, ma soeur et mon frère*. . . . This was a case study of the ways in which different kinds of discourse—medicopsychiatric, legal, journalistic, and political—revealed the workings of "power" in their "analyses" and recommended "treatment" of the murderer. Foucault's own interest in this case stemmed, obviously, from the insight it provided into the function of "murder" in marking the limits between legality and illegality. After all, he reminds us, society distinguishes between different kinds of killing: criminal, martial, political (the assassination), and accidental. In the bourgeois society taking shape in the early nineteenth century, however, "murder" had an especial fascination; and accounts of murders, such as Pierre Rivière's famous *memoire* of his crime, an especial popularity.

The "universal success" of these *révits* manifests "the desire to know and to tell how men have been able to rebel against [*se lever*

*contre*] power, break the law, to expose themselves to death by means of death" (271). What these *récits* and their universal popularity reveal, Foucault concludes, is a "battle which was taking shape, on the eve of revolutionary struggles and imperialist wars, over two rights, less different than they appear at first sight: the right to kill and have killed; [and] the right to speak and to recount" (271-72). Apparently, popular and official opinion alike were more outraged by Rivière's presumption in writing about his crime than they were by his committing it (266). His discourse seemed to have "doubled" the crime, making him the "author" of it twice over—first "in fact," second in "history" (274). Rivière did not try to excuse himself from the crime; rather he tried to situate it in the "discourse of murder" which in its official form both sanctioned and prohibited "killing." In daring to give his own account of the crime, Rivière set his own discourse over against every official one—legal, medical, political, and folkloric.

The fact that his act included a parricide brought it close to the fundamental concerns of society: the similarity of parricide to regicide or, indeed, any kind of political assassination had long been recognized in folklore and law alike. The nature of the crime, therefore, had both social and political implications, since it raised the question of the authority of the parent over the child in the family, in the first instance, and that of the state over the citizen, in the second. In setting his own "discourse" over against all official discourses, Rivière effectively claimed a freedom to act however he wished, in conformity to his own desires; and by implication he challenged the authority of society, whether vested in the family, the state, the law, science, or popular opinion, to judge him on its terms.

By remanding the sentence of death and consigning Rivière to life imprisonment, the state in the person of the king reasserted its authority while simultaneously masking it behind an act of grace. In deciding that Rivière had been insane and not, therefore, the *auteur* of his crime, it also nullified his claims to be the *auteur* of his own discourse about it. Instead of being *auteur*, he was defined simply as *autre* and put away in the prison, which, in the modern, totalitarian state, is the potential destiny of any deviant from the norms of society. Foucault had sought to show in his studies of the discourses of penology, psychiatry, and medicine that all deviancy is implicitly considered to be criminal, insane, or sick. That the notion of deviancy as crime, madness, and sickness arises within the economy of discourse itself, in the distinction between proper and improper discourse, is also the

explicit message of *Moi, Pierre Rivière, ayant égorgé ma mère, ma soeur et mon frère. . . .*

This contention is further documented in *Surveiller et punir* and *La Volonté de savoir*. The historical framework of the two arguments presented in these books is the same as that found in earlier works: the transition from the *épistème* of the Classical age to that of the nineteenth century (or rather the mutation of the latter out of the former) is the center of interest. The celebration of the relative openness of sixteenth-century society vis-à-vis criminality, on the one side, and sexuality, on the other, is found in these works also, as is the suggestion that our own time is undergoing another change of momentous impact. And as in *The Birth of the Clinic* especially, here too changes in medical and psychiatric discourse are linked to the impulse towards totalitarian control which Foucault conceives to be intrinsic to modern society. But in *La Volonté de savoir* especially, this totalitarian impulse is represented as being more powerful, more fraught with consequences, more apocalyptic than it appears in his earlier works. This is because the "discourse on sexuality" in our time unfolds in the effort to gain total control over the whole individual—over the body, to be sure, but over the psyche also.

*Surveiller et punir* prepares us for this analysis of totalitarianism by explicating the function of the prison in modern society. Product of the modern "discourse on criminality," the prison serves as a model of the *société disciplinaire*, of which it is the first institutional manifestation. Invented in the nineteenth century, different from the dungeons and châteaux of incarceration that littered the landscape of the Classical age, the prison is committed less to the hiding and confinement of criminals than to their "reformation" into ideal types of what the citizen outside them should be. The prison reforms of the nineteenth century, however, far from being the evidence of growing enlightenment and humanitarianism that they are conventionally presented as being, reflect a new conception of the ideal society, a new conception of deviancy, and new ways of dealing with it.

In the totally ordered, hierocratized space of the nineteenth-century prison, the prisoner is put under constant surveillance, discipline, and education in order to transform him into what power as now organized in society demands that everyone become: docile, productive, hard-working, self-regulating, conscience-ridden—"normal" in every way. Similar reforms, seemingly inspired by the new, enlightened conception of the citizen as a "responsible" human being, were carried

out during the same period in schools, military systems, and places of work. Justified by the new social sciences which supposedly promoted a new and more enlightened idea of human nature, culture, and society, these new disciplinary apparatuses (Foucault's word is the virtually untranslatable *dispositifs*) secretly conceal within their several "discourses" the ideal of the prisons organized on their bases. In the sixteenth century, Foucault argues, criminals and heretics were publicly tortured, mutilated, and put to death in a "spectacle" intended to remind the "subject" of the sovereign's right to punish, his right to "kill." But at least this treatment was open and direct, exacted on the body of the prisoner rather than on his whole being, and possessed at its worst the not unenviable virtue of "candor." By its nature, torture taught that authority was based on force and showed by implication that the subject had a "right" to take the law into his own hands and to answer force with force, if he had the power to do so.

Modern legal systems and the penal systems they serve (rather than the reverse) represent a social authority that masks itself behind professions of humanistic concern for the citizen, humanitarian principles of social organization, and altruistic ideals of service and enlightenment. But this authority, as sovereign in practice as any absolute monarch claimed to be in theory, seeks to make society into an extended prison, in which discipline becomes an end in itself; and conformity to a norm that governs every aspect of life, and especially desire, becomes the only principle of both law and morality.

Thus summarized, this sounds very much like the kind of ranting we normally associate with conservative opponents of the power of the centralized state, or a liberal defense of the individual against a "society" intent on violating his rights. It sounds a little like Camus in *The Rebel*, opposing "totalitarianism" and holding up the prospect of an amiable anarchy as a desirable alternative. But if in *Surveiller et punir* Foucault seems to be defending the individual against society, it is not because he credits any idea of natural rights or the sanctity of a contract between the members of society, or between them and their government. Far from honoring the notions of rights and contract, Foucault abandons the notion of the natural itself.

In fact, he argues that wherever it appears in the discourses of the human sciences, the natural always conceals within it the aspect of a "norm," so that any "law" supposedly derived from study of the natural can always be shown to be nothing more than a "rule" by which to define the "normal" and to justify the "disciplining" of those who deviate from the norm, by punishment, incarceration, education,

or some other form of "moral engineering." The play of the concepts "normality" and "deviancy" and their functioning in the social discourse of our own time are never more clearly seen than in the modern human sciences' concern with "perversion" and the "pervert." And this concern is never more apparent than in the modern "discourse on sexuality." To show that these concepts and this concern are simply elements in a never-ending conflict between power and desire is the aim of his *History of Sexuality*. To show how this conflict, in turn, is masked behind a simple "desire for knowledge" is the aim of the first volume.

The title of this volume, *La Volonté de savoir* (published in English as *The History of Sexuality*), indicates the matrix of the larger work: the complex relationships that have taken shape in Western society, since the sixteenth century but especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, between power, desire, and knowledge. The stated aim of the extended work is to analyze the *mise en discours* of sex and to relate this to the "polymorphous techniques of power" (20). We are to be enlightened, we are promised, about the "productive processes" that engender "sex, power, and knowledge" (21) to the end of constructing a veritable "political economy" of Western man's "will to know" (98). The principal subject of analysis will be, not sex itself, sexual practices, or the folklore of sex, but rather a "discourse" that substitutes the abstraction "sexuality" for the "body and pleasure" as a "drive" that supposedly underlies every aspect of life and as the "mystery" that clothes the "secret" of life itself (49, 91-94).

If, however, in succeeding volumes Foucault follows the outline given in the first, the work will represent a significant departure from the notions of cultural history that he has promoted up till now. First of all, he seems no longer interested in defending the notion of historical discontinuity, rupture, or mutation on which he has insisted in previous works. He presents the nineteenth-century discourse on sexuality as importantly new in what it aspires to and achieves, but he finds its institutional origins in medieval monastic discipline, the "confessional" culture of post-Tridentine religion, and the "technology of sex" developed in the eighteenth century. Second, more overtly than in previous works, Foucault grounds the "discourse on sexuality" in the larger "discourse of power," so much so that he seems finally to have reached a bottom in his efforts to plumb the *abîme* out of which discourse in general arises. He will, he promises us in his methodological remarks, analyze "a certain knowledge of sex, in terms not of repression or of law, but of power" (121); and he then proceeds to define



power in such a way as to endow it with all the mystery, all the meta-physicality with which he claims that power endows sex.

"Power," Foucault says, "is everywhere" (123). Moreover, it is not a thing that can be acquired; its relations are immanent in all other kinds of relations (economic, political, and so on); it "comes from below"; and its relations are both "intentional and nonsubjective" (123-24). This suggests that we should not expect from him in future an analysis of the general "discourse of power." The more so inasmuch as he insists that the principal characteristic of power is always to manifest itself in a discourse about something other; power can only be effective—and tolerated—when some part of it is hidden (113). Power, it seems, has a capacity of infinite displacement; accordingly, it can only be caught "on the wing," analyzed in the places it both inhabits and vacates simultaneously, and hence viewed only indirectly. But sexuality is the place to grasp it most effectively, for the discourse on sexuality, actively promoted by the "apparatus of power" (*dispositif du pouvoir*) in modern Western society, gives access to the human body and, through the body, to the control of the group, the species, and finally "life" itself (184-88).

The third way in which this book differs from others by Foucault is in the radicalism of its attack on "knowledge" in all its forms. The studies of madness, clinical medicine, the human sciences, and even that of "the archeology of knowledge" had continued to suggest that there was some ground, consisting perhaps of a theory of discourse itself, that might be used as a staging area for some positive conception of "knowledge." Hope for the discovery of this ground is now realized. Everything is seen to consist in "power," but power itself is viewed as indeterminable. Even the "discourse about discourse" offers only an indirect insight into its nature. No sooner is power fixed in a "meta-discourse" than it "slips" to another domain, perhaps even to that of "meta-discourse" itself. When knowledge is conceived to be so saturated with power that it is no longer distinguishable from it, the only recourse left is to a kind of power that eschews "knowledge" of every sort. The nature of such a power is only hinted at here, in Foucault's designation of the "base" (*point d'appui*) for a counterattack against the apparatus of sexuality: "the body and pleasures" (208). How this base is to be constituted, however, is not made clear.

Finally, this work differs from others in Foucault's corpus by virtue of its overtly political tone and open orientation towards contemporary political questions. The same apocalyptic mood colors the end of the work; intimations of future biological wars and racial

holocausts abound. But the dreams of a "garden of delights," of "good sex on the morrow," to be brought about by "speaking out against the powers that be, telling the truth and promising enjoyment"—all this is dismissed as fatuous utopianism. In fact, Foucault argues, such dreams confirm, when they are not complicit in, a "discourse of sexuality" that exercises control and contributes to the massive process of "normalization," precisely insofar as they credit the myth of "repression" promoted by that discourse itself. Whence the twofold purpose of the proposed history of sexuality: to dissipate the myth of the repressive nature of modern society and to expose the operations of the *dispositif du pouvoir* in the very "knowledge" that claims to liberate us from the effects of this repression.

The paradoxical opening that we have come to expect in Foucault's discourse is not lacking in *La Volonté du savoir*. It consists of the argument that far from being sexually repressive, modern Western society, even in its Victorian golden age of repression, was anything but that. On the contrary, modern Western society has not only promoted more talk about sex, more study of it, more classifications of its forms, more theories of its processes than any culture known to human history, it has promoted as well the radical diversification of sexual practices, refined the forms that sexual desire and gratification may take, and accorded to "sex" a greater metaphysical function than has any other culture we know. The true originality of Western society in world culture, we might conclude, consists in its recognition that the promotion and control of the various forms of sexuality offers the best means of "policing" society, of "disciplining" human beings, and even of turning their "perversions" to socially useful, that is, power-serving, purposes.

Although the origins of this attitude towards sex are to be found in the Middle Ages, the "break" in a generally healthy attitude towards the body and its functions occurs in the eighteenth century. At this time, sex becomes subject to causal and quantitative analyses, a matter of concern to the state, and a resource to be "policed"—because sexual practices are perceived as the key to population control and therewith to "wealth." For the first time, at least in a significant way, "how people use sex becomes a concern of society" (37). In the nineteenth century, the control of sex is effected by means of a movement both political and scientific in which a sexual norm ("heterosexual monogamy") is constituted, and any form of sexuality that threatens that norm can be designated as "against nature" (52). Thus is created—and this is what is more important for an understanding of

modern society than "repression"—"le monde de la perversion" (50-55).

This world is the place where "unnatural acts" are performed, and it is populated by a host of "antisocial" types whose activities threaten the purity and health of the species: the sodomite, the onanist, the necrophiliac, the homosexual, the sadist, the masochist, and so on (54-55). But while being exiled to the confines of "proper society," the inhabitants of this world are simultaneously discovered—by doctors, psychiatrists, preachers, teachers, and moralists in general—to reside also within the "normal" family as well, as a threat to its "health" and to the family's proper service to the "race." "Perversion" is now included within the body of the "normal" person as *potentia* that must be identified, treated, disciplined, guarded against—in a ceaseless exercise of self-examination, confession, (psycho)analysis, regimentation, and general vigilance that ceases only with death. In fact, not surprisingly, the modern *scientia sexualis*, which takes shape over against general medicine on the one side and the ancient *ars erotica* on the other, even succeeds in finding death, in the form of the "death wish," to underlie sexuality in general (72-73).

The great invention of this "science" is nothing other than sexuality itself (91). It discovers, before sex and beneath it, the play of a "force" that is "everywhere" and nowhere, a process that is pathological in essence and a "field of significations calling for decipherment," and a mechanism that, while localizable, is yet governed by indefinite causal connections (92). And the "science of sex" makes of this force the "secret," not only of life, but of the "individual subject" as well (93). By its success in making the individual and the group seek their "essence" and "impurity" in real or imagined "perversions," this "science" (which includes even that "liberating" discipline, psychoanalysis) serves a power that is only temporarily identifiable in class terms. Ultimately, Foucault predicts, it will serve to organize the wars of the races, each of which will see in sex a capital resource to be used in the "bio-politics" of the future.

But the theory, or rather the myth, of repression has its golden age and perfect ground of cultivation in the era of the bourgeois family; for during this era "science" identifies, and in the process brings into being, four specific social types which are generalized into the possible types that "normal" humanity may incarnate: the hysterical woman, the masturbatory child, the perverse adult, and the Malthusian couple. The family is simultaneously defined as the "normal" human unit and as the battleground (between men and women, young and old, parents

and children, and, by extension, teachers and students, priests and laymen, rulers and ruled) where the prize to be won and the weapons to be used in the battle consist of the same thing: sexuality (136). "Science," in seeking to control this battle, evolves four great strategies: the transformation of the body of the "hysterical" woman into a medical object; of the sex of the infant into an educational object; of perverse pleasures into a psychiatric phenomenon; and of procreative conduct into an object for social control (137-39). These strategies have the effect of "producing sexuality" and bringing under general social control the unit in which sexuality has its greatest play: the family. A whole apparatus is created for dealing with nothing but the problems that sexuality, now generalized and deemed eminently effective in the long run, creates in the family (139-46, 148-49). "Love" in the family is always under the threat of falling into "perversion"; perversion in turn is linked to "degeneracy," and degeneracy to loss of "racial" power, wealth, status (157, 160).

What Foucault purports to show, then, is that the "theory of repression," far from being an instrument of liberation, is in fact a weapon used in the extension of social disciplining over every individual and group (169). And why this "will to discipline"? Modern society apparently knows clearly what the individual only dimly grasps: that "l'homme moderne est un animal dans la politique duquel sa vie d'être vivant est en question" (188). The "disciplines" not only know this, they "prove" it; they provide the theory of an "anatomopolitique du corps humain" and of a "bio-politique de la population" (183). In modern global warfare, Foucault concludes, the matter at issue is no longer one of "rights" but one of "life" itself (191). Since sex provides access to the "life of the body and the life of the species," it functions in these sciences as both "unique signifier" and "universal signified" (204)—so convincingly that these sciences have succeeded, more completely than any *ars erotica* could ever do, in making "sex itself desirable" (207).

Thus, the discourse on sexuality is shown simultaneously to reveal and to conceal the play of power in modern society and culture. Measured against the enormity of the power of this discourse, Foucault tells us, the manifestly "political" discourses of the traditional ideologies pale to insignificance. Even the Nazis look tame in comparison with the "bio-politics" that Foucault sees taking shape on the horizon (197). He foresees an era of racial wars made more virulent than anything previously known in the degree to which "knowledge" will have succeeded in internalizing, within the individual and the

group, the play of a "sexuality" intended solely to discipline "bodies and pleasures."

Thus, Foucault's coming books promise to be even more apocalyptic than his earlier ones, in part because he has now come upon his true subject: power. And power has been hypostatized and given the status that spirit once enjoyed in an earlier, humanistic dispensation. Of course, his real subject had always been power, but power specified, located in particular exchanges between words and things. Now the "void" out of which language was originally conceived to have spun its fictions has been filled. No void, but a plenum of force; not divine, but demonic. And the whole of culture, far from being that exercise of endless sublimation that humanism conceives to be the essence of our humanity, is revealed as nothing but repression. More or less killing, to be sure, but in the end nothing but destructive.

Summarized in this way, Foucault must seem to be little more than a continuation of a tradition of pessimistic, even decadent, thought of which Schopenhauer, Gobineau, Nordau, and Spengler are representative. And it is true that Foucault not only finds little to lament in the passing of Western civilization but offers less hope for its replacement by anything better. But philosophers are under no obligation to be optimists, and neither are cultural commentators. The issue is not whether a thinker is an optimist or a pessimist but the grounds for his point of view.

Foucault's grounds are difficult to specify, because he rejects most of the strategies of explanation that analysts of culture and history have honored as legitimate bases for praising or condemning social practices in the past. At the center of his thought is a theory of discourse based upon a rather conventional conception of the relation between language and experience, a theory originating in the now discredited discipline of rhetoric. Foucault uses rhetorical notions of language to project a conception of culture as magical, spectral, delusory. Strangely enough, this idea of language remains unexamined by him. In fact, although his thought is based primarily on a theory of language, he has not elaborated such a theory systematically. And as long as he fails to elaborate it, his thought remains captive of that very power that it has been his aim to dissipate.

\* \* \* \*

This chapter was written some eight years ago. Since that time Foucault has died, but just before his death in 1984 he issued two volumes of his projected *History of Sexuality* and left another in sufficiently

finished form to permit hope of its publication in the near future. The two volumes in hand, *L'Usage des plaisirs* and *Le Souci de soi*, represent a considerable departure from the original plan of the project, which was to have concentrated on the development of that *scientia sexualis* which he considered to be a creation unique to modern Western society. Instead, he turned to the study of the ancient *ars erotica* as it had developed from its putative invention in fourth-century Greece to its transformation into an "ethics of pleasure" in second-century Rome. The promised fourth volume, entitled *Les Aveux de la chair*, will deal with the elaboration of Christian "sexual ethics" during the patristic period.

These studies are not intended to provide a historical background for the understanding of the modern "science of sex" that had originally engaged Foucault's attention. On the contrary, he continued to insist on the discontinuities and differences between the three great traditions of the discourse of sexuality in the West. He denied, for example, that the ethical theories of the Roman Stoics had anything in common with Christian asceticism. On the contrary, he argued, the "ethics of pleasure" that took shape in Roman culture during the period of the Empire was the last phase of a development begun in Greece centuries earlier rather than a prefiguration of the "confessions of the flesh" that would triumph with Christianity in the fourth century A.D. Why, then, we must ask, did Foucault turn his attention to the study of what he might well have considered to be a purely antiquarian topic?

In the last interview given before his death, Foucault offered two reasons for his attention to the Classical period. One was his desire to study the phenomena of "individual conduct"; and the other was his interest in the relation of "the question of style" to ethics and morality. In his earlier studies of madness, health, the human sciences, and prisons, he said: "Many things that were implicit therein were never able to be rendered explicit because of the way I posed problems. I wished to pin down [*repérer*] three great types of problems: that of truth, that of power, and that of individual conduct." These three areas of experience, he continued, could be adequately comprehended "only in their interrelationships, and no one of them can be understood without the others." What bothered him about his earlier books was that he had "considered the first two experiences without taking into account the third." It was in the interest of taking into account "individual conduct" that he had been forced to elaborate the notion of style and especially the notion of a "style of life." The "question of

style," he averred, was "central to the ancient experience: stylization of the relation with one's self, style of conduct, stylization of one's relations with others." The ancient world

never ceased to pose the question of knowing whether it might be possible to define a style common to different areas of conduct. Effectively the discovery of this style would have permitted the definition of the subject. The unity of a "morality of style" began to be conceptualized only under the Roman Empire, in the second and third centuries, and immediately in terms of a code and of truth.

Not that Greek and Roman thought were to be held up as more enlightened or nobler alternatives to either Christian thought or its modern "scientific" counterparts. Quite the contrary: Foucault purported to have found nothing "admirable" or "exemplary" in ancient thought about sex, love, or pleasures. Ancient thought on these matters, in his view, consisted of little more than a "profound error." In fact, ancient thought was shot through with a massive contradiction: between the search for a "certain style of life" and "the effort to render it common to everybody." In other words, the very notion of a style of life was thinkable only against the notion of a style common to everybody. To have style, to live with style, was to live in contrast to what "everybody" else believed, thought, or practiced.

Style, then, is set in opposition to ethics, in the manner in which the individual is to be set in opposition to that "subject" that is always the presumption of every "system" of morality. What was admirable and original about Classical thought was its search for an adequate concept of style; what was less than admirable was its consistent confusion of style with a code that could be applied to all as a rule of ethical comportment. The transformation of the quest for a style of living into the project of constructing "a form of ethics that would be acceptable to everyone—in the sense that everyone would have been obliged to submit to it—seemed to me catastrophic."

The dynamics of this long, slow process of transformation is the subject of *L'Usage des plaisirs* and *Le Souci de soi*. In a sense, then, these volumes tell the story of the failure of Classical thought to escape the lure of ethics. What began as little more than a search for an aesthetics of pleasures, the means of heightening the gratifications of sexual desire, ends as an ethics of pleasures that defines gratification as abstinence from sexual activity or the confinement of it to the

exigencies of a "spiritual matrimony." In the process, the individual is reduced to the status of a "subject" whose principal obligation to his "self" is to deny, repress, or sublimate his pleasures to his duties.

The irony of this story is contained in the fact that among the Greeks and Romans the pursuit of sexual pleasures was not regulated by the established centers of public power, the state and religion. Here was an area of individual freedom, at least for that small elite of nobles that made up the only group that counted in ancient times. Sex, Foucault insists, was regarded as a perfectly "natural" activity, carrying with it no imputation of being either evil in itself or harmful in its effects. At least, such was the case prior to the identification of sexual activity as an object of systematic study and cultivation in the fourth century B.C. This identification of sex as an object of study was tantamount to the Fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden, because once sex became fixed as an object of study, its "problematization" followed as a matter of course. And once it had been problematized, it was inevitably transformed into an object of moral concern and ethical regulation. Thus, the folly displayed in every "will to know" returns as the subject under discussion, as it had been in every one of Foucault's earlier books. And the plot of the story he has to tell is substantially the same also. Through a series of condensations and displacements, effected by discourse itself, what had once been conceived as simply a fact of life becomes first an object of systematic study, then a chaos of differences that must be reduced to an order, next a hierarchy of activities sharing more or less in the essence that is presumed to underlie them all, and finally a set of practices regulated by a code of comportment that prescribes abstinence as the means to gratification. The greater irony is contained in the fact that none of this was prescribed by the powers that governed society. It was all a consequence of that human fatality, the "will to know."

So *L'Usage des plaisirs* and *Le Souci de soi* are ironic titles, inasmuch as the former indicates a practice that leads to the disuse of pleasures and the latter indicates the mistake contained in the notion that there is a self to care for. The Greek search for an aesthetics of sexual pleasures ends in a conceptualization of "true love" (*le véritable amour*) in which the fixation on the desire of the adult male for the adolescent boy is sublimated into "the love of truth." The quest for "true love," that is, the essence of love, eventuates in a doctrine that makes the "access to truth" dependent upon "sexual austerity." And so, too, with respect to "the care of the self" as cultivated especially

by Roman theorists of desire under the high Empire. Here too it is what might be called "the fetishism of truth" that triumphs over the desire to "know" about the self and to analyze its potentialities for the living of a "good life." By way of an account of how Roman thinkers conceptualized the topics of body, woman, and boys, Foucault's story culminates in his representation of the "new erotics" which resembles Christian asceticism in the rules it lays down for the living of the good life. But the orientation differs from the Greek project of aestheticizing sexual pleasures. "The care of the self" orients thought and practice differently from "the use of pleasures." These differences are reflected in the distances that separate "use" and "care," on the one side, and "pleasures" and "selves," on the other. The "new erotics" that crystallizes in the Roman Empire and is centered on the care of the self features as its ironic inversion the substitution of virginity for sex as the highest style of life.

At the center of the Roman ideal was a profound concern for that self that had been invented precisely to serve as the object of the "care" that now took the place of the pursuit of pleasures. This self was conceptualized in ways radically different from the Christian version thereof that would serve as the object of Christian regulation. But far from being the liberating discovery that modern humanists conceive it to have been, this self was nothing but another instrumentality for cultivating the concern that had generated its invention.

Foucault's analyses of Greek and Roman ethics are of a piece with his attacks elsewhere upon the illusions of humanism. At the base of these attacks is his refusal to credit the idea of a human subject. The idea that there resides within the individual a subjectivity—an essential self—that it is the duty of the individual to cultivate, at the expense of the pleasures available for enjoyment, is for Foucault the error shared by Christianity, Classical humanism, and the modern human sciences alike. Thus, volumes 2 and 3 of the *History of Sexuality* must be seen as parts of his more general project of contributing to that "death of Man" that he announced at the end of *The Order of Things*. But it is significant, I would say, that in these last works Foucault turned once more to reflection on the question of style and its relation to the play of the discourse of truth, on the one side, and that of desire, on the other. For in this turn we see a return to the one idea that, as I wrote in my original version of this essay, "appears to escape Foucault's critical ire," the idea of style.

I noted earlier that Foucault praised Roussel for his "reversed

style," a manner of writing that effectively canceled itself out in its very articulation. In his account of the Classical discourse of sexuality, he appears to fault the ancients for their failure to develop a similarly reversed style in the cultivation of their pleasures. It was not, apparently, a matter of holding fast to an aesthetic attitude in this domain of experience, because insofar as a given experience is "problematized" by being made into an object of systematic inquiry, it is already on the way to becoming an object of moral concern—so intimately is morality related to any "will to know." A generally aesthetic attitude is no more intrinsically liberating than a purely cognitive one; in fact, it is repressive insofar as it involves a cognitive moment in its elaboration. What is required, it would seem, is an aesthetic attitude in which the cultivation of a style takes precedence over any curiosity about the true nature of the experience being stylized. A liberatory style would be one improvised solely for heightening pleasures on the occasion of their possibility but dissolved at the moment of gratification. Any attempt to extend the stylization improvised for one occasion to another, any attempt to generalize a style of comportment and to make of it a code applicable to all occasions, would represent a slippage from an aesthetic into an ethical attitude.

Needless to say, Foucault's attack on ethics—a project he inherited from Nietzsche—required that he practice a kind of scholarship or a manner of philosophizing that would not itself represent a distinct ethical stance or a merely aesthetic attitude, lacking any claim to cognitive authority. Apparently, he came to regard the notion of style or stylization as a third alternative to these two dangers. Not, to be sure, style understood as fine writing but rather style conceived as "a certain constant manner of speaking" that claimed authority to illuminate only the specific topic under study. In his last interview, Foucault opined that all of his early works featured "a certain use of specialized terms [*vocabulaire*], of play, and of philosophical experiment" as well as "methods slightly rhetorical." All this he characterized as a "reflexive style." But, he continued, he had "abruptly broken" with these practices" around 1975-76 "when he had undertaken to "write a history of the subject . . . and of which it would be necessary to recount its genesis and dissolution." The development of a new style of presentation was necessitated by the desire to liberate himself from that earlier way of philosophizing ("de me dependre de cette form—là de philosophic"). And while this turn to what appeared a purely

historical interest might seem to some to mark a passage to a "radical non-philosophy" but that would be in reality a way of "thinking more radically the philosophical experience"—would this not be the equivalent in the human sciences of that *style renversé* that Foucault claimed to have found in Roussel's experiments in aleatory writing? And would not such a reverse style be appropriate for a scholar who wished to save his own individuality from the "subjection" that adherence to a consistent stylistic practice would signify? Would it not be the height of irony for a scholar known for his idiosyncratic style in his early works to end his career by the composition of at least two books in which what was written was "straight" history, in which the method used was the most conventional kind of philological analysis, and in which the manner of composition was so pedantic as to make of sex the most boring of subjects?

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Foucault's last interview is printed as "Le Retour de la morale," in *Les Nouvelles*, 28 June-5 July 1984, 37-41.

politics is surely of a piece with the death of a cultural endowment that takes the "timelessness" of the "classics" for granted. At the very end of his book, Jameson recalls Benjamin's "identification of culture and barbarism" in "The Theses on the Philosophy of History." Benjamin reminds us of the extent to which even "the greatest cultural monuments" are "stained with the guilt not merely of culture in particular but of History itself as one long nightmare" (299). And this reminder, Jameson says, is a salutary "rebuke" and "corrective" to "the doctrine of the political unconscious" itself. It recalls us to consciousness of the extent to which "within the symbolic power of art and culture the will to domination preserves intact."

And if this is true of "art and culture," is it not true also of those philosophies of art and culture, of which the Marxist master narrative is one? Is it not possibly true of narrative itself? Is it not possible that the doctrine of history, so arduously cultivated by the Western tradition of thought since the Greeks as an instrument for releasing human consciousness from the constraints of the Archaic age, is ready for retirement along with the politics it helped to enable? And could not the death of "History," politics, and narrative all be aspects of another great transformation, similar in scope and effect to that which marked the break with Archaicism begun by the Greeks? Marx thought the communist revolution would release humankind from the conditions of pseudo-historical existence and usher in a genuinely historical one. The problem may be not how to get into history but how to get out of it. And in this respect, modernism in the arts may be less a regression to a pseudo-mythic condition of consciousness than an impulse to get beyond the myth-history distinction, which has served as the theoretical basis for a politics that has outlived its usefulness, and into a post-political age insofar as politics is conceived in its nineteenth-century incarnations.

## 7. The Metaphysics of Narrativity: Time and Symbol in Ricoeur's Philosophy of History

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Recent debate over the nature of historical narrative has been carried out in terms of the adequacy of the story form of discourse to the representation of reality. Historical theorists such as the *Annalists*, who were interested in transforming historiography into a science, could legitimately point out that the natural sciences had little interest in storytelling as an aim of their enterprise. And indeed, it could be argued with some pertinence that the transformation of a field of study into a genuine science has always been attended by an abandonment of anything like an interest in inventing a story to tell about its object of study in favor of the task of discovering the laws that governed its structures and functions. According to this view, the prevalence of any interest in storytelling within a discipline aspiring to the status of a science was prima facie evidence of its proto-scientific, not to mention its manifestly mythical or ideological, nature. Getting the "story" out of "history" was therefore a first step in the transformation of historical studies into a science.

The defense of narrative history by Anglo-American thinkers was based on a similar identification of narrative with the story form of discourse. For the principal defenders of narrative historiography in this tradition, the adequacy of the story form to the representation of historical events and processes was manifest, even if the theoretical justification of that adequacy remained to be provided. In their view, not only was a story a legitimate form of explanation for specifically historical events and processes but it was the *proper* way of representing historical events in discourse, inasmuch as such events could be established as displaying the kind of forms met with in traditional

story types. Historical stories differed from fictional stories by virtue of the fact that they referred to real rather than to imaginary events. But "true" historical stories did not differ from historical events by virtue of their formal features, because history itself was a congeries of lived stories awaiting only the historian to transform them into prose equivalents.

Now, neither the attack on nor the defense of narrative history did justice to the variety of kinds of stories met with in literature, folklore, and myth; the differences between the techniques of the traditional novel and the modernist novel; or the complex relation between "literature" and the "real world," to which the former undeniably referred even if in the most indirect and allegorical manner. The notion that historical narratives were unrealistic because they were cast in the form of a story implied that literature could not illuminate the "real world" in any important way. But the idea that historical narratives illuminated the "real world" because the world displayed the form of a well-made story, with "characters" engaged in conflicts similar to those encountered in traditional kinds of stories, was similarly untenable. What was obviously called for was an analysis of narrative, narration, and narrativity that would take into account the many forms of story-telling met with in world literature, from ancient epics through the post-modernist novel, and a reconceptualization of the possible relations existing between the three principal kinds of narrative discourse—mythic, historical, and fictional—and the "real world" to which they undeniably referred. It was to these tasks that Paul Ricoeur turned in the late 1970s.

The results of Ricoeur's labors are now available in his magisterial *Temps et récit (Time and Narrative)*, which must be accounted the most important synthesis of literary and historical theory produced in our century.<sup>1</sup> Although at the moment of this writing only two of the projected three volumes of *Time and Narrative* have been published, the plan of the whole is discernible. The analysis consists of four parts in three volumes. Volume 1 contains parts 1 and 2: "The Circle of Narrativity and Temporality" and "History and Narrative," respectively. Volume 2 contains part 3: "Configuration in Fictional Narrative." Volume 3, entitled *Temps raconté*, will present "the threefold testimony of phenomenology, history, and fiction" regarding the "power" of narrative to "refigure time" in such a way as to reveal the "secret relationship" of eternity to death (*TN*, preface and 101).

In his work, Ricoeur seeks to sort out the different notions of story, storytelling, and narrativity informing the principal theories of

narrative discourse set forth in our time. In the process, he redefines historical narrative as a kind of allegory of temporality, but an allegory of a special kind, namely, a true allegory. This is not to say that he denies cognitive authority to other kinds of allegory, such as theological, mythical, and poetic allegory. On the contrary, he grants to fictional narrativity a capacity to represent a deeper insight into the "human experience of temporality" than does either its historical or its mythical counterpart. Nonetheless, historical narrative is assigned a specific task in the representation of a reality that presents itself to human consciousness, in one aspect at least, as an insoluble but ultimately "comprehensible" mystery. This mystery is nothing other than the enigma of being-in-time. Taken in conjunction with Ricoeur's earlier *The Rule of Metaphor (La métaphore vive)*,<sup>2</sup> which forms what he calls a "pair" with *Time and Narrative (TN, 2:ix)*, we will have, when the latter work is finished, a comprehensive theory of the relation between language, narrative discourse, and temporality by which to appreciate the degree of truth to be accorded to any representation of the world in the form of a narrative.

The overarching thesis of *Time and Narrative* is that temporality is "the structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity" and that narrativity is "the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent." This formulation appears in Ricoeur's 1980 essay, "Narrative Time," which plainly indicates that his study of the truth of narrative is based on a notion of the narrativistic nature of time itself.<sup>3</sup> The contention is not that historians impose a narrative form on sets or sequences of real events that might just as legitimately be represented in some other, nonnarrative discourse but that historical events possess the same structure as narrative discourse. It is their narrative structure that distinguishes historical events from natural events (which lack such a structure). It is because historical events possess a narrative structure that historians are justified in regarding stories as valid representations of such events and treating such representations as explanations of them.

Needless to say, Ricoeur's notion of story differs in important ways from that used by recent Anglo-American philosophers to account for the explanatory effect of narrative histories. It is not enough simply to tell the story of what happened in the past, in the manner of a sports journalist recounting the sequence of contingencies that resulted in the outcome of an athletic contest on a given day. A narrative history is not necessarily, Ricoeur insists, a "species" of the genus "story" (*TN*, 1:179, 228). Any number of different kinds of



stories could be told about any given sequence of real events, and all of them might be equally plausible accounts thereof. We could follow such stories perfectly well and credit them all as possible ways of making sense of the events related in them but still not feel that we had been provided with a specifically "historical" account of the events in question—any more than we feel that we have been provided with a historical account of yesterday's political or economic events after we have read a newspaper account of them. Journalists tell stories about "what happened" yesterday or yesteryear and often explain what happened with greater or lesser adequacy, in the same way that detectives or lawyers in courts of law may do. But the stories they tell should not be confused with historical narratives—as theorists of historiography looking for an analogue of historical discourse in the world of everyday affairs so often do—because such stories typically lack the "secondary referentiality" of historical narratives, the indirect reference to the "structure of temporality" that gives to the events related in the story the aura of "historicality" (*Geschichtlichkeit*).<sup>4</sup> Without this particular secondary referent, the journalistic story, however interesting, insightful, informative, and even explanatory it may be, remains locked within the confines of the purview of the "chronicle."

By the same token, Ricoeur's notion of the historical narrative differs from that of certain formalist or rhetorical analysts of folktales, epics, and novels, for whom the essence of a story is contained in its disposition of "functional mechanisms," which can be put in any order as long as the conventions of the genre to which the story belongs are observed (or, conversely, systematically transgressed). What such notions of narrative miss, in Ricoeur's view, is the logic, or rather the poetics, that presides over the integration of such mechanisms into a discursive whole that means more, because it says more than the sum total of the sentences that it comprises. For him, a narrative discourse is not analyzable into the local meanings of the sentences that make it up. A discourse is not, as some would have it, a sentence writ large; any analysis of a discourse carried out on the analogy of a grammatical or rhetorical explication of the sentence will miss the larger structure of meaning, figurative or allegorical in nature, that the discourse as a whole produces.

In contrast, then, to both chronicles of events and what we may call "dissertative" discourses, the kinds of discursive stories that interest Ricoeur and that he takes to be the types told in narrative histories are characterized by their possession of plots. To "emplot" a sequence of events and thereby transform what would otherwise be only a

chronicle of events into a story is to effect a mediation between events and certain universally human "experiences of temporality." And this goes for fictional stories no less than for historical stories. The meaning of stories is given in their "emplotment." By emplotment, a sequence of events is "configured" ("grasped together") in such a way as to represent "symbolically" what would otherwise be unutterable in language,<sup>5</sup> namely, the ineluctably "aporetic" nature of the human experience of time.<sup>6</sup>

Historical discourse is a privileged instantiation of the human capacity to endow the experience of time with meaning, because the immediate referent (the *Bedeutung*) of this discourse is real, rather than imaginary, events. The novelist can invent the events that his stories comprise, in the sense of imaginatively producing them, in response to the exigencies of emplotment or, for that matter, of disemplotment, after the manner of modernist, antinarrativist writers. But the historian cannot, in this sense, invent the events of his stories; he must (in that other, equally traditional sense of *invention*) "find" or "discover" them. This is because historical events have already been "invented" (in the sense of "created") by past human agents who, by their actions, produced lives worthy of having stories told about them.<sup>7</sup> This means that the intentionality informing human actions, as against mere motions, conduces to the creation of lives that have the coherency of emplotted stories. This is one reason why, I take it, the very notion of a modernist historiography, modeled on the modernist, antinarrativist novel, would be in Ricoeur's estimation a contradiction in terms.

The meaning of real human lives, whether of individuals or collectivities, is the meaning of the plots, quasiplots, paraplots, or failed plots by which the events that those lives comprise are endowed with the aspect of stories having a discernible beginning, middle, and end. A meaningful life is one that aspires to the coherency of a story with a plot. Historical agents prospectively prefigure their lives as stories with plots. This is why the historian's retrospective emplotment of historical events cannot be the product of the imaginative freedom enjoyed by the writer of fictions. Historiographical emplotment is, Ricoeur argues, a poetic activity, but it belongs to the (Kantian) "productive imagination" rather than to the "reproductive" or merely "associative" imagination of the writer of fictions, because it is the productive imagination that is at work in the making of distinctively historical events no less than in the activity of retrospectively emplotting, or refiguring, them which it is the historian's duty to carry out (*TN*, 1:68).

The creation of a historical narrative, then, is an action exactly like that by which historical events are created, but in the domain of "wording" rather than that of "working."<sup>8</sup> By discerning the plots "prefigured" in historical actions by the agents that produced them and "configuring" them as sequences of events having the coherency of stories with a beginning, middle, and end, historians make explicit the meaning implicit in historical events themselves. While this meaning is prefigured in the actions of historical agents, the agents themselves cannot foresee it, because human actions have consequences that extend beyond the purview of those who perform them. This is why it is wrong, from Ricoeur's point of view, for historians to limit themselves to trying to see things from the position of past agents alone, to trying to think themselves back into the mind or consciousness of past actors in the historical drama. They are fully justified in availing themselves of the advantages of hindsight. Moreover, they are fully justified in using the techniques of analysis developed by the social sciences of their own time to identify social forces at work in the agent's milieu, because these forces may have been only emergent in the agent's time and place and not perceivable to the latter.

Human actions have consequences that are both foreseeable and unforeseeable, that are informed by intentions both conscious and unconscious, and that are frustratable by contingent factors that are both knowable and unknowable. It is for this reason that narrative is necessary for the representation of "what actually happened" in a given domain of historical occurrences. A scientific (or scientific) historiography of the sort envisioned by the *Annalists*, which deals in large-scale, physical and social, anonymous "forces," is not so much wrong as simply able to tell only a part of the story of human beings at grips with their individual and collective destinies. It produces the historiographical equivalent of a drama that is all scene and no actors, or a novel that is all theme but lacking in characters. Such a historiography features all background and no foreground. The best it could provide would be "quasi-history," comprising "quasi-events," enacted by "quasi-characters," and displaying the form of a "quasi-plot" (TN, 1:206 ff.).

And, indeed, as Ricoeur shows in his analysis of Braudel's great book, *The Mediterranean*, once a human being is allowed to enter such a scene, inhabited only by forces, processes, and structures, it becomes impossible to resist the lure of the narrative mode of discourse for representing what is "happening" in that scene (TN, 1:25). Even Braudel must tell stories whenever human beings acting as agents are

permitted to appear against the background of those "forces" that he would describe solely in quantitative and statistical terms. This even against his own conscious repudiation of narrativity as the principal impediment to the creation of a scientific historiography.

Historians, then, not only are justified in telling stories about the past but cannot do otherwise and still do justice to the full content of the historical past. The historical past is populated above all by human beings, who, besides being acted on by "forces," are acting with or against such forces for the realization of life projects that have all the drama and fascination, but also the meaning (*Sinn*), of the kinds of stories we encounter in myth, religious parable, and literary fiction. Ricoeur does not erase the distinction between literary fiction and historiography, as I have been accused of doing, but he does scumble the line between them by insisting that both belong to the category of symbolic discourses and share a single "ultimate referent." While freely granting that history and literature differ from one another in terms of their immediate referents (*Bedeutungen*), which are "real" and "imaginary" events, respectively, he stresses that insofar as both produce emplotted stories, their ultimate referent (*Sinn*) is the human experience of time or "the structures of temporality."<sup>9</sup>

Ricoeur's insistence that history and literature share a common "ultimate referent" represents a considerable advancement over previous discussions of the relations between history and literature based on the supposed opposition of "factual" to "fictional" discourse (TN, 1:64). Just by virtue of its narrative form, historical discourse resembles such literary fictions as epics, novels, short stories, and so on, and Barthes and the *Annalists* are justified in stressing those resemblances. But instead of regarding this as a sign of narrative history's weakness, Ricoeur interprets it as a strength. If histories resemble novels, he points out, this may be because both are speaking indirectly, figuratively, or, what amounts to the same thing, "symbolically," about the same "ultimate referent." Speaking indirectly because that about which both history and literature speak, the aporias of temporality, cannot be spoken about directly without contradiction. The aporias of temporality must be spoken about in the idiom of symbolic discourse rather than in that of logical and technical discourse. But history and literature speak indirectly about the aporetic Experiences of temporality by means of and through signifiers that belong to different orders of being, real events on the one side, imaginary events on the other.<sup>10</sup>

! Ricoeur's conception of the symbolic nature of all discourses that

feature temporality as an organizing principle also allows him to make a significant advance over many contemporary discussions of the relation between the history and the chronicle. For him, the chronicle of events out of which the historian makes his story is not an innocent representation of raw facts given by the documentary record and presenting itself, as it were, spontaneously to the eye of the historian, who then "explains" the events or identifies the story embedded within the sparse chronological account. Ricoeur points out that the chronicle is already a figured representation of events, a first-order symbolization that, like the "history" made out of it, has a double referent: events on the one side and a "structure of temporality" on the other.

There is nothing natural about chronologically ordered registrations of events. Not only is the chronological code in terms of which the events are ordered culture-specific and conventional but the events included in the chronicle must be selected by the chronicler and placed there to the exclusion of other events that might have been included if the time of their occurrence had been the only operative consideration. A chronicle is not a narrative, by Ricoeur's reasoning, because it does not possess the kind of structure with which a plot alone could endow it. But that does not mean that it is not a mode of symbolic discourse, for neither its referentiality nor its meaning is exhausted by the truths of its several singular existential statements taken distributively, in the way that the truth value of a logical and technical discourse can be determined. While the value of the chronicle considered as a list of facts is undeniable, its value as an instance of proto-narrative discourse is equally great. In fact, Ricoeur argues, the chronicle is the symbolic mode in which the human experience of "within-time-ness" achieves expression in discourse.<sup>11</sup>

What the chronicle says, then, is not only that so-and-so happened at a given time and then something else happened at another time, but that "seriality" is a mode or level of organization of a life lived "within-time." This double saying of the chronicle provides a basis for distinguishing between well-made chronicles and those more crudely composed and, indeed, between artistic and everyday forms of chronicling, the "plotless" novel being an example of the former and the diary or register of business transactions being an example of the latter. There is a difference between giving expression to the experience of "within-time-ness" (as in a diary) and self-consciously affirming that this is the only experience of temporality human beings can know (as the modernist, antinarrative novel seems to do). This difference also appears in the distinction, often drawn by Ricoeur in his studies of

religious myths, between those that locate the origin of evil in the physical cosmos and those that try to "take the origin back to man."<sup>12</sup> In the former kind of myth, we have the equivalent of the expression of the experience of "within-time-ness"; in the latter, that of the expression of the experience of "historicality." This difference marks a qualitative advance, within the general category of mythic thought from cognitive self-consciousness and human self-awareness. The difference between a chronicle and a history marks a similar kind of advance in the human effort to "make sense" of temporality.

If every chronicle is a first-order symbolization of temporality, awaiting the emplotting powers of the historian to transform it into a history, so, too "within-time-ness" is only a first-order experience of temporality, awaiting a deeper recognition of the level of temporality, which Ricoeur calls the "experience of historicality" (*Geschichtlichkeit*). Here the crucial difference is between the experience of time as mere seriality and an experience of temporality in which events take on the aspect of elements of lived stories, with a discernible beginning, middle, and end. In historicality, events appear not only to succeed one another in the regular order of the series but also to function as inaugurations, transitions, and terminations of processes that are meaningful because they manifest the structures of plots. Historians bear witness to the reality of this level of temporal organization by casting their accounts in the form of narratives, because this mode of discourse alone is adequate to the representation of the experience of historicality in a way that is both literal in what it asserts about specific events and figurative in which it suggests about the meaning of this experience. What the historical narrative literally asserts about specific events is that they really happened, and what it figuratively suggests is that the whole sequence of events that really happened has the order and significance of well-made stories.

Here Ricoeur skates dangerously near to the formalism that he wishes to avoid, for when the notion of the well-made story, that is, the emplotted story, is applied to historical narrative, it appears to make historiography a matter of "style" and internal coherence rather than one of adequacy to what it represents. Ricoeur seeks to avoid this danger by reworking the notion of mimesis in order to account for the fact that historical stories both are "well-made" and correspond in their outlines to the sequences of events of which they are representations.

Ricoeur reworks the concept of mimesis in order to show how a discourse cast in the form of a narrative can be both symbolic and

realistic at one and the same time. His exposition, drawing upon his earlier work on metaphor and myth, is too complex for a brief recapitulation here. His crucial point, however, is that insofar as historical representation is concerned, mimesis has less to do with "imitation" than with the kind of action (praxis) that properly serves as the subject matter of a history. He challenges the traditional, Aristotelian distinction between mimesis, considered as an imitation of an action in a discourse, and diegesis, considered as a description of events, on which the opposition of fictional to factual discourse conventionally has been based (*TN*, 2:36-37). For Ricoeur, this distinction is useful enough for the characterization of the kinds of representations met with in the drama. When used, however, to analyze the narrative mode of discourse, it obscures the fact that a narrative not only describes but actually imitates the events of which it speaks, because narrative, like discourse in general, is a product of the same kinds of actions as those that produce the kinds of events deemed worthy of being represented in a history.<sup>13</sup>

In Ricoeur's view, then, narrative discourse does not simply reflect or passively register a world already made; it works up the material given in perception and reflection, fashions it, and creates something new, in precisely the same way that human agents by their actions fashion distinctive forms of historical life out of the world they inherit as their past. Thus conceived, a historical narrative is not only an icon of the events, past or present, of which it speaks; it is also an index of the kind of actions that produce the kinds of events we wish to call historical. It is this indexical nature of historical narrative that assures the adequacy of its symbolic representations to the real events about which they speak. Historical events can be distinguished from natural events by virtue of the fact that they are products of the actions of human agents seeking, more or less self-consciously, to endow the world in which they live with symbolic meaning. Historical events can therefore be represented realistically in symbolic discourse, because such events are themselves symbolic in nature. So it is with the historian's composition of a narrative account of historical events: the narrativization of historical events effects a symbolic representation of the processes by which human life is endowed with symbolic meaning.

Narrative discourse, then, is as much "performative" as it is "constative," to use the terminology of early Austin, which Ricoeur favors at crucial junctures in his discussions of metaphoric language and symbolic discourse.<sup>14</sup> And historical narrative, which takes the events created by human actions as its immediate subject, does much more

than merely describe those events; it also imitates them, that is, performs the same kind of creative act as those performed by historical agents. History has meaning because human actions produce meanings. These meanings are continuous over the generations of human time. This continuity, in turn, is felt in the human experience of time organized as future, past, and present rather than as mere serial consecution. To experience time as future, past, and present rather than as a series of instants in which every one has the same weight or significance as every other is to experience "historicality." This experience of historicality, finally, can be represented symbolically in narrative discourse, because such discourse is a product of the same kind of hypotactical figuration of events (as beginnings, middles, and ends) as that met with in the actions of historical agents who hypotactically figure their lives as meaningful stories.

Obviously, any adequate criticism of Ricoeur's argument would have to examine in depth his whole theory of symbolic language and discourse, his revision of the concept of mimesis as it applies to representation in narrative, his conception of the nature of the distinctively historical event, his notion of the different levels of temporality and the ways in which these attain to expression in language, his ideas of emplotment as the key to the understanding of a distinctively historical mode of consciousness, his characterization of the kind of knowledge we derive from our reflection on history, and a host of other issues. His conceptualization of each of these matters constitutes an important contribution to literary theory, the philosophy of history, social theory, and metaphysics alike. It is difficult, however, to detach any one conceptualization from the others for purposes of analysis, because each is a part of a whole argument that is more "symbolical" than either "logical" or "technical" (to use his own categories for classifying kinds of discourses) in structure.<sup>15</sup> To be sure, Ricoeur's work is always cast on the manifest level as a technical, philosophical discourse presided over by the protocols of literal speech and traditional logic. But as he has said of those mythic and religious texts that he himself has analyzed so perspicuously as examples of symbolic speech, Ricoeur's own discourse always says something "more" and "other" than what it appears to be asserting on the literal level of its articulation. It is fair to ask, then, What is the something "more" and "other" that Ricoeur is saying about historical narrative?

One thing he is saying is that narrative historians need feel no embarrassment about resemblances between the stories they tell and those told by writers of fiction. Historical stories and fictional stories

resemble one another because whatever the differences between their immediate contents (real events and imaginary events, respectively), their ultimate content is the same: the structures of human time. Their shared form, narrative, is a function of this shared content. There is nothing more real for human beings than the experience of temporality—and nothing more fateful, either for individuals or for whole civilizations. Thus, any narrative representation of human events is an enterprise of profound philosophical—one could even say anthropological—seriousness. It does not matter whether the events that serve as the immediate referents of a narrative are considered to be real or only imaginary; what matters is whether these events are considered to be typically human.

Historical narratives may, therefore, resemble fictional narratives, but this tells us more about such fictions than about such histories. Far from being an antithetical opposite of historical narrative, fictional narrative is its complement and ally in the universal human effort to reflect on the mystery of temporality. Indeed, narrative fiction permits historians to perceive clearly the metaphysical interest motivating their traditional effort to tell "what really happened" in the past in the form of a story. There, in narrative fiction, the experiences of both "within-time-ness" and "historicality" can be dissolved in the apprehension of the relation of "eternity" to "death," which is the content of the form of temporality itself.

Thus conceived, narrative fiction provides glimpses of the deep structure of historical consciousness and, by implication, of both historical reflection and historical discourse. This resemblance between historical narrative and fictional narrative, which is a function of their shared interest in the mystery of time, would account, I surmise, for the appeal of those great classics of historical narrative—from Herodotus's *Persian Wars* through Augustine's *City of God*, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Michelet's *History of France*, and Burckhardt's *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* down to, yes, even Spengler's *Decline of the West*—that makes them worthy of study and reflection long after their scholarship has become outmoded and their arguments have been consigned to the status of commonplaces of the culture moments of their composition. It is true, as the conventional opinion has it, that such classics continue to appeal to us because of their "literary" quality; but this quality should not be identified with verbal style or rhetorical eloquence, as if style could be dissociated from meaning, or rhetorical form from semantic content. On the basis of Ricoeur's theory of historical discourse, we are permitted to

attribute the timeless fascination of the historiographical classic to the content that it shares with every poetic utterance cast in the mode of a narrative. This content is allegorical: every great historical narrative is an allegory of temporality. Thus, long after its scholarship has been superseded and its arguments exploded as prejudices of the cultural moment of its production (as in Gibbon's contention that the fall of Rome was caused by the solvent effects of Christianity on pagan manly virtues), the classic historical narrative continues to fascinate as the product of a universal human need to reflect on the insoluble mystery of time.

But in suggesting that historical narratives are, in the final analysis, allegories of temporality, what something "more" and "other" is Ricoeur saying about allegory itself? As I understand him, he is saying that histories are not *mere* allegories, in the sense of being nothing but plays of analogy or "extended metaphors," for it is clear on the basis of what Ricoeur has to say about *allegoresis* in other contexts that there are for him different kinds of allegorization, different ways of "speaking otherwise," and different degrees of responsibility to those aspects of reality about which we can speak in only an indirect or symbolic manner.<sup>16</sup> For Ricoeur, the problem presented by both historical discourse and the interpretation thereof is false allegorization, a speaking otherwise about history that suggests either that it is a timeless, mechanical structure of functions without meaning or that it is a temporal process the meaning of which can be provided by metaphysical speculation of religious dogma. For Ricoeur, the meaning of history resides in its aspect as a drama of the human effort to endow life with meaning. This universal, human quest for meaning is carried out in the awareness of the corrosive power of time, but it is also made possible and given its distinctively human pathos by this very awareness. In this respect, that manner of being-in-the-world that we call "historical" is paradoxical and cannot be apprehended by human thought except in the form of an enigma. If this enigma cannot be dissolved by pure reason and scientific explanation, it can be grasped *in* all its complexity and multilayeredness in symbolic thought and given a real, if only provisional, comprehensibility in those true allegories of temporality that we call narrative histories. Their truth resides not only in their fidelity to the facts of given individual or collective lives but also, and most importantly, in their faithfulness to that vision of human life informing the poetic genre of tragedy. In this respect, the symbolic content of narrative history, the content of its form, is the tragic vision itself.<sup>17</sup>

Historical narratives are true allegories, then—when they display the facts of human existence under their temporal aspect and symbolically suggest that the human experience of time is tragic in nature. But what is the nature of this narrative truth, which is not literal but yet is not merely figurative either? What is being indirectly asserted about historical narrative in Ricoeur's own symbolic speech?

In trying to identify the allegorical meaning of Ricoeur's discourse on historical discourse, I cast about for a way of characterizing a manner of speaking that would be allegorical in its structure but more than allegorical in its meaning. My friend and colleague Norman O. Brown directed me to the late Charles Singleton's commentary on Dante's discussion of the distinction between poetic allegory and scriptural allegory in the *Convivio*. The distinction is different from that offered in *The Letter to Can Grande*, wherein the topic discussed is the relation between the literal and the figurative senses of the language used in the *Commedia*. In the *Convivio*, Dante wishes to distinguish between the "allegory of poets" and the "allegory of Holy Scripture." The difference between the two kinds of allegory, he maintains, stems not from the distinction between the literal and the figurative levels of the two kinds of discourse but rather from the nature of the uses to which the *literal* sense is put in each. Singleton explicates Dante's thought in the following way:

The "allegory of poets," which is that of fable, of parable (and hence is also to be found in Scriptures), is a mode in which the first and literal sense is one devised, fashioned [*factio* in its original meaning) in order to conceal, and in concealing to convey, a truth. Not so in the other (scriptural allegorical) mode. . . . There the first sense is historical, as Dante says it is, and not "fiction." The children of Israel did depart from Egypt in the time of Moses. Whatever the other senses may be, this first sense abides, stands quite on its own, is not devised "for the sake of." Indeed it was generally recognized that in Holy Scripture the historical sense might at times be the only sense there. These things have been so; they have happened in time. This is the record of them.<sup>18</sup>

This means, Singleton goes on to explain, that although in Scripture "the historical . . . sense can and does yield another sense," in the same way that the literal sense in poetic allegory does, as when, for example, the Exodus can be read as a figure of "the movement of the soul on the way to salvation," the relation between the two senses should not be seen as that of a fiction to its moral or anagogical meaning.

The relation is, rather, that of a "fact" to its moral or anagogical significance. In scriptural allegory, events are portrayed, not in order to conceal, and in concealing to convey, a truth," but rather to reveal, and in revealing to convey, yet another, deeper truth. For Dante, Singleton writes, "only God could use events as words, causing them to point beyond themselves" to meanings that must be construed as being literal truths on *all* of their multifold levels of significance. Thus conceived, history, considered as a sequence of events, is God's "poetry."<sup>19</sup> (God writes in events as poets write in words. This is why any history considered as the human account of those events would be at best a translation of God's "poetry" into "prose," or what amounts to the same thing, a merely human "poetry." Since no poet or historian possesses God's power, the best either could do would be to "imitate God's way of writing"—which Dante purported to do in the *Commedia*. But since this writing will always be only an imitation of God's power to write in events, every history will always be something other than the events of which it speaks, both in its form and in its content. It will be a special kind of poetry which, in its intention to speak literally, is always frustrated, driven to speak poetically, that is to say, figuratively, and in so speaking to conceal what it wishes to reveal—but by concealing, conveying a much deeper truth.

Something like this, I take it, is what Ricoeur is saying in his reflections on historical narrative—although he is saying this indirectly, figuratively, allegorically. His is an allegory of allegorization, intended—if I understand him correctly—to save the moral dimension of historical consciousness from the fallacy of a false literalism and the dangers of a false objectivity.

But to reveal the allegorical nature of a discourse that does not know itself to be such is to de-allegorize it. To identify the referent of the figurative level of such discourse is to re-literalize it, even if on a level of signification different from that of its manifest or "first-order" level of signification. In Ricoeur's view, every historical discourse worthy of the name is not only a literal account of the past and a figuration of temporality but, beyond that, a literal representation of the content of a timeless drama, that of humanity at grips with the "experience of temporality." This content, in turn, is nothing other than the moral meaning of humanity's aspiration to redemption from history itself.

This seems right to me, for otherwise I cannot account for the ferocity of all those struggles, between human beings and whole societies, for the authority to decide what history means, what it teaches,

and what obligations it lays upon us all. I am not surprised, therefore, that Ricoeur presses on to the discovery of yet another level of temporal experience, what he calls the experience of "deep temporality," which has as its content the enigma of death and eternity, the ultimate mystery figured in every manifestation of human consciousness.<sup>20</sup> On this level, which would correspond to the analogical level in the scholastic fourfold schema, not only discourse but speech itself reaches a limit. But the form in which the experience of deep temporality reaches expression in language is glimpsed in such disemplotted "fables about time" as *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Remembrance of Things Past* (TN, 2:101).

The function of the notion of deep temporality in Ricoeur's thought about history, narrativity, and time seems clear. It saves historical thinking from its most common temptation, that of irony. In this work of redemption, Ricoeur joins the efforts of Hegel and Nietzsche, for both of whom the overcoming of irony was the central problem of a distinctively human thought. While arguing (or suggesting) that historical thinking is allegorical but not merely such, that is to say, that it has a secondary referentiality in its figurative dimension to a reality that lies beyond history itself, he has escaped the danger that philosophical reflection faces when confronted by any instance of symbolic discourse, the peril of a *merely* allegorical interpretation. But has he escaped the other peril, the one that, by his own account, threatens thought in its speculative aspect, the "temptation of gnosis," the inclination to repeat "the symbol in a mimic of rationality," to rationalize "symbols as such" and "thereby fix . . . them on the imaginative plane where they are born and take shape"?<sup>21</sup> The answer to his question must await the appearance of the projected third volume of Ricoeur's meditation on narrative. Whether he will escape the danger of "dogmatic mythology" that threatens the "gnostic" turn of mind, we shall have to wait and see. It would, however, be the supreme irony if, in his efforts to save historical reflection from irony, he were forced to collapse the distinction between myth and history, without which the very notion of fiction is difficult to imagine.

## 8. The Context in the Text: Method and Ideology in Intellectual History

Today we discern a wish to rethink the basic issues of intellectual historiography, to reexamine governing concepts and strategies of interpretation, not out of any feeling of beleagueredness, but on the contrary, in response to new methodologies that have arisen in philosophy, literary criticism, and linguistics and that offer new ways of conceiving the tasks of historical hermeneutics. The older authorities in the field—Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Dilthey, and Freud—are still present to the consciousness of the current generation of intellectual historians, but more as ancestral shades or sanctioning grandfathers than as models and guides to specific research tasks. New models, represented by Benjamin, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, by Habermas, Foucault, Derrida, Barthes, and possibly J. L. Austin, appear to have moved to the center of the scene. They authorize new ways of looking at texts, of inscribing texts within "discourses" (a new term for intellectual historians), and of linking both texts and discourses to their contexts. The social historiography of the past generation has, temporarily at least, reached a limit in its incapacity to speak meaningfully about what might be called consciousness, and the explanatory procedures of that historiography are giving way to hermeneutical procedures deriving from phenomenology, analytical philosophy and speech-act theory, deconstruction, and discourse analysis.

Clear evidence of these changes can be seen in the recent collection of essays edited by Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan, *Morvern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives* (Cornell University Press, 1982). The themes that recur in this collection touch on the principal *topoi* of the field of intellectual

history since its inception by Hegel. At the center of this set of themes is the crucial one, not only for intellectual historians but for historians of anything whatsoever, namely, that of the text-context relationship. What is this relationship? What, indeed, is a text—an entity that once had an assuring solidity and concreteness, indeed a kind of identity that allowed it to serve as a model of whatever was comprehensible in both culture and nature. What happened to that text that used to lay before the scholar in a comforting materiality and possessed an authority that the "context" in which it had arisen and to the existence of which it attested could never have? Where is this context which literary historians used to invoke as a matter of course to "explain" the distinctive features of the poetic text and to anchor it in an ambience more solid than words? What are the dimensions and levels of this context? Where does it begin and end? And what is its status as a component of the historically real which it is the historian's purpose to identify if not to explain? The text-context relationship, once an unexamined presupposition of historical investigation, has become a problem, not in the sense of being simply difficult to establish by the once vaunted "rules of evidence," but rather in the sense of becoming "undecidable," elusive, uncreditable—in the same way as the so-called rules of evidence. And yet this very undecidability of the question of where the text ends and the context begins and the nature of their relationship appears to be a cause for celebration, to provide a vista onto a new and more fruitful activity for the intellectual historian, to authorize a posture before the archive of history more dialogistic than analytic, more conversational than assertive and judgmental.

And if the text-context distinction is now problematized, so, too, is the distinction, within the domain of historical artifacts, between the so-called classic text and the common, or merely documentary, text. It used to be thought that certain texts, such as those produced by the great nineteenth-century theorists of civilization, were themselves less cultural artifacts than self-interpreting models for explanation in the human sciences. But now not even Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud can escape the charge of ideological deformation that they once brought against their opponents in the methodological and theoretical disputes of their own times. They too must be "deconstructed," their "blindness" specified, and their places in the *épistèmes* of their epochs determined before they can enter the lists as possible models of historical reconstruction and analysis. And as it is with Marx and Freud, so it is with every other "classic" text that once served as a

"representative" text of the best thought of an age: Homer and Plato, Tacitus and Augustine, Machiavelli and Erasmus, and so forth. Their very "representativeness" is brought under question, their status as both "evidence" of a "spirit of the age" and the privileged interpreters of their own time and place is placed in doubt, because representativeness and interpretation are no longer taken as unambiguous possibilities of texts. Or rather, since every text, grand or humble, is seen to be equally representative, equally interpretative of its proper milieu, the very notion of a text that might serve as an especially privileged interpretative model is set aside.

And if the classic text is problematized, so, too, is the distinction, which is of the same order, between reliably transparent texts or documents and "ideologically" distorted, unreliable, or opaque texts. Considered as historical evidence, all texts are regarded as being equally shot through with ideological elements or, what amounts to the same thing, as being equally transparent, reliable, or evidential in what they can tell us about the "mental climate" (here variously construed) in which they arose. To the historian equipped with the proper tools, it is suggested, any text or artifact can figure forth the thought-world and possibly even the world of emotional investment and praxis of its time and place of production. Not that any given text can alone call up the whole world of its origin or that any given set of texts can reveal its world completely. But in principle, it seems to be held that we today possess the tools to probe texts in ways only dimly perceived or, if perceived, not fully utilized by earlier intellectual or other historians. And these tools, it is suggested, are generally linguistic in nature.

This is not the uniform opinion, of course, and for obvious reasons. For some historians, a linguistically oriented approach to the study of history raises the specter of a Whorfian kind of relativism. A specifically Structuralist-linguistic approach to historical texts raises the threat of "ahistoricity" for which Structuralism is ritualistically denounced by many historians. A specifically Post-Structuralist—linguistic approach to historical texts holds out the prospect of an infinite "free play" of interpretative fantasy that takes one further and further from, rather than closer and closer to, the origin and subject of the texts studied. It is for reasons such as these, I surmise, that cultural critics divide rather evenly into those who (1) take their stand on one or more of the classical hermeneutics of the nineteenth century (Hegel, Dilthey, Marx, Freud) or their twentieth-century avatars; (2) adopt a neo-Humboldtian, philological theory of language lately



revived and refined by Gadamer and Ricoeur; or (3) openly embrace the post-Saussurian theory of the linguistic sign, of which both Foucault and Derrida, though in different ways, are exponents.

Here arises a division between the historian who wishes primarily to "reconstruct" or "explain" the past and one who is interested either in "interpreting" it or using its detritus as an occasion for his own speculations on the present (and future). Nineteenth-century systematic hermeneutics—of the Comtian, Hegelian, Marxist, and so on, varieties—was concerned to "explain" the past; classical philological hermeneutics, to "reconstruct" it; and modern, post-Saussurian hermeneutics, usually laced with a good dose of Nietzsche, to "interpret" it. The differences between these notions of explanation, reconstruction, and interpretation are more specific than generic, since any one of them contains elements of the others; but they point to different degrees of interest in a "scientific" enterprise, an "object of study" (the past), or the investigator's own powers of composition and invention, respectively. And this question of the domain to which the historian is responsible is, of course, a crucial issue in any effort to determine what is an appropriate performance in the discipline of history. On this question turns what might be called the ethics and possibly the politics of the discipline. To what is the historian responsible, or rather, to what *should* one be responsible?

There can be no answer to this question, I should think, that is not value-laden and normative, prescriptive and judgmental, rather than obvious, self-evident, or objectively determinable. To be sure, the field of linguistics is, in the human sciences, the principal new field of investigation opened up in the twentieth century in the West, surpassing in its importance even the field of ethnography (which, in a way, has finally found its favored hermeneutical models in this very field of linguistics). And to expect that historians would not find linguistics at least as attractive as investigators in other fields have found it would be naive. Historians have always had to draw upon theories from other fields in the humanities and social sciences, when they have not credited current common sense or traditional wisdom, for their analytical strategies. And indeed modern, historical method was, in its Rankean formulation, little more than the philological method carried over to the investigation of documents of a nonliterary sort. Historians have always used some version of a theory of language to assist them in their work of "translating" meaning across the historical continuum in order to "make sense" of their documents. It would appear, therefore, that the question confronting contemporary historians is not whether

they will utilize a linguistic model to aid them in their work of translation but what kind of linguistic model they will use. And this is especially crucial for intellectual historians, who are concerned above all with the problem of meaning and that of translating between different meaning systems, whether as between past and present or between the documents and those readers of history books who wish to know what these documents "really mean."

But which linguistic theory will be used, or might be used, or even should be used to help us in this work of translation? There are at least four ways to construe the relation between language and the world of things. Language can be taken to be (1) a *manifestation* of causal relationships governing the world of things in which it arises, in the mode of an index; (2) a *representation* of that world, in the mode of an icon (or mimesis); (3) a *symbol* of that world, in the mode of an analogue, natural or culture-specific, as the case might be; (4) simply another among those things that populate the human world, but more specifically a *sign system*, that is, a code bearing no necessary, or "motivated," relation to that which it signifies.<sup>1</sup>

Marxists—and social determinists in general—tend to think of language as an index of the world (or rather its world), rather like a symptom or an effect of causal forces conceived to be more basic, residing in the "infrastructure" or at least in the "social relations of production." As one lives, so one speaks. A weaker version of the same idea, but usually unattended by the theoretical apparatus of the Marxist notion, holds that language does not so much "indicate" as "represent" a world, and does so as much in its grammar and syntax as in its lexicon, such that the kinds of meanings that a given cultural configuration can generate are reflected in the formal features of its modes of discourse, grammatically defined. This is the basis of the faith in the philological method espoused by an older generation of intellectual historians or historians of ideas, of whom Spitzer, Auerbach, Cassirer, and so on, were representative. The iconic fidelity of language, if not of texts, was taken for granted, and one had only to know the structure of the language to penetrate to the real meaning of texts or historical documents.

A third way of construing the nature of the relation of language to its world was to regard language in general as a symbol of that world, that is, a natural analogue of that of which it was a representation. This was the Hegelian view, and it underwrote the whole enterprise of *Geistesgeschichte* which presupposed a *Zeitgeist* manifested in all aspects of a culture but in language especially, such that a proper

analysis of any artifact deriving from the culture would reveal the "essence" of the whole, "microcosmically," as it were, in the mode of a synecdoche.

All of these notions of language, then, presuppose some "natural" relation between it and the world it represents: causal, mimetic, or analogical, as the case may be. And one or another of these notions of language has underwritten different approaches to intellectual or cultural history in the modern period. What is notable at this moment in the evolution of language theory is that one or another of these versions of the nature of language still informs most intellectual historians' conceptualizations of the text, textuality, discourse, and evidence for their field of study. This is interesting because it reflects the extent to which even those intellectual historians enlivened to the implications of modern language studies for the field have not yet fully assimilated the Saussurian theory of language as a sign system, the theory that stands at the basis of both Structuralism and post-Structuralism and offers, in my view, the best immediate prospects for a fruitful revision of the central problem of intellectual history, the problem of ideology.

I call ideology the central problem of intellectual history because intellectual history has to do with meaning, its production, distribution, and consumption, so to speak, in different historical epochs. But in the West at least, the question of meaning—or more precisely that of the meaning of meaning—has evolved against the background of a conviction of the irreconcilable opposition between science (conceived as some kind of objective view of reality) and ideology (conceived as a distorted, fragmentary, or otherwise deformed view, produced to serve the interest of a specific social group or class).<sup>2</sup> This distinction regenerates most of the earlier epistemological conflicts of our culture, as between reason and faith, philosophy and theology, secular and sacred learning, and so forth, but with this difference: whereas earlier conflicts of this sort had envisioned a resolution in the form of the establishment of one or the other of these pairs as an organon of or propaedeutic to the other, the science-ideology conflict took on, in the course of the nineteenth century, the aspect of a Manichaeic struggle that could end only with the extirpation of ideology and its replacement by a scientific view of reality.

The intellectual historian's own conception of his discipline required that he assume the role of arbitrator as to what counted as a more or less "objective," "realistic," or "reliable" representation of reality and what had to be identified as primarily "ideological" in

nature. Underlying and authorizing this critical activity was—as I noted above—a tacit theory of language, of discourse, and of representation in general by which to sort out the distortions of reality present in any text under analysis and a presupposition of the concreteness and accessibility of a text's original historical context by which a given distortion could be verified. But once it was realized (or conceded) that this context was itself accessible only through the medium of verbal artifacts and that these were subject to the same distortions by virtue of their textuality as was the evidence of which the context was to serve as a control, the problem of identifying ideological elements in a given text was extended to the concept of the context as well. Therewith, the very enterprise not only of the intellectual historian but of other historians too was opened up to the dangers of ideologism. For if the context represented to one in the documents was subject to distortion, by virtue of its being represented or being accessible only by way of verbal artifacts, the same could be said of that "science" one invoked as organon for guiding one's own investigations.

Of course, one could still moot the whole question of language and continue to act as if the problem of its opacity did not exist, but this became increasingly difficult to do in the wake of Structuralism (Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, and so on) and post-Structuralism (Foucault, Derrida, Lacan) and especially the problematizing of the whole task of textual interpretation by literary scholars, hermeneuticists, and even such neo-Marxists as Althusser and Habermas under the press of a new sensitivity to the problem of language itself. And here it is possible to specify the nature of a crucial split, among not only intellectual historians but cultural analysts in general, between those who continue to use a linguistic theory of the text and those who embrace a specifically semiological conception of it.

By a linguistic theory of texts I mean one that takes specifically lexical and grammatical categories as elements in its analytical model and, on the basis of this model, seeks to establish rules for identifying a "proper," as against an "improper," instance of language use after the manner of Russell, Wittgenstein, Austin, or Chomsky. By a semiological conception of texts I mean the tradition of cultural analysis that builds upon the theory of language as a sign (rather than a word) system, after the manner of Saussure, Jakobson, and Benveniste, and distinguishes between those sign systems that are extrareferential and those that have as their referents some other sign system. This provides the basis for a methodologically significant distinction between a linguistic inquiry and a specifically semiological one that has important

implications for the way we might conceptualize the problem of characterizing the ideological aspects of a given text, discourse, or artifact. As Paolo Valesio puts it, the ideological aspects of a text are specifically those "metalinguistic" gestures by which it substitutes another sign system for the putatively extralinguistic referent about which it pretends to speak or of which it pretends to be a straightforward, objective, or value-free description.<sup>3</sup> A semiological approach to the study of texts permits us to moot the question of the text's reliability as witness to events or phenomena extrinsic to it, to pass over the question of the text's "honesty," its objectivity, and to regard its ideological aspect less as a product (whether of self-interest or group interest, whether of conscious or unconscious impulses) than as a process. It permits us, more precisely, to regard ideology as a process by which different kinds of meaning are produced and reproduced by the establishment of a mental set towards the world in which certain sign systems are privileged as necessary, even natural, ways of recognizing a "meaning" in things and others are suppressed, ignored, or hidden in the very process of representing a world to consciousness. This process goes on in scientific discourse no less than in fictional or legal-political discourse. Indeed, a discourse could not appear scientific if it did not, in the process of its own elaboration, substitute a specific sign system (the "code" of science) for the referent ("nature," "atoms," "genes," and so forth) that is its manifest object of representation and analysis. This has implications not only for the way we read historical texts but for the ways we read the works of other historians as well.

When historians analyze and criticize the work of their colleagues or predecessors in order to identify the ideological elements in their work, they are inclined to present the points at issue in terms of "contents": "themes," "concepts," "arguments," "judgments," "values," or the like. The conventional procedure is then to characterize these contents as being either distortions of the facts or deviations from the truth—as these "facts" and "truths" are given in some other corpus of works, either the "documents" the investigator regards as having been correctly analyzed by himself or some interpretative canon, such as Marxism, the investigator regards as having been properly interpreted by himself and established as the ultimate court of appeal for the authority and rectitude of his own interpretations. What is offered as a description of the work under analysis, in this case the corpus of, say, Freud's or Marx's writings and the "facts" of their careers, usually turns out to be a set of quotations, paraphrases of passages in selected texts, or condensed summaries of positions that are themselves as

distorted as the works in question are presumed to be. The question of why or in what manner Marx's or Freud's work has enjoyed the authority it has had among other historians is dealt with by simply assuming that historians appeal to other, ideologically mystified coprofessionals because they share common ideological biases. This amounts to a form of *petitio principii*, which assumes the existence and nature of that for which it is supposed to offer an analysis and explanation.

But we should take this as given: a bourgeois historian will of course make sense to other bourgeois historians and not to Marxist ones, just as the Marxist will make sense to other Marxist historians and not to bourgeois ones. This is less in the nature of a problem than an assumption that all ideologically oriented analysis must presuppose even to entitle its heuristic quest. The more interesting question would be to ask, not What do Freud, Foucault, and so on, assert, allege, argue? but How do they establish, through the articulation of their texts, the plausibility of their discourse by referring the "meaning" of these, not to other "facts" or "events," but rather to a complex sign system which is treated as "natural" rather than as a code specific to the praxis of a given social group, stratum, or class? This is to shift hermeneutic interest from the content of the texts being investigated to their formal properties, considered not in terms of the relatively vacuous notion of style but rather as a dynamic process of overt and covert code shifting by which a specific subjectivity is called up and established in the reader, who is supposed to entertain this representation of the world as a realistic one in virtue of its congeniality to the imaginary relationship the subject bears to his own social and cultural situation.<sup>4</sup>

All of this is, of course, highly abstract and would require not only a wealth of illustrative exemplifications but also considerably more theoretical exposition than space here permits to gain even minimal plausibility for its claims. Such a theoretical exposition would require, however, at least detailed reference to the work of Jakobson, Benveniste, Eco, Barthes, and so on, as well as to that of Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, Lacan, the neorhetoricians and theorists of discourse analysis, and so forth, on which its authority as a theory would in many ways depend. Moreover, it would itself be able to escape the charges of tautology and *petitio principii* that I have leveled against the "content" method of analysis only if it plainly displayed and drew explicit attention to the code shifts by which *it* provided a "meaning" for phenomena that it might pretend only to describe and objectively analyse.

More specifically, such an exposition would have to draw explicit attention to the problem of exemplification itself, the semiological significance both of the text it had chosen as a specimen for illustrative purposes and of those portions of the text on which it had chosen to lavish its hermeneutical attention. Nor could it obscure the fact that the very distinction on which the analysis is based, that between linguistic and semiological analysis, is hardly universally agreed upon; it is rather in the nature of an enabling presupposition the utility of which is to be assessed solely in terms of a quantitative criterion, namely, its capacity to account for more of the elements of any given text, of whatever length, than any contending, "content"-oriented method could match. Beyond that, this approach would demonstrate its "objectivity" above all in the methodological tolerance and patience it lavished on texts opposed to the investigator's own consciously held political, social, cultural, and scientific values, it being one of the universally agreed-upon criteria for assessing any hermeneutic its capacity to entertain sympathetically not only those texts the specific hermeneutic values and regards as classic but also and especially those texts representing other, opposed positions, projects, and the like. But all this having been said, an example by way of illustration is called for.

Suppose we are interested in characterizing the ideological status, and thereby the historically evidentiary nature, of a work such as *The Education of Henry Adams*.<sup>5</sup> The conventional approach would be to try to identify certain generic elements of the text, themes, arguments, and so forth, in the interest of establishing what the text is about, what point of view its author represents, and its importance as evidence of some aspect of early twentieth-century American social and cultural history. We might say that the text sets forth views and arguments with respect to politics, society, culture, ethics and morality, epistemology, and so forth, and we would then proceed to assess the validity of the positions assigned to the author or the text, to determine the extent to which they were prophetic, prejudiced, farsighted, reflective, sapient, antiquated, and so forth, much in the way that D. W. Brogan did in his introduction to a 1961 edition of the *Education*. Here, for example, we find such statements as:

It is, indeed, on the surface, the story of one who failed.

For Adams is a child of Rousseau, of the romantic movement.

The *Education* . . . illuminat[es] . . . American history, seen sometimes from an exceptionally good position on the sidelines. . . .

And it is a statement of the predicament of modern man in the late 19th century.

The book can only be appreciated if it is realized how American the book is and yet what an exceptional American Adams, merely as an Adams, was bound to be.

The *Education*, briefly summed up, is the story of a lifelong apprenticeship to the fact that the world could ignore the standards, the ranks, the assumptions of Boston, that nothing was stable, not even the natural precedence of the Adams family.

From one point of view, this [the first twenty chapters, dealing with Adams's formal education and service in the American ministry in London during the Civil War] is the most successful part of the book.

It can be held (I hold this view) that the most important part of the *Education* is the record of disillusionment with the victorious Union.

Adams was an artist and an anarchist.

Adams was not a scientist or a philosopher but a historian, and he had shown in his writings a mastery of the techniques of historical scholarship.

Henry took a . . . pessimistic point of view . . . [but] this pessimism is partly "an act."

There was in his correspondence with [his brother Brooks] an unattractive and rather stupid strain of anti-Semitism.

For the background of our present perplexities, the *Education* is an indispensable document.

But it is more than that; it is a great work of art and in its first half, at any rate, a nearly perfect work of art.

Adams . . . fell more and more under the influence of French ways of thinking and writing. The stylistic effects are beneficial.

And finally:

He [Adams] speaks to us as mere Presidents and millionaires cannot and he speaks for an American attitude that we tend to ignore, for that critical side of American life that knows how much more the human heart needs than mere material goods and the vulgar success that Henry Adams, to our profit, escaped.

I want to stress that this kind of mixture of thematic description and assessment (the two are hardly distinguishable) is a perfectly legitimate kind of commentary, and when only impressionistic and unsystematic, as this example is, it can be illuminating to the reader when the commentator is a shrewd, knowledgeable, and eloquent impressionist, as Brogan was. But in no way can it serve as a model of analysis, for students to emulate and apply to other texts (unless they became versions of Brogan himself), and it provides absolutely no criterion for assessing the validity of the various generalizations offered in the commentary. We may intuitively credit certain of the generalizations and reject others (but this would be a matter of personal taste on our part), and we can imagine a commentary on this text that might take the negative of every one of Brogan's predications as the real truth about the text or Adams and, probably, find some passage in the text that would justify this reading rather than the one offered by Brogan (also on the basis of personal taste, inclination, or ideological commitment) and arrive at an utterly different account of what the text really means. The authority of Brogan's reading is simply assumed, rather than argued for, and the picture it gives of the text, not less than the assessments it makes of its various aspects, is utterly arbitrary, by which I mean a matter of the psychology of the commentator rather than the result of a theoretical position vis-a-vis the nature of texts and the problem of discriminating between what they say and what, in an ideological sense, they might mean or do.

From a semiological perspective, by contrast, we can provide a theoretically generated reading of this text, which would give an account for every element of it, whether as large as the book's gross organization (with editor's preface, author's preface, its thirty-five chapters with their curious pattern of entitlement, the concluding chapter's title, "Nunc Age" and so forth) or as small as a single paragraph, sentence, or phrase. Not an account in the sense of providing a causal explanation of why Adams says what he says wherever he says it but an account that would help identify the patterns of code shifting by which its ideological implications are substituted for the straightforward representation of a social life or meditation on a single life that the text pretends to be. Such an analysis would begin with a rhetorical characterization of the text's elements, after the manner of Barthes's *S/Z*,<sup>6</sup> by which to identify the nature of the authority claimed by the text as a perspective on the reality it purports to represent, and would proceed to the disclosure of the modality of code shifting by which a specific mental set is specified as necessary to the proper reception of

the text by an ideal reader, and thence to a detailed analysis of the metalinguistic elements of specific passages where a particular kind of social code is invoked as the standard for assessing the validity of all social codes in the reader's purview.

Here the rule is to begin at the beginning, in this case with the title of the book, which does not feature reference to an author, except indirectly or inferentially: *The Education of Henry Adams [An Autobiography]*. The title appears to be nothing other than the product of an act of nomination, although on reflection the idiosyncrasy of the locution (why not: "The Autobiography of Henry Adams: An Education" or any number of other possibilities? Why "education" for "life?" And so on) should alert the hermeneut to other rhetorical moves having to do with the manipulation of the genre of autobiography specifically. One notices that although the author of the work is also its subject, the subject is featured at the expense of the reader's sense of the author. The work is not offered as being "by" Henry Adams. It is only by the device of labeling the genre to which the work belongs—the label was affixed by the Massachusetts Historical Society, not Adams—that we can infer that it was written by its subject. And it is "an" autobiography, not the "the" autobiography, which, as the text will confirm, is specifically the case: it is a version of a life that, because it can be said hardly to have existed at all, would presumably bear many more than only a single, definitive version. It does not matter that the title replicates a conventional formula of entitlement, for any of a number of alternative formulae might have been followed. The choice of this convention, along with its peculiar twists of locution, immediately locates us in a thought-world more like that of Henry James than that of Thoreau (compare *Walden or, Life in the Woods* "by" Henry David Thoreau) or Jean Jacques Rousseau (*The Confessions* "of" Jean Jacques Rousseau). With this title, the text already signals the reticence of the author, that denial of authorial ego that Adams himself justifies in his own preface and that "dissolution of the ego" that remains a theme throughout the book.

Next we would comment on the number, subject matter, and above all the titles of the thirty-five chapters given in the table of contents (titles with place names, proper nouns, and subjects indeterminable from the title alone) and the curious gap that the "Contents" indicates, that of the years 1871-1892, in which, it would appear, "nothing happened." This, we would learn from extratextual sources, comprises the period of Adams's marriage, the suicide of his wife, and other events that we would expect to be included in an

"autobiography." The fact that they are not included suggests to us that we should be prepared for anything but an "ordinary" or "conventional" autobiography and that we should note with especial care what has been left out of the account and try to determine what other rules of exclusion systematically operated in the construction of the text.

We would next attend to the "Editor's Preface," which is signed "Henry Cabot Lodge," seemingly acting as the spokesman for the Massachusetts Historical Society, under whose auspices the text is being offered to the public. We would not realize, unless we had other evidence to substantiate it, that this "Editor's Preface" was written, not by Lodge, but by Adams himself for Lodge's signature—another example of the author's reticence, duplicity, humility, desire for control, or what? I am not sure. But what strikes our eye, especially once we have read the author's preface, is the seeming equivocation, deferral, or ambiguity with which the author viewed his own text and the pains he took to ensure that his readers (if they attended to these opening gestures especially) would read the work in the "proper" spirit or frame of mind. In both prefaces, the author seeks to characterize his own book, assign it to a genre and identify its specificity within the genre, and bracket, as it were, the whole problem of the sincerity, authenticity, veracity, or literalness of a text that, because it is an autobiography, should have all these qualities.

The "Editor's Preface," for example, likens the work to Augustine's *Confessions*, only to qualify the supposed similarity between them by stressing the differences between them and, implicitly, to suggest the superiority of Adams's work over that of his Christian prototype. In the author's preface, by contrast, the work is likened to the model provided by Rousseau's *Confessions* and, in an aside, Franklin's *Autobiography*, only, again, to stress the differences between them and, by implication, the superiority of Adams's work over theirs. We might, from a semiological perspective, regard all this as a working of the code of literary genres in such a way as to foreclose any impulse to compare Adams's work with similar examples of the genre, thereby establishing the author's originality, and locating the reader in the appropriate domain of critical response for assessing his product (in this case, the aesthetic domain rather than that of religion, psychology, or ethics).

In fact, this had already been explicitly suggested in the preface by "Lodge" when he stated that the author's dissatisfaction with his own work had been so strong that, according to "Lodge," he had decided

never to have it published and that this dissatisfaction had to do, not with the content of the work, the matters of fact or judgments rendered in it, but what "Lodge" calls "the usual [problem] of literary form." This was "the point on which the author failed to please himself," and it was the one point on which he "could get no light from readers or friends"—all of which suggests the *topos* of the isolated artist struggling to express a truth too deep to be rendered in mere words and refers us not so much to an actual fact or condition (since Adams's sense of his own stylistic capability was as inflated as that of Henry James or any other mandarin writer of the time) as to a specific ideology of a certain kind of artist—not a Romantic one at all, as Brogan suggests, but rather more like Oscar Wilde, to whom Brogan does liken Adams, but only to dismiss the comparison as inappropriate.

The location of the artist's persona in the precious, however serious, world of Oscar Wilde and Swinburne (whom Adams professes to admire) is further effected by a passage in the author's preface that turns upon a reworking of another literary *topos*, that of the "philosophy of clothes" which was dominantly present in nineteenth-century Anglo-American literary culture in Carlyle's influential *Sartor Resartus*. This passage is crucial for the semiologist because it is one in which the author comments on his own work, less in a metalinguistic than in a metagenic intervention, and ironically, almost to the point of malign satire, signals the literal "emptiness" of his text as a fit vehicle for the representation of the emptiness of his own ego and then sketches what might be called a "mannikin" theory of the literary work, which makes of it not a product of a dialectic between form and content, but rather a relationship between two forms equally evanescent: the clothes in which the tailor's dummy is garbed and the surface of the dummy's body which feigns the form of a man but has no interior.

But no sooner is the mannikin model invoked than it too is distanced and brought into question by being characterized in the sense in which the term is conventionally used, that is, as a model only, which "must be taken for real, must be treated as though it had life," in order to serve as a "measure of motion, of proportion, of human condition." But this new characterization is itself dissolved in the rhetorical question that forms the last thought of the preface. This question is, Did the mannikin ever have any life? And the answer given is, "Who knows? Possibly it had!" A rhetorical question followed by an ambiguous answer—which might very well serve as an emblem of the "style" of Henry Adams.

But alongside the rhetoric of aestheticism and evasion by which Adams locates his work within a specific domain of the writer's code of his time and place is another important *topos* that is more social-class-specific and surfaces right at the beginning of the pseudonymous preface signed "Henry Cabot Lodge." The first words of this preface are: "This volume, written in 1905, as a sequel to the same author's 'Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres,' was privately printed, to the number of one hundred copies, in 1906, and sent to the persons interested, for their assent, correction, and suggestion." Not only does this passage attest to the author's scrupulousness concerning the factual "content" of his text but the phrase "privately printed" summons up a specific kind of writerly condition and a notion of this writer's potential public that is at once patrician or aristocratic and seemingly solvent of any aspiration to the attention of the general public. This *topos* of privacy-publicity recurs in the third paragraph of "Lodge"'s preface when he mentions that "the 'Chartres' was finished and privately printed in 1904." The publicizing of both of these texts, their projection into the public domain, is explicitly characterized by "Lodge" as having happened beyond the author's "control." "In 1913," "Lodge" reports, "the Institute of American Architects published the 'Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres'"—a phrase that leaves unspecified how the institute claimed the right to do so (it is almost as if Adams had had nothing to say about the matter). But the placement of the text under the auspices of a professional institution has the effect of signaling the kind of authority as a scholarly work to which it can lay claim, as well as suggesting that the book was, as it were, "fated" to see the light of day, whatever the author's "private" wishes on the matter.

This motif is repeated in the next sentence, where "Lodge" reports that "already, the 'Education' had become almost as well known as the 'Chartres,' and was freely quoted by every book whose author requested it." So much for "privacy"—quality will out! But so will fate: "The author," we are told, "could no longer withdraw either volume; he could no longer rewrite either, and he could not publish that which he thought unprepared and unfinished, although in his opinion the other was historically purposeless without its sequel." In the end, therefore, he preferred to leave the "Education" unpublished, "avowedly incomplete, trusting that it might quietly fade from memory," thereby confirming a precept he had long believed, namely, that "silence next to good-temper was the mark of sense." Since this was made an "absolute" rule after midsummer 1914, the intervention of the Massachusetts Historical Society alone was able to overcome the

author's express wishes to ignore his book, and so, as "Lodge" tells us: "The Massachusetts Historical Society now publishes the 'Education' . . . not in opposition to the author's judgment, but only to put both volumes equally within reach of students who have occasion to consult them."

Now, a preface is, by its very nature, an instruction on how to read the text that follows it and, by the same token, an attempt to guard against certain misreadings of the text, in other words, an attempt at control. In his masterful meditation on the preface as genre in Western writing, Derrida notes that the preface is always a narcissistic enterprise, but a special kind, that in which a proud parent looks upon and praises, excuses, or otherwise prepares the way for his child, the text that he has at once sired and given birth to. If we might consider the matter in this way for a moment, what do we make of an autobiographical text that has two prefaces (both written by the author but one offered over the name of a friend who is a representative not only of the Boston patriciate but also of the Massachusetts Historical Society)?

The double preface is at best redundant and, as such, symptomatic of an excessive solicitude for the future of the progeny for whom it obviously wishes to prepare and smooth the way. The shadow of the author casts itself over the work not only as one presence seeking to guide the reader's approach to the text but as two, the first of which wishes to guide the reader's approach to the text and the author. The repetitiveness of the pretextual gesture already puts it in the domain of obsessive concern which, from a psychoanalytical perspective, we might refer to some traumatic experience in the life of the text's author. Not only does the double preface suggest an especial concern about the fate of the text (a concern explicitly stated in "Lodge"'s account of the reluctant "birth" of the text) but it suggests a kind of fear of being muffled by prejudicial misreading which is repeated in the text proper by the theme of the burden of an inherited tradition that misfitted the author for a proper "life" in the twentieth century.

All this is, I believe, clear enough, but from what perspective(s)? From a psychoanalytical perspective, concerned as it would be with moving from the text to a determination of the author's unconscious and conscious intentions in writing the text (and the conflicts between them), this excessive concern is to be regarded as a symptom, that is, an index of the writer's state of mind and stance vis-à-vis his world as he perceives it. This state of mind is to be referred, in turn, to the socio-dynamics of the author's family experiences as the cause of the

neurotic fixations in response to which both the text and the activity of writing are to be regarded as sublimations. The typicality of the text, then, its status as evidence of the social world in which it takes its rise, resides in the extent to which it reveals something about the psychoeconomics of a particular kind of family structure. And this is one way to proceed, as long as it is recognized that in order to carry out the analytical operation, one must presume the adequacy of some version of Freudian doctrine to such an analysis.

From a Marxist perspective, the text will also be treated as an index of a structure (a contradictory one by definition), that of a specific class consciousness and practice and, to the extent that it is self-consciously a representation of that consciousness and practice, an icon as well. If, beyond that, the text is treated as an especially apt manifestation of this class consciousness, one that systematically offers itself to its public in such a way as both to mask its class nature and surreptitiously to defend it, it will be elevated to the status of a symbol. This leads the investigator from the text through the postulated consciousness of the author to the social context, of which the text is then supposed to be a highly complex but still perfectly decodable reflection. And this too is a way to proceed, as long, however—as with the Freudian tactic—as it is recognized that one must simply presume the adequacy of the Marxist doctrine to explicate the double relation between the text and the author, and between the author and the "superstructure."

A semiological perspective, on the other hand, treats the text less as an effect of causes more basic or as a reflection, however, refracted, of a structure more fundamental than as a complex mediation between various codes by which reality is to be assigned possible meanings. It seeks, first of all, to identify the hierarchy of codes that is established in the process of the text's elaboration, in which one or more emerge as seemingly self-evident, obvious, natural ways of making sense of the world.

In the dynamics of a complex text such as that represented by the *Education*, various codes are "tried on," rather in the way that one tries on various sizes and styles of suits, before finding the one that "fits" more or less adequately—one that appears to have been especially tailored for the thing it is meant to clothe, adorn, warm, and protect from the elements. In the *Education*, the codes of history, science, philosophy, law, art, and so on, as well as various social codes, cultural codes, etiquettes, protocols, and so forth, are all "tried on" only to be rejected as "unsuited" to the needs of a "sensitive" intelligence asked to

come to terms with the "real" forces governing life in the twentieth century. These are systematically reduced to the status of a "patchwork" or "motley," of dispersed "fragments" or "sherds," to harlequinade—the utility of which for life is adjudged to be nil. What is revealed to be operative in the new world is power, or rather brute force, represented as an "energy" that has no end or purpose beyond pure process itself (in the animal world the symbol of this force is represented by the shark *Pteraspis*, in the physical world by the "dynamo," and in the cultural world by the "Virgin"). Standing over against this impersonal, blind, undirected force, as a last refuge of sensitivity (itself seen as a kind of "sport" of nature) that is itself rapidly disappearing in response to powers it can not begin to resist, is the "personal" gesture of the exemplary autobiography, whose "authority" as a meaningful gesture is contained in its status as mere "literature" and whose "integrity" is confirmed by its aspiration to a stylistic consistency which the author himself adjudges not to have been achieved.

The code switching involved here is, on the level of formal argument, from a postulated social consciousness inherited from the eighteenth century to a putatively more "realistic" perception of "the way things really are" in the nineteenth century and, on the level of affect or valuation, from a putative historical and scientific knowledge to a hypostatized, but purely local or personal, aesthetic consciousness. The form of the discourse, that of the autobiography, enacts a similar switching of codes. Its manifest message is that it is impossible to write an autobiography like any of the traditional types (religious, psychological, ethical) on the basis of the modern experience. Second, by virtue of the stated incompleteness of the effort on Adams's own part, it is asserted to be impossible to write an autobiography at all (this in evidence of the dissolution of the "ego" which modern society and culture are seen to have effected). And third, it is suggested that the only possible justification of even the effort to write an autobiography would be the consistency of style with which the enterprise was undertaken by a person like Adams—a purely aesthetic criterion, although it is represented in the text as having moral implications.

The strategy suggested in all this is that of taking what one considers to be the defects of one's own culture or historical moment (in this case its dissolution of the "ego") and turning them into first, a method of observation, representation, and assessment and, second, a protocol for orchestrating the introduction of the text in which they are given so as to limit the kind of audience it will find—that complex ballet of approach-avoidance that we have seen manifested in the



two prefaces of the work. In the two prefaces, the triple irony that pervades the text is given direct embodiment. And the form of the whole text can be seen to figure forth the precise nature of the value attached to the messages contained in the text proper.

Indeed, in a way quite different from Augustine and Rousseau, not to mention Franklin, the form of this work can be seen, from a semiological perspective, as the specifically ideological content of the text as a whole. And our assent to the form of the text as something given, in the interest of entertaining, assessing, and otherwise responding to the thematic content, representations, judgments, and so forth, contained in the narrative levels of the text, is the sign of the power of this text considered as an exercise in ideological mystification.

Once we are enlivened to the extent to which the form of the text is the place where it does its ideologically significant work, aspects of the text that a criticism unsensitized to the operations of a form-as-message will find bewildering, surprising, inconsistent, or simply offensive (such as the "gap" in the account of the years 1871-92 or the shift from a narrative account in the early years [which Brogan and most modern commentators like] to the so-called speculative discourses of the last fourteen chapters [especially offensive to historians by virtue of their supposedly abstract or a priori or deductive method]) themselves become meaningful as message. In fact, the formal differences between the account of the earlier years and that of the later ones involve a code switch from a putatively empirical record of social and political events, of which the author was more or less a witness, to a manifestly speculative and deductive meditation on processes, a switch required by the supposedly different "natures" of the matters dealt with. But since this change of scale, scope, and content is not mediated by any theoretical necessity that the author can envisage (he has rejected Hegel, Marx, Darwin, and so on), and since it is authorized by a canon of "taste" and "sensitivity" rather than of method or formal thought, the "gap" in the account of the years 1871-92 is not only fully justified from an aesthetic standpoint but a necessary element of the message of the text as a whole.

To say that Adams left this hole in his text, this rupture in his account, because of the pain he suffered during those years, that these experiences were too personal for recounting, given the fastidiousness of his patrician nature, is to acquiesce in the fiction of "taste" as epistemic criterion which informs the work and is consistently invoked to validate its judgments. All of this talk about Adams's suffering may be

true, but how could we be sure? The textual fact is the gap in the chronicle of the narrative. The reasons for or causes of this gap we can only speculate about. But the textual function of the gap is clear enough. As message, it reinforces the thesis of the emptiness of life that Adams adumbrates in the figure of the mannikin throughout the book. Adams cannot account for this emptiness, ontological in nature as he envisions it, either by historical-empirical-narrative methods (the methods of the first part) or by aprioristic, deductive, and speculative methods (those used in the second part). It is like the gap between the pseudo-editor's preface and the author's preface. These may reflect a kind of schizophrenic condition in Adams's psyche, but to explain or interpret a rupture in a text by referring it to a rupture in the author's psyche is merely to double the problem and to pass off this doubling operation as a solution to it.

The two parts of the text are manifestly not intended to be viewed as phases of a continuous narrative or as stages in the elaboration of a comprehensive argument. They are, as Adams himself suggests at the opening of his penultimate chapter, to be apprehended as aspects of a complex image: "Images are not arguments, rarely even lead to proof, but the mind craves them, and, of late more than ever, the keenest experimenters find twenty images better than one, especially if contradictory; since the human mind has already learned to deal in contradictions" (489). But this image—as we can expect from reading almost any other part of the text—has a hole in its center, conformable to the text's explicit assertions that the depths of the individual personality are as unplummable as the mysteries of history and nature. This sense of an unplummable mystery more than adequately justifies, within the terms of the text itself, the structure of the last chapter, ironically entitled "Nunc Age" (meaning both "Now, depart" and "Now act") and ending with a meditation on Hamlet's last words: "The rest is silence." Before the enormity of the mystery of death, Adams suggests, we are capable only of either commonplace or silence. And, as he says in the "Editor's Preface," "silence next to good-temper was the mark of sense."

All of this places the reader firmly within a social domain specifically literary in nature, in a society inhabited by such figures as Henry James, Swinburne, Wilde, Carlyle, and so forth, but also in a world in which meaning is conferred upon experience, not by reference to some empirically discernible reality, social or natural, but rather by reference to other literary works, artistic monuments, and similarly

encoded "texts." It was, Barthes has argued, the supreme achievement of nineteenth-century realism, whether in literature or in social commentary, to substitute surreptitiously an already textualized image of the world for the concrete reality it feigned iconically to represent. We can locate Adams within this tradition—along with James, Proust, Virginia Woolf, Joyce, and other heralds of modernism—as another representative of realism's imminent unmasking and the writer's surrender to the free play of language itself as the true function of literature as John Carlos Rowe has persuasively argued. But Rowe's suggestion that Adams's art, which "uses its artifice to question the nature of all signification," summons us to return once again "to the human dialogue that we ought to be renewing" seems more a pious hope on Rowe's part than a conclusion justified by either the explicit messages of the text or that implicit message given in its form. Rowe's concluding suggestion returns Adams to that favored domain of the traditional humanist, the realm of the timeless "classic" which always shows us that "some beauty and nobility lurk in the anguished burden of human consciousness."<sup>7</sup>

For an antidote to the arbitrarily hopeful reading of the *Education*, let us look at the last sentence of the text, which reports a fantasy in which Adams imagines himself returning to the world in 1938, the centenary of his own birth, with his two best friends, John Hay and Clarence King (not, be it noted, with his wife), "for a holiday, to see their own mistakes made clear in the light of the mistakes of their successors." "Perhaps then," the wish continues, "for the first time since man began his education among the carnivores, they would find a world that sensitive and timid natures could regard without a shudder" (505). "THE END."

It is possible, of course, to read any text as a meditation, more or less explicit, on the impossibility of representation and the aporias of signification just by virtue of the fact that any text attempting to grasp any reality through the medium of language or to represent it in that medium raises the specter of the impossibility of the task undertaken. But Adams's text is anything but an invitation, explicit or implicit, to a renewal of any dialogue. Its suppression of the expected "voice" of the dialogistic mode of discourse, that "I" that implies the existence of a "you" to participate in the verbal exchange by which meaning is to be dialectically teased out of the words used as a medium, is enough to suggest as much. This alone is enough to establish its essential difference from a work such as Thoreau's *Walden*, with which it might be profitably compared in semiological terms, and show that it was

intended implicitly to be dialogistic in spite of its manifestly egoistic form. Adams's autobiography is a monologue, and if we can speculatively summon up the elements of dialogue in it, we must insist that the other party in the exchange can only be imagined to be some fragment or sherd of Adams's own fractured persona. He speaks of himself in the third person singular—as "he," "Adams," and so forth—splitting himself into both the speaker who is hidden behind the anonymity of the narrative form and the referent or subject of the narrative, who occupies center stage, around which (and in the fiction of the book, for which) the events of both nature and history occur, just as, in the prefatorial matter, he splits himself into two speakers, "Lodge" and "Adams," and assigns them slightly different things to say about his book.

This splitting, unraveling, or doubling of the persona of the author is, to be sure, a function of authorship itself, in which every writer is both the producer and consumer of his own discourse. The narcissistic—or onanistic—nature of this function is manifest. And on one level at least, texts differ by virtue of their respective efforts to transcend the narcissism inherent in the author function and move to what a Freudian might call that anaclitic relationship that sociality presupposes as its basis. Not that we would follow Freud in regarding this as a qualitatively (morally) superior condition to the narcissistic one, for we could do that only by moving outside the text and affirming another ideology that regards the anaclitic form of love as more human, that is, more natural, than its narcissistic counterpart. Far from being an "egoless" text, the *Education* is, in spite of the suppression of the authorial "I," or perhaps because of it—a supremely egoistic one—moreover, an egoistic one that is explicitly class-based. Thus, in the second paragraph of the *Education*, in which Adams likens his "christening" to a "brand" as burdensome as that laid upon any Jew in the synagogue, he writes:

To his life as a whole he was a consenting, contracting party and partner from the moment he was born to the moment he died. Only with that understanding—as a consciously assenting member in full partnership with the society of his age—had his education an interest to himself or to others.

As it happened, he never got to the point of playing the game at all; he lost himself in the study of it, watching the errors of the players; but this is the only interest in the story, which otherwise has no moral and little incident. (4)

The *Education's* manifest announcement and demonstration of the end of the ego in the modern age has to be viewed as a message not only personal and subjective but social and historical as well. Insofar as Adams identifies his own ego with that of his class, the announcement of the dissolution of one is also the announcement of the dissolution of the other.

The seeming depersonalization of Adams's autobiography, the use of the objectivizing voice of the third-person narrative, of an author who distances himself from himself and writes the history of his (mis)education, is another sign of the fusion of the subjective ego with that of a specific social class. And the theme of (mis)education provides simply another way of speaking about the (mis)fortunes of the latter in terms of those of the former. As for the further identification of "Henry Brooks Adams" with world history, which is also explicitly made, however much on its surface it is ironically made, means that far from being a mannikinlike counterpart of Augustine's *Confessions*, the *Education* is intended to provide a superior alternative to the former. Its superiority consists, it is suggested, not so much in its worldliness (in contrast to the Christian mythology of Augustine's *Confessions*) as in its egotism (a quality Augustine seeks to erode in his own text as much by precept as by discursive example).

I could go on indefinitely this way, seeking to identify the various codes—psychological, social, metaphysical, ethical, and artistic—by which the complex fabric of the text could be said to emit messages more phatic and optative, to use Jakobson's terminology, than referential or predicative. The aim would be not to reduce all of these messages to a single, seemingly monolithic position that could be neatly condensed into an emblematic paraphrase, but rather to show the myriad different messages and different kinds of messages that the text emits. The aim would also be, however, to characterize the types of messages emitted in terms of the several codes in which they are cast and to map the relationships among the codes thus identified both as a hierarchy of codes and as a sequence of their elaboration, which would locate the text within a certain domain of the culture of the time of its production.

How, then, does a semiological approach to intellectual history contribute to the resolution of the specific problems arising in that field of inquiry? How does it help to resolve the problem of the text-context relationship, the classic text-documentary text relationship, the interpreter text-interpreted text relationship, and so on? Crucial to any historical investigation is the evidential status of any given artifact,

or, more precisely, its referential status. Of what is the artifact evidence? to what does it refer? Or put another way, what referent does it permit us, however indirectly, to perceive? As long as the object to which an artifact gives access is conceived to exist outside the artifact, these questions are irresolvable, at least when it is a matter of historical perception, because by definition, we might say, a datum is past only to the extent that it is no longer something to which I can be referred as a possible object of living perception.

The historically real, the past real, is that to which I can be referred only by way of an artifact that is textual in nature. The indexical, iconic, and symbolic notions of language, and therefore of texts, obscure the nature of this indirect referentiality and hold out the possibility of (feign) direct referentiality, create the illusion that there is a past out there that is directly reflected in the texts. But even if we grant this, what we see is the reflection, not the thing reflected. By directing our attention to the reflection of things that appear in the text, a semiological approach to intellectual history fixes us directly before the process of meaning production that is the special subject of intellectual history conceived as a subfield of historical inquiry in general.

It goes without saying that not all historical inquiry is concerned with the production of meanings. In fact, most historical inquiry is concerned less with the production of meanings than with the effects of such productive processes—what we might wish to call the exchange and consumption of meanings within a given sociocultural configuration. Wars, alliances, economic activity, exercises of political power and authority, anything involving intentional creation and destruction, aim-oriented activities entered into by individuals and groups—these are what I have in mind. If intellectual history, which takes as its special subject matter the ideas, *mentalités*, thought systems, systems of values and ideals of particular societies in the past, simply treats these as data that reflect processes in some way more "basic" (such as economic, social, political, or even psychological processes), then intellectual history is supererogatory in relation to the historical reconstruction of these other processes, for in that case it can only double the accounts provided by specialists in these other fields of study, tell the same story, with slightly different material and in a slightly different register, as the story told about these other fields.

Manifestly, however, the data of the intellectual historian are different from those with which political and economic historians work, and their differentness consists in the fact that these data show us directly the processes by which cultures produce the kinds of meaning

systems that give to their practical activities the aspect of meaningfulness, or value. Groups engage in political activities for political purposes, to be sure, but these activities are meaningful to them only by reference to some other, extrapolitical aim, purpose, or value. This is what permits them to imagine that their political activities are qualitatively different from those of their opponents or represent a higher value than those of their enemies—who are enemies or opponents precisely to the extent that they envision other aims, purposes, values, specifically different from their own though generically similar to them. This is also true of economic, religious, or social activities. Historical events differ from natural events in that they are meaningful for their agents and variously meaningful to the different groups that carry them out.

Economic activity no doubt has to do with economic aims—the production, exchange, and consumption of goods—but different modalities of economic activity (feudal, capitalist, socialist, and all mixtures thereof) exist because this activity is regarded as serving other ends than those of mere production, exchange, and consumption of goods. Food, clothing, and shelter may be basic "economic" necessities, but what is considered the proper kind of food, appropriate clothing, and humanly adequate shelter varies from culture to culture. Moreover, the provision of these necessities in any given culture is governed by rules and laws that have their justification in an extra-economic domain, specifically that in which the meaning of what is to be considered proper, appropriate, and adequate is produced.

Put this way, it immediately becomes obvious why intellectual historians take their inspiration from Hegel, Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche—and their modern avatars, Lévi-Strauss, Habermas, Foucault, Derrida, Ricoeur, Gadamer, J. L. Austin, and so on. Every one of these is concerned with the problem of mediation, which we can construe as the deflection of basic impulses (economic, social, sexual, aesthetic, intellectual, whatever) from their putatively immediate aims by considerations that are culture-specific in nature. And here *culture-specific* means specific to a historically determinate system of meaning.

The intellectual historical artifact viewed semiologically permits us to see the system of meaning production operating directly in a way that other kinds of historical artifacts do not—because these other kinds of artifacts (weapons, treaties, contracts, account books) inevitably appear to us more as the effects of such operations, or at best as instruments of them, rather than as causes of them. This is why a content-oriented, history-of-ideas approach to intellectual history is

perfectly appropriate for the analysis of certain kinds of documents in those situations in which we are interested more in the effects of culture on its members than in the ways that culture produces those effects. And this way of formulating the matter points to a way of resolving the classic text-documentary text relationship.

The classic text seems to command our attention because it not only contains ideas and insights about "the human condition" in general but provides an interpretative model by which to carry further our investigations in our own time or, indeed, any time. In reality, however, the classic text, the master text, intrigues us, not because (or not only because) its meaning-content is universally valid or authoritative (for that is manifestly impossible; in any event, it is a profoundly unhistorical way of looking at anything), but because it gives us insight into a process that is universal and definitive of human species-being in general, the process of meaning production. To be sure, even the most banal comic strip can yield some insight into this process, especially when submitted to semiological analysis—and in a way that it could not do, incidentally, under investment by a conventional history-of-ideas approach. And in the interest of a scientific responsibility that must inform our work if it is to claim an authority any larger than that of virtuoso performance, we must be prepared to grant that the comic strip cannot be treated as qualitatively inferior to a Shakespeare play or any other classic text. From a semiological perspective, the difference is not qualitative but only quantitative, a difference of degree of complexity in the meaning-production process (complexity, I assume it will be granted, marks a qualitative difference between two objects only for those for whom complexity itself is a value). The difference in degree of complexity has to do with the extent to which the classic text reveals, indeed actively draws attention to, its own processes of meaning production and makes of these processes its own subject matter, its own "content."

Thus, to return by way of conclusion to *The Education of Henry Adams*, the text serves us especially well as an intellectual historical document, in a way that Adams's diaries, letters, and other documents relating his daily life would not, precisely to the extent that it contains all of those evidences of self-concern and fear of failure that we have indicated as aspects of its ideologizing function. What might be regarded as its flaws from the standpoint of a naive expositor, that is, anyone wishing to assess its logical consistency or to assign points for its stylistic proprieties in its various parts, becomes for the semiologically oriented commentator its very virtue as a "document" of

intellectual history. The differences between the first part of the *Education*, so beloved by diplomatic historians for its observations of the diplomatic scene and by those with a conventional notion of what a "narrative" should be, and the second part, with its metahistorical speculations and tone of pessimism (which offends those who have a conventional notion of what a proper "autobiography" should be), the mandarinlike pickiness and preciosity of the diction of the whole work, its hesitations and duplicities, the thematic obsessions, the pervasive irony—all become equally valuable for the analyst concerned with meaning production rather than with meaning produced, with processes of the text rather than with the text as product. It is precisely these "flaws" that point us to what makes the *Education* a classic work, an example of a self-conscious and self-celebrating creativity, poiesis.

As for the text-context problem—the extent to which the *Education* was a product of causal forces more basic, whether these are regarded as social, psychological, economic, or what have you, the extent to which Adams's work either "reflects" his own time or "reflects on" it perspicuously, as Brogan praises it for doing—I have suggested that this problem becomes resolvable from the semiological perspective to the extent that what conventional historians call the context is already in the text in the specific modalities of code shifting by which Adams's discourse produces its meanings. For surely, when we inquire into the context of a work such as the *Education*, we are interested above all in the extent to which that context provided resources for the production of the kinds of meanings that this text displays to us. To have information about this aspect of the text's context would not illuminate the operations of Adams's work in their specificity, in their details as we follow or track the text's narrative. On the contrary, it is the other way around: the context is illuminated in its detailed operations by the moves made in Adams's text.

Of course, Adams drew upon his society and his culture for the kinds of operations he carries out in his text, by which to endow his experiences, his "life," with a meaning, even if the meaning provided is only the judgment that life itself is meaningless. What Adams does is show us one example of how the cultural resources of his historical moment and place could be fashioned into a plausible justification for this kind of nihilistic judgment. In wedding the general notion of nihilism with the particularities of his life, Adams produces an individual version of the nihilistic credo, which is to say, a type of this credo (*type* being defined as a mediation between particulars and real or merely

feigned universals). It is the typicality of Adams's discourse that makes it translatable as evidence of his own age that a reader in our age can comprehend, receive as message, understand.

Typicality is produced by the imposition of a specific form on an otherwise wild content. The imposition of this form is carried out in the discourse materialized in Adams's text. It is the enactment of this discourse that attests to Adams's status as a representative of the culture of his age. And it is the product of that enactment, the text entitled *The Education of Henry Adams*, considered as a finished form, that gives us insight into the type of meaning production available in the culture of Adams's time and place.

This notion of the typicality of the text permits us to deal with the problem of the hated "reduction" of the complex text which hermeneuticists lament endlessly. In saying that a given text represents a type of meaning production, we are not reducing the text to the status of an effect of some causal force conceived to be more basic than that of meaning production in general. We are pointing, rather, to what is both obvious and undeniable, namely, that Adams himself has "condensed" his life into the form that it displays in the *Education* and, moreover, transformed that life into a symbol of the sociocultural processes of his own time and place as he perceived them thereby. This is not a reduction but a sublimation or transumption of meaning which is a possible response of human consciousness to its world everywhere and at all times. By unpacking the rich symbolic content of Adams's work, we de-sublimate it and return it to its status as an immanent product of the culture in which it arose. Far from reducing the work, we have, on the contrary, enflowered it, permitted it to bloom and caused it to display its richness and power as a symbolizing process.

## Notes

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### 1. The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality

1. Roland Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York, 1977), 79.

2. The words *narrative*, *narration*, *to narrate*, etc., derive via the Latin *gnārus* ("knowing," "acquainted with," "expert," "skilful," etc) and *narrāre* ("relate," "tell") from the Sanskrit root *gnā* ("know"). The same root yields *gnāyamaḥ* ("knowable," "known"). See Emile Boisacq, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (Heidelberg, 1950), s.v. *γνώσιμος*. My thanks to Ted Morris, of Cornell, one of our great etymologists.

3. See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve (London, 1838); Jakob Christoph Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London, 1878); Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought, and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Dawn of the Renaissance*, trans. F. Hopman (London, 1924); and Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Sian Reynolds (New York, 1972). See also Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973); and Hans Kellner, "Disorderly Conduct: Braudel's Mediterranean Satire," *History and Thought* 18, no. 2 (1979): 197-222.

4. Gerard Genette, "Boundaries of Narrative," *New Literary History* 8, no. 1 (1978): 11. See also Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca, 1975), chap. 9; Philip Pettit, *The Concept of Structuralism: A Critical Analysis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1977); Tel Quel [Group], *Théorie d'ensemble* (Paris, 1968), articles by Jean-Louis Baudry, Philippe Sollers, and Julia Kristeva; Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (New Haven and London, 1974), chaps. 4-5; Tzvetan Todorov, *Poétique de la prose* (Paris, 1971), chap. 9; and Paul

Zumthor, *Langue, texte, énigme* (Paris, 1975), pt. 4.

5. Genette, "Boundaries of Narrative," 8-9.

6. *Ibid.*, 9. Cf. Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, Fla., 1971), 208.

7. See Louis O. Mink, "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument," and Lionel Gossman, "History and Literature," both in *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, ed. Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki (Madison, Wis., 1978), with complete bibliography on the problem of narrative form in historical writing.

8. For purposes of economy, I use as representative of the conventional view of the history of historical writing Harry Elmer Barnes, *A History of Historical Writing* (New York, 1963), chap. 3, which deals with medieval historiography in the West. Cf. Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (Oxford, 1976), 64, 211.

9. White, *Metahistory*, 318-85.

10. Peter Gay, *Style in History* (New York, 1974), 189.

11. *Annales Sangallenses Maiores, dicti Hepidanni*, ed. Ildefonsus ab Arx, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, series Scriptores*, ed. George Heinrich Pertz, 32 vols. (Hanover, 1826; reprint, Stuttgart, 1963)], 1:72 ff.

12. Oswald Ducrot and Tzvetan Todorov, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language*, trans. Catherine Porter (Baltimore, 1979), 297-99.

13. Barnes, *History of Historical Writing*, 65.

14. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York, 1956), 60-63.

15. Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague, 1971), 85-86.

16. Barnes, *History of Historical Writing*, 65. ff.

17. Richer, *Histoire de France, 888-995*, ed. and trans. Robert Latouche, 2 vols. (Paris, 1930-37), 1:3; further references to this work are cited parenthetically in the text (my translations).

18. *La cronica di Dino Compagni delle cose occorrenti ne'tempi suoi e La canzone morale Del Pregio dello stesso autore*, ed. Isidore Del Lungo, 4th ed., rev. (Florence, 1902); cf. Barnes, *History of Historical Writing*, 80-81.

19. *Ibid.*, 5.

20. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford, 1967), chap. 1.

21. Compagni, *La cronica*, 209-10.

## 2. The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory

1. As Roland Barthes remarks, "Narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself" ("Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath [New York, 1977], 79). The narrative mode of representation is, of course, no more "natural" than any other mode of discourse, although whether it is a

primary mode, against which other discursive modes are to be contrasted, is a matter of interest to historical linguistics (see Emile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* [Paris, 1966]; and Gérard Genette, "Frontières du récit," *Figures II* [Paris, 49-69]). E. H. Gombrich has suggested the importance of the relation between the narrative mode of representation, a distinctively historical (as against a mythical) consciousness, and "realism" in Western art (*Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* [New York, 1960], 116-46).

2. Thus, for example, Maurice Mandelbaum denies the propriety of calling the kinds of accounts produced by historians *narratives*, if this term is to be regarded as synonymous with *stories* [*The Anatomy of Historical Knowledge* [Baltimore, 1977], 25-26]. In the physical sciences, narratives have no place at all, except as prefatory anecdotes to the presentation of findings; a physicist or biologist would find it strange to tell a story about his data *rather than* to analyze them. Biology became a science when it ceased to be practiced as "natural history," i.e., when scientists of organic nature ceased trying to construct the "true story" of "what happened" and began looking for the laws, purely causal and nonteleological, that could account for the evidence given by the fossil record, results of breeding practices, and so on. To be sure, as Mandelbaum stresses, a *sequential* account of a set of events is not the same as a narrative account thereof. And the difference between them is the absence of any interest in teleology as an explanatory principle in the former. Any narrative account of anything whatsoever is a teleological account, and it is for this reason as much as any other that narrativity is suspect in the physical sciences. But Mandelbaum's remarks miss the point of the conventional distinction between a chronicle and a history based on the difference between a *merely* sequential account and a narrative account. The difference is reflected in the extent to which the history thus conceived approaches the formal coherence of a story (see Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," chap. 1 in this volume).

3. See Geoffrey Elton, *The Practice of History* (New York, 1967), 118-41; and J. H. Hexter, *Reappraisals in History* (New York, 1961), 8 ff. These two works may be taken as indicative of the view of the profession in the 1960s concerning the adequacy of "storytelling" to the aims and purposes of historical studies. For both, narrative representations are an option of the historian, which he may choose or not according to his purposes. The same view was expressed by Georges Lefebvre in *La Naissance de l'historiographie moderne* (lectures delivered originally in 1945-46) (Paris, 1971), 321-26.

4. The distinction between dissertation and narrative was a commonplace of eighteenth-century rhetorical theories of historical composition (See Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* [London, 1783], ed. Harold F. Harding [Carbondale, 111, 1965], 259-310; see also Johann Gustav Droysen, *Historik*, ed. Peter Leyh [Stuttgart, 1977], 222-80). For a more recent statement of the distinction see Peter Gay, who writes: "Historical narration without analysis is ~Trivial, historical analysis without narration is

page number is given, the reference is to the *Vorlesungen*, by far the most important of these works and the one most frequently cited. *Grundriss I* and *Grundriss* refer, respectively, to the earliest manuscript version (1857/58) and the last published version (1882/83) of that work.

9. Johann Gustav Droysen, *Historik. Vorlesungen über Enzyklopädie und Methodologie der Geschichte*, ed. Rudolf Hübner (Munich, 1937).

10. Rügen, *Begriffene Geschichte*, 15, 61-88, 91, 113.

11. *Ibid.*, 29. Droysen, *Vorlesungen*, in *Historik*, ed. Leyh, 258; further references to Leyh's edition of *Historik* are cited parenthetically in the text (see above, n. 8).

12. See Erich Rothacker, "J. G. Droysen's *Historik*," in *Mensch und Geschichte: Studien zur Anthropologie und Wissenschaftsgeschichte* (Bonn, 1950), 54-58. As always, of course, Arnaldo Monigliano beat the field: see his "Genesi storica e funzione attuale del concetto di Ellenismo," originally published in 1935 and collected in *Contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (Rome, 1955), esp. 181-93.

13. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford, 1956), 165-66; Benedetto Croce, "La Storia ridotta sotto il concetto generale dell'arte," originally published in 1893, now in *Primi saggi*, 3d ed. (Bari, 1951), 3-41.

14. See Louis Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism," in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York, 1969), 232-36; and *idem*, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York, 1971), 127-86. On Althusser see Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject* (London, 1977), 71-78. I am especially grateful to Frederic Jameson for his lectures on ideology, which I have heard on many occasions. His recent book *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, 1981), places the whole subject of ideology on new ground.

15. Coward and Ellis, *Language and Materialism*, 74-78.

16. See Louis Althusser, "Freud and Lacan," in *Lenin and Philosophy*, 189-220.

17. G. G. Gervinus, *Grundzüge der Historik* (Leipzig, 1837), reprinted in *Schriften zur Literatur* (Berlin, 1962), cited in Luther Gall, "Georg Gottfried Gervinus," in *Deutsche Historiker*, vol. 5, ed. H. -U. Wehler (Göttingen, 1972), 25, n. 4.

18. The distinctions between poetry, history, and philosophy are given in Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Ingram Bywater, in *Introduction to Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (Chicago, 1973), chap. 9, pp. 681-82.

19. Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago, 1949), chap. 3.

20. Georg Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?" in *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, trans. Arthur D. Kahn (New York, 1971), 110ff.

21. Althusser, "Freud and Lacan," 211-16.

## 5. Foucault's Discourse: The Historiography of Anti-Humanism

1. The English translator of *The Archeology of Knowledge* translates *énoncé* as "statement" (33). I prefer the technically more specific, or at least philosophically more familiar, "utterance," with its conative connotations, to the more static "statement." I have, accordingly, substituted the former term for the latter in all quotations from the English translation of this work—with apologies to the translator, A. M. Sheridan Smith, who has otherwise done a superb job of Englishing Foucault.

## 7. The Metaphysics of Narrativity: Time and Symbol in Ricoeur's Philosophy of History

1. This essay is a revised version of an appreciation of Paul Ricoeur's *Temps et récit*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1983), which I was asked to prepare for a conference held at the University of Ottawa in October 1983 to honor Ricoeur on his seventieth birthday. I have used the English translation by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1 (Chicago, 1984). When I originally wrote the essay, vol. 2 of *Temps et récit: La configuration dans le récit de fiction* (Paris, 1984) had not yet appeared. In my revision I have made use of this work, now available in an English version by the same translators, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2 (Chicago, 1985); further references to this work, below and in parentheses in the text, are to the English translations, designated *TN* with the volume indicated.

2. Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czemy with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello (Toronto, 1981).

3. Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980), 169.

4. By "secondary referentiality" Ricoeur indicates the twofold nature of all symbolic speech, its saying one thing literally and another figuratively (see *TN*, 1:57-58, 77-82). In the case of the historical narrative, its literal referent is the set of events of which it speaks, while its figurative referent is the "structure of temporality" which, following Heidegger, he calls "historicality" (*Geschichtlichkeit*). Two features of "historicality," he writes, are "the extension of time between birth and death, and the displacement of accent from the future to the past" (*Tn*, 1: 61-62).

5. On plot, emplotment, and configuration as a "grasping together" of scattered events in a symbolic mediation see *TN*, 1:41-42. Later on, Ricoeur writes: "This highlighting of the dynamic of emplotment is to me the key to the problem of the relation between time and narrative. . . . my argument in this book consists of constructing the mediation between time and narrative by demonstrating emplotment's mediating role in the mimetic process" (*TN*, 1:53-54).

6. The aporias of time reside in the fact that we cannot *not* think about



our experience of time, and yet we can never think about it both rationally and comprehensively: "The aporetic character of the pure reflection on time is of the utmost importance for all that follows in the present investigation." It is because such reflection is aporetic that the only response to it can be a poetical and specifically narrative response: "A constant thesis of this book will be that speculation on time is an inconclusive rumination to which narrative activity can alone respond. Not that this activity solves the aporias through substitution. If it does resolve them, it is in a poetical and not a theoretical sense of the word. Emplotment . . . replies to the speculative aporia with a poetic making of something capable, certainly, of clarifying the aporia. . . , but not of resolving it theoretically" (*TN*, 1: 6).

7. "If mimetic activity 'composes' action, it is what establishes what is necessary in composing it. It does not see the universal, it makes it spring forth. What then are its criteria? We have a partial answer in [the expression of Aristotle]: 'it is because as they look at them they have the experience of learning and reasoning out what each thing represents, concluding, for example, that "this figure is so and so"' (48W6-17). This pleasure of recognition, as Dupont Roc and Lallot put it, presupposes, I think, a prospective concept of truth, according to which to invent is to rediscover" (*TN*, 1: 42).

8. This theme of the historian's task as being twofold a "wording" and a "working," a signifying and an acting, a speaking and a doing, is elaborated by Ricoeur in the introduction to *Histoire et vérité*, 2d ed. (Paris, 1955), 9. This collection of essays introduces many of the problems that will be addressed more systematically in *Time and Narrative*; see esp. "Objectivité et subjectivité en histoire" and "Travail et parole."

9. See Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, 1982), 140-42; cf. *TN*, 1: 77-80.

10. Compare Ricoeur's discussion of the relation between history and fiction in "The Fictive Experience of Time," chap. 4 of *TN*, 2, esp. pp. 100-101, with his discussion of historical mimesis in *TN*, 1: 64.

11. Ricoeur distinguishes three kinds of mimesis in narrative discourse. These are produced by symbolizations that effect mediations between (1) random events and their chronological ordering, which produces the chronicle; (2) chronicle representations of events and the history that can be made out of them by emplotment; and (3) both of these and the figures of deep temporality that serve as the ultimate referent of such modernist fables of time as Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Proust's *The Remembrance of Things Past*. See *TN*, 2: 30, where chronology and chronography are characterized as "the true contrary of temporality itself," and 2: 62, where "Being-within-time" is viewed as necessitating the impulse to "reckon with time" and "make calculations" of the sort that inform the chronicle form of representing time.

12. On the two basic kinds of myth see Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection," in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*:

*An Anthology of His Work*, ed. Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (Boston, 1978), 42.

13. "Without leaving everyday experience, are we not inclined to see in a given sequence of episodes of our lives (as yet) untold stories, stories that demand to be told, stories that offer anchorage points for narrative? . . . The principal consequence of [the] existential analysis of human beings as 'entangled in stories' is that narrating is a secondary process, that of 'the story's becoming known.' . . . Telling, following, understanding stories is simply the 'continuation' of these untold stories. . . . We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated" (*TN*, 1: 74-75).

14. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 72-73.

15. See esp. Paul Ricoeur, "The Language of Faith," in Reagan and Stewart, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 232-33.

16. Ricoeur does not, of course, refer to historical narratives, nor indeed to fictional narratives, as "allegorical" in nature, because this would suggest that their secondary referents, the structures of temporality, were nothing but verbal constructions, rather than realities. He uses the term *allegory* to designate the "level of statements" in a symbolic discourse, in contrast to *metaphor*, which designates the level of "figures of speech." Symbolic discourse can then be seen to use the technique of "allegorization" at the level of statement to speak about its double referent—events or actions, on the one side, and structures of temporality, on the other (see Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 171-72). But this means, it seems to me, that we can distinguish a proper and an improper use of allegorization in those forms of symbolic discourse that, like historical narratives, seek to "speak otherwise" about real events, especially when it is a matter of speaking about them in their diachronic, as against their synchronic, aspects.

17. "The question that I shall continue to pursue until the end of this work is whether the paradigm of order, characteristic of tragedy, is capable of extension and transformation to the point where it can be applied to the whole narrative field. . . . the tragic muthos is set up as the poetic solution to the speculative paradox of time" (*TN*, 1: 38).

18. Charles D. Singleton, *Commedia: Elements of Structure* (Cambridge, 1965), 14.

19. *Ibid.*, 15-16.

20. Referring to Heidegger's idea of "deep temporality" (*Zeitlichkeit*), Ricoeur says that it is "the most originary form and the most authentic experience of time, that is, the dialectic of coming to be, having been, and making present. In this dialectic, time is entirely desubstantialized. The words 'future,' 'past,' and 'present' disappear, and time itself figures as the exploded unity of the three temporal ekstases" (*TN*, 1: 61).

21. Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Symbols," 46.

### 8. The Context in the Text: Method and Ideology in Intellectual History

1. For a general survey of modern theories of the sign see Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Golin Smith (New York, 1968), chap. 3; Oswald Ducrot and Tzvetan Todorov, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language*, trans. Catherine Porter (Baltimore and London, 1979), 84-90; and Paul Henle, ed., *Language, Thought, and Culture* (Ann Arbor, 1972), chap. 7.

2. See now the comprehensive survey of modern theories of ideology by Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, 1981), chap. 1.

3. Paolo Valesio, *The Practice of Literary Semiotics: A Theoretical Proposal*, Centro Internazionale di Semiotica e di Linguistica, Università di Urbino, no. 71, series D (Urbino, 1978), 1-23. For a more comprehensive theoretical statement and application, see idem, *Novantiqua: Rhetorics as a Contemporary Theory* (Bloomington, Ind., 1980), chaps. 1, 3.

4. The formulation is, of course, that of Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York, 1971), 127-86.

5. The standard edition is *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography*, ed. Ernest Samuels (Boston, 1973), with indispensable notes. For reasons that are obvious I have used the earlier edition, with an introduction by D. W. Brogan (Boston, 1961).

6. See Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York, 1974), 16-21; and John Sturrock, ed., *Structuralism and Since* (Oxford, 1979), 52-80.

7. John Carlos Rowe, *Henry James and Henry Adams* (Ithaca, 1977), 242.

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