POWER/KNOWLEDGE
Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977
Michel Foucault

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11 THE CONFESSION OF THE FLESH

A conversation with Alain Grosrichard, Gerard Wajeman, Jaques-Alain Miller, Guy Le Gaufey, Dominique Celas, Gerard Miller, Catherine Millot, Jocelyne Livi and Judith Miller.

GROSRICHAUD: Let's begin with the general title of this new project of yours: the 'History of Sexuality'. What is the nature of this new historical object which you term 'sexuality'? Evidently it isn't sexuality in the sense that botanists or biologists speak or have spoken of it, something which is more a matter for historians of science. Nor is it a question of sexuality in the sense that traditional histories of ideas or customs might have understood the term, the point of view which you are now contesting with your doubts about the 'repressive hypothesis'. Nor even, finally, do you seem to be talking about sexual practices such as historians study today using new methods and techniques of analysis. You talk about an 'apparatus of sexuality'. What is the meaning or the methodological function for you of this term, *apparatus (dispositif)*?

FOUCAULT: What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions — in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements. Thus, a particular discourse can figure at one time as the programme of an institution, and at another it can function as a means of justifying or masking a practice which itself remains silent, or as a
secondary re-interpretation of this practice, opening out for it a new field of rationality. In short, between these elements, whether discursive or non-discursive, there is a sort of interplay of shifts of position and modifications of function which can also vary very widely. Thirdly, I understand by the term 'apparatus' a sort of—shall we say—formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need. The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function. This may have been, for example, the assimilation of a floating population found to be burdensome for an essentially mercantilist economy: there was a strategic imperative acting here as the matrix for an apparatus which gradually undertook the control or subjection of madness, mental illness and neurosis.

WAJEMAN: So an apparatus is defined by a structure of heterogeneous elements, but also by a certain kind of genesis?

FOUCAULT: Yes. And I would consider that there are two important moments in this genesis. There is a first moment which is the prevalent influence of a strategic objective. Next, the apparatus as such is constituted and enabled to continue in existence insofar as it is the site of a double process. On the one hand, there is a process of functional overdetermination, because each effect—positive or negative, intentional or unintentional—enters into resonance or contradiction with the others and thereby calls for a re-adjustment or a re-working of the heterogeneous elements that surface at various points. On the other hand, there is a perpetual process of strategic elaboration. Take the example of imprisonment, that apparatus which had the effect of making measures of detention appear to be the most efficient and rational method that could be applied to the phenomenon of criminality. What did this apparatus produce? An entirely unforeseen effect which had nothing to do with any kind of strategic ruse on the part of some meta- or trans-historic subject conceiving and willing it. This effect was the constitution of a delinquent milieu very different from the kind of seedbed of illegalist practices and individuals found in eighteenth-century society. What happened? The prison operated as a process of filtering, con-
centrating, professionalising and circumscribing a criminal milieu. From about the 1830s onwards, one finds an immediate re-utilisation of this unintended, negative effect within a new strategy which came in some sense to occupy this empty space, or transform the negative into a positive. The delinquent milieu came to be re-utilised for diverse political and economic ends, such as the extraction of profit from pleasure through the organisation of prostitution. This is what I call the strategic completion (remplissement) of the apparatus.

**GROS-RICHARD:** In *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, you talked about the *episteme*, knowledge and discursive formations. Now you are more inclined to talk about ‘apparatuses’ and ‘disciplines’. Are these new concepts intended to replace the previous ones, which you would now want to abandon? Or do they rather reproduce them in a different register? Does this amount to a change in the way you would like your books to be used? Are you now selecting your objects of study, your way of approach and your conceptual instruments in terms of new objectives, namely the contemporary struggles that have to be fought, the world which has to be changed rather than interpreted? I am asking this now so that the questions we put to you afterwards won’t be at cross purposes with what you are trying to do.

**FOUCAULT:** But bear in mind that it may be just as well if they’re at cross purposes: that would show that my own undertaking is at cross purposes. But you are right to ask the question. With the notion of the apparatus, I find myself in a difficulty which I haven’t yet been properly able to get out of. I said that the apparatus is essentially of a *strategic* nature, which means assuming that it is a matter of a certain manipulation of relations of forces, either developing them in a particular direction, blocking them, stabilising them, utilising them, etc. The apparatus is thus always inscribed in a play of power, but it is also always linked to certain coordinates of knowledge which issue from it but, to an equal degree, condition it. This is what the apparatus consists in: strategies of relations of forces supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge. In seeking in *The Order of Things* to write a history of the *episteme*, I was still caught
in an impasse. What I should like to do now is to try and show that what I call an apparatus is a much more general case of the *episteme*; or rather, that the *episteme* is a specifically discursive apparatus, whereas the apparatus in its general form is both discursive and non-discursive, its elements being much more heterogeneous.

J.-A. Miller: The complex which you are introducing under the term of apparatus is certainly conceived in a much more heterogeneous form than what you termed the *episteme*. You mingled together or distributed within your epistemes statements of very diverse kinds, those of philosophers, savants, obscure authors, practitioners theorising their practice: hence the effect of surprise your work produced, but it was still finally concerned with discursive utterances.

Foucault: Certainly.

J.-A. Miller: With the introduction of 'apparatuses', you want to get beyond discourse. But these new ensembles, which articulate together so many different elements, remain nonetheless signifying ensembles. I can't quite see how you could be getting at a 'non-discursive' domain.

Foucault: In trying to identify an apparatus, I look for the elements which participate in a rationality, a given form of co-ordination, except that . . . .

J.-A. Miller: One shouldn't say rationality, or we would be back with the *episteme* again.

Foucault: If you like, I would define the *episteme* retrospectively as the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within, I won't say a scientific theory, but a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say are true or false. The *episteme* is the 'apparatus' which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may from what may not be characterised as scientific.

Le Gauvey: But going back to this question of the 'non-discursive', what is there in an apparatus, over and above the discursive utterances, except the 'institutions'?

Foucault: The term 'institution' is generally applied to every kind of more-or-less constrained, learned behaviour. Everything which functions in a society as a system of
constraint and which isn’t an utterance, in short, all the field of the non-discursive social, is an institution.

J.-A. Miller: But clearly the institution is itself discursive.

Foucault: Yes, if you like, but it doesn’t much matter for my notion of the apparatus to be able to say that this is discursive and that isn’t. If you take Gabriel’s architectural plan for the Military School together with the actual construction of the School, how is one to say what is discursive and what institutional? That would only interest me if the building didn’t conform with the plan. But I don’t think it’s very important to be able to make that distinction, given that my problem isn’t a linguistic one.

The Analytic of Power

Grosrichard: In The Will to Know, you study the constitution and the history of an apparatus: the apparatus of sexuality. Very schematically, one can say that this apparatus is articulated, on the one hand, on to what you call power (le pouvoir), for which it serves as a means and expression, and that on the other hand it produces, as one might put it, an imaginary, historically datable object, namely sex. There follow from this two major series of questions about power, about sex, and about their relation to the apparatus of sexuality. Concerning power, you voice doubts about the conception of it that has been traditionally held. And what you are proposing is not so much a new theory of power as an ‘analytic of power’. How does this term, ‘analytic’ help you to throw light on what you refer to here as ‘power’ and its connection with the apparatus of sexuality?

Foucault: Power in the substantive sense, ‘le pouvoir’, doesn’t exist. What I mean is this. The idea that there is either located at — or emanating from — a given point something which is a ‘power’ seems to me to be based on a misguided analysis, one which at all events fails to account for a considerable number of phenomena. In reality power means relations, a more-or-less organised, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations. So the problem is not that
of constituting a theory of power which would be a remake of Boulainvilliers on the one hand and Rousseau on the other. Both these authors start off from an original state in which all men are equal, and then, what happens? With one of them, a historical invasion, with the other a mythico-juridical event, but either way it turns out that from a given moment people no longer have rights, and power is constituted. If one tries to erect a theory of power one will always be obliged to view it as emerging at a given place and time and hence to deduce it, to reconstruct its genesis. But if power is in reality an open, more-or-less coordinated (in the event, no doubt, ill-coordinated) cluster of relations, then the only problem is to provide oneself with a grid of analysis which makes possible an analytic of relations of power.

Grosrichard: And yet in your book, speaking of the repercussions of the Council of Trent, you propose to study ‘via what channels and through what discourses power is able to gain access to the slightest, most individual forms of behaviour, by what routes it is enabled to reach into the most insubstantial, imperceptible forms of desire’. Here the language you use still suggests a power beginning from a single centre which, little by little, through a process of diffusion, contagion or carcinosis, brings within its compass the minutest, most peripheral details. Now it seems to me that elsewhere, when you talk about the multiplication of ‘disciplines’, you show power as having its beginnings in the ‘little places’, organising itself in terms of the ‘little things’, before it gets to the stage of concentrated organisation. How can one reconcile these two representations of power, the one describing it as exercised from the top downwards, from the centre to the perimeter, by the important over the trivial, and the other, which seems to be the exact opposite?

Foucault: I inwardly blushed while listening to you reading, thinking to myself, it’s true, I did use that metaphor of the point which progressively irradiates its surroundings. But that was in a very particular case, that of the Church after the Council of Trent. Generally speaking I think one needs to look rather at how the great strategies of power encrust themselves and depend for their conditions of exercise on the level of the micro-relations of power. But there are always also movements in the opposite direction,
whereby strategies which co-ordinate relations of power produce new effects and advance into hitherto unaffected domains. Thus up to the middle of the sixteenth century the Church only supervised sexuality in a fairly distant manner. The requirement of annual confession, with its avowal of the different kinds of sins committed, ensured that in fact one wouldn’t have to relate very many sexual adventures to one’s curé. With the Council of Trent, around the middle of the sixteenth century, there emerge, alongside the ancient techniques of the confessional, a new series of procedures developed within the ecclesiastical institution for the purpose of training and purifying ecclesiastical personnel. Detailed techniques were elaborated for use in seminaries and monasteries, techniques of discursive rendition of daily life, of self-examination, confession, direction of conscience and regulation of the relationship between director and directed. It was this technology which it was sought to inject into society as a whole, and it is true that the move was directed from the top downwards.

J.-A. Miller: This is the phenomenon which Pierre Legendre has studied.

Foucault: I haven’t been able to read his most recent book yet, but what he did in L’Amour du Censeur seems to me to be an absolutely necessary undertaking. What he describes there is a process that really existed. But I don’t believe that relations of power are only engendered like that, from the top downwards.

Grosrichard: Then you think this representation of power as exercised from above, and in a negative or repressive way, is an illusion? Isn’t it a necessary illusion, one engendered by power itself? At all events, the illusion is a very persistent one, and after all it’s against just this kind of power that people have struggled in the hope of being able to change things.

G. Miller: I would add this: even if one accepts that power, on the scale of a whole society, doesn’t proceed downwards from the top but can be analysed rather as a cluster of relations, don’t the ‘micro-powers’ on which these relations are founded themselves still operate from above?

Foucault: Yes, if you like. In so far as power relations are an unequal and relatively stable relation of forces, it’s
clear that this implies an above and a below, a difference of potentials.

GROSRIChARD: One always needs to have someone smaller than oneself.

FOUCAULT: Agreed, but what I meant was that in order for there to be a movement from above to below there has to be a capillarity from below to above at the same time. Take a simple example, the feudal form of power relation. Between the serfs tied to the land and the lord who levies rent from them, there exists a local, relatively autonomous relation, almost a tête-à-tête. For this relation to hold, it must indeed have the backing of a certain pyramidal ordering of the feudal system. But it’s certain that the power of the French kings and the apparatuses of State which they gradually established from the eleventh century onward had as their condition of possibility a rooting in forms of behaviour, bodies and local relations of power which should not at all be seen as a simple projection of the central power.

J.-A. MILLER: What is it, then, this ‘power relation’? It isn’t just the relation of obligation.

FOUCAULT: Ah no! I was just trying to answer the question that was asked a moment ago, about this power from above, which is supposed to be ‘negative’. All power, whether it be from above or from below, whatever level one examines it on, is actually represented in a more-or-less uniform fashion throughout Western societies under a negative, that is to say a juridical form. It’s the characteristic of our Western societies that the language of power is law, not magic, religion, or anything else.

GROSRIChARD: But the language of love, for example, as it’s formulated in courtly literature and in the whole history of love in the West, isn’t a juridical language; yet it does nothing but talk of power, never ceases establishing relations of domination and servitude. Take the term ‘mistress’, for instance.

FOUCAULT: Yes indeed. But Duby has an interesting explanation there. He connects the emergence of courtly literature with the existence in medieval society of the ‘juvenes’: the juvenes were the young people, the descendants who had no rights of inheritance and had to live on the margins of the linear genealogical successions which charac-
terised the feudal system. They waited for deaths among the male legitimate heirs, or for an heiress obliged to procure a husband capable of taking charge of the inheritance and the functions of head of a family. The *juvenes* thus constituted the turbulent surplus necessarily engendered by the mode of transmission of power and property. And Duby sees this as the origin of courtly literature: courtly literature was a sort of fictive joust between the *juvenes* and the head of a family, the lord, the King even, for the stake of the already appropriated wife. In the intervals between wars and the leisure of the long winter evenings there was woven around the wives the web of these courtly relations which at bottom were the very inverse of relations of power since it was still only an affair of a landless knight turning up at a chateau to seduce the lord of the manor's wife. So what one had here, engendered by the institutions themselves, was a sort of loosening of constraints, an acceptable unbridling, which yielded this real–fictive joust one finds in the themes of courtly love. It's a comedy around power relations which functions in the interstices of power but isn't itself a real power relation.

**GROS RICHARD:** Perhaps, but even so courtly literature derives, via the troubadours, from Arabic and Moslem civilisation. Does Duby's analysis work there as well? But let's return to the question of power and its relation to the notion of the apparatus.

**MILLOT:** Discussing what you call 'general apparatuses' ('*dispositifs d'ensemble*') you write in *The Will to Know* that 'here the logic is perfectly clear, the aims decipherable, yet it turns out that no one can have conceived and very few formulated them: such is the implicit character of the great, anonymous, almost mute strategies which coordinate the voluble tactics whose "inventors" or directors are often devoid of all hypocrisy . . . .' You define here something like a strategy without a subject. How is this conceivable?

**FOUCAULT:** Let's take an example. From around 1825 to 1830 one finds the local and perfectly explicit appearance of definite strategies for fixing the workers in the first heavy industries at their work-places. At Mulhouse and in northern France various tactics are elaborated: pressuring people to marry, providing housing, building *cités ouvrières*,
practising that sly system of credit-slavery that Marx talks about, consisting in enforcing advance payment of rents while wages are paid only at the end of the month. Then there are the savings-bank systems, the truck-system with grocers and wine-merchants who act for the bosses, and so on. Around all this there is formed little by little a discourse, the discourse of philanthropy and the moralisation of the working class. Then the experiments become generalised by way of the institutions and societies consciously advocating programmes for the moralisation of the working class. Then on top of that there is superimposed the problem of women’s work, the schooling of children and the relations between the two issues. Between the schooling of children, which is a centralised, Parliamentary measure, and this or that purely local initiative dealing with workers’ housing, for example, one finds all sorts of support mechanisms (unions of employers, chambers of commerce, etc.) which invent, modify and re-adjust, according to the circumstances of the moment and the place—so that you get a coherent, rational strategy, but one for which it is no longer possible to identify a person who conceived it.

MILLOT: But then what role does the social class play?

FOUCAULT: Ah, here we are at the centre of the problem, and no doubt also of the obscurities of my own discourse. A dominant class isn’t a mere abstraction, but neither is it a pre-given entity. For a class to become a dominant class, for it to ensure its domination and for that domination to reproduce itself is certainly the effect of a number of actual pre-meditated tactics operating within the grand strategies that ensure this domination. But between the strategy which fixes, reproduces, multiplies and accentuates existing relations of forces, and the class which thereby finds itself in a ruling position, there is a reciprocal relation of production. Thus one can say that the strategy of moralising the working class is that of the bourgeoisie. One can even say that it’s the strategy which allows the bourgeois class to be the bourgeois class and to exercise its domination. But what I don’t think one can say is that it’s the bourgeois class on the level of its ideology or its economic project which, as a sort of at once real and fictive subject, invented and forcibly imposed this strategy on the working class.
J.-A. MILLER: So there is no subject, but there is an effect of finalisation.

FOUCAULT: An effect of finalisation relative to an objective —

J.-A. MILLER: — An objective which is imposed, then.

FOUCAULT: Which turns out to be imposed. To reiterate: the moralisation of the working class wasn’t imposed by Guizot, through his schools legislation, nor by Dupin through his books. It wasn’t imposed by the employers’ unions either. And yet it was accomplished, because it met the urgent need to master a vagabond, floating labour force. So the objective existed and the strategy was developed, with ever-growing coherence, but without it being necessary to attribute to it a subject which makes the law, pronouncing it in the form of ‘Thou shalt’ and ‘Thou shalt not’.

G. MILLER: But how is one to distinguish between the different subjects involved in this strategy? Mustn’t one be able to distinguish, for instance, between those who produce it and those who only undergo it? Even if their respective initiatives often end by converging, are they all merged into one or do they singularise themselves? And if so, in what terms?

GROSCHARD: Or to put it another way, is your model Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees*?

FOUCAULT: I wouldn’t exactly say that, but I’ll take another example: that of the constitution of a medico-legal apparatus, through which on the one hand psychiatry is utilised in the penal system while, conversely, penal types of controls and interventions are developed and multiplied to deal with the actions or behaviour of abnormal subjects. This led to that vast theoretical and legislative edifice constructed around the question of degeneracy and degenerates. What took place here? All sorts of subjects intervened, administrative personnel for example, for reasons of public order, but above all it was the doctors and magistrates. Can one talk of interests here? In the case of the doctors, why should they have wanted to intervene so directly in the penal domain, just when they had barely, and then only with difficulty, succeeded in detaching psychiatry from the sort of magma constituted by the practices of internment which occupied precisely the heart of the
'medico-legal' domain except for the fact that they were neither medical nor legal. Just when the alienists have barely isolated and marked out the theory and practice of mental alienation, here they are saying, 'There are crimes which are our business, these people belong to us!' Where is their interest as doctors in this? To say that there was a sort of imperialist dynamic of psychiatry aiming to annex crime and submit it to its rationality doesn't get us anywhere. I would be tempted to say that there was, in fact, a necessity here (which one doesn't have to call an interest) linked to the very existence of a psychiatry which had made itself autonomous but needed thereafter to secure a basis for its intervention by gaining recognition as a component of public hygiene. And it could establish this basis only through the fact that there was a disease (mental alienation) for it to mop up. There had also to be a danger for it to combat, comparable with that of an epidemic, a lack of hygiene, or suchlike. Now, how can it be proved that madness constitutes a danger except by showing that there exist extreme cases where madness, even though not apparent to the public gaze, without manifesting itself beforehand through any symptom except a few minute fissures, minuscule murmurings perceptible only to the highly trained observer, can suddenly explode into a monstrous crime. This was how the diagnosis of homicidal mania was constructed. Madness is a redoubtable danger precisely in that it is not foreseeable by any of those persons of good sense who claim to be able to recognise it. Only a doctor can spot it, and thus madness becomes exclusively an object for the doctor, whose right of intervention is grounded by the same token. In the case of the magistrates, one can say that it is a different necessity which leads them, despite their reluctance, to accept the intervention of the doctors. Along with the edifice of the Penal Code, the punitive machine of the prison which had been placed in their hands could function effectively only if it operated at the level of the individuality of the individual, the criminal and not the crime, so as to transform and reform him. But, once given that there were crimes whose reasons and motives could not be established, punishment became impossible. To punish a person whom one doesn't fully know is
impossible for a penal system which no longer works through the *supplice* but through internment. (This is so much the case that the other day someone, an admirable person moreover, uttered this astounding sentence which ought to have left us all gaping: 'You cannot execute Patrick Henry, you don't understand him'. What does that mean? If they had understood him, would it have been all right to kill him?) The magistrates, therefore, so as to combine a penal code which was still based on punishment and expiation with a punitive practice which had become one of reform and imprisonment, were forced to make room for the psychiatrists. So here you have strategic necessities which are not exactly interests . . . .

G. Miller: You substitute for the notion of 'interest' those of 'problem' (for the doctors) and 'necessity' (for the magistrates). The gain appears very slight, and things remain still very imprecise.

Le Gaufey: It seems to me that the metaphorical system governing your analysis is that of the organism, which makes possible the elimination of reference to a thinking, willing subject. A living organism tends always to persist in its being, and all means for its attaining that objective are good ones.

Foucault: No, I don't agree with that at all. Firstly, I have never used the metaphor of the organism. Secondly, the problem isn't one of self-preservation. When I speak of strategy, I am taking the term seriously: in order for a certain relation of forces not only to maintain itself, but to accentuate, stabilise and broaden itself, a certain kind of manoeuvre is necessary. The psychiatrist had to manoeuvre in order to make himself recognised as part of the public hygiene system. This isn't an organism, any more than in the case of the magistrature, and I can't see how what I'm saying can imply that these are organisms.

Grosrichard: What is striking, however, is that it was during the nineteenth century that a theory of society conceived on the model of the organism was constituted—that of Auguste Comte for instance. But let's leave that. All the examples you have given us to show how you conceive this 'strategy without a subject' are drawn from the nineteenth century, a period where society and the State already
possess a very centralised, technicised form. Are things equally clear for earlier periods?

J.-A. Miller: In short, it’s just at the moment when the strategy appears to have a subject that Foucault shows that it hasn’t . . . .

Foucault: In a sense, I would agree. I heard someone talking about power the other day—it’s in fashion. He observed that the famous ‘absolute’ monarchy in reality had nothing absolute about it. In fact it consisted of a number of islands of dispersed power, some of them functioning as geographical spaces, others as pyramids, others as bodies, or through the influence of familial systems, kinship networks and so forth. One can see perfectly well why grand strategies couldn’t emerge in such a system. The French monarchy was equipped with a very strong, but very rigid, administrative apparatus: one which let a tremendous amount slip through its grip. Certainly there was a King, the manifest representative of power, but in reality power wasn’t centralised and didn’t express itself through grand strategies, at once fine, supple and coherent. On the other hand, in the nineteenth century one finds all kinds of mechanisms and institutions—the parliamentary system, diffusion of information, publishing, the great exhibitions, the university, and so on: ‘bourgeois power’ was then able to elaborate its grand strategies, without one needing for all that to impute a subject to them.

J.-A. Miller: As far as the space of ‘theory’ was concerned, after all, the old ‘transcendental space without a subject’ never really worried many people, whatever the reproaches that were made against you from the direction of Les Temps Modernes when you published The Order of Things complaints about the absence of any kind of causality from your shifts from one episteme to the next. But perhaps there is a problem when one is dealing not with the ‘theoretical’ but the ‘practical’ field. Given that there are relations of forces, and struggles, the question inevitably arises of who is doing the struggling and against whom? Here you can’t escape the question of the subject, or rather the subjects.

Foucault: Certainly, and this is what is preoccupying me. I’m not too sure what the answer is. But after all, if one con-
siders that power has to be analysed in terms of relations of power, then it seems to me that one has a much better chance than in other theoretical procedures of grasping the relation that exists between power and struggles, and especially the class struggle. What I find striking in the majority—if not of Marx’s texts then those of the Marxists (except perhaps Trotsky)—is the way they pass over in silence what is understood by struggle when one talks of class struggle. What does struggle mean here? Is it a dialectical confrontation? An economic battle? A war? Is civil society riven by class struggle to be seen as a war continued by other means?

CELAS: Perhaps one should take account here of the party, that other institution, which can’t be assimilated to those others which don’t have ‘taking power’ as their goal...

GROSRIICHARD: And then again, the Marxists do all the same ask the question, ‘Who are our friends, who are our enemies?’, the question which serves to determine the real lines of confrontation within this field of struggles...

J.-A. MILLER: So who ultimately, in your view, are the subjects who oppose each other?

FOUCAULT: This is just a hypothesis, but I would say it’s all against all. There aren’t immediately given subjects of the struggle, one the proletariat, the other the bourgeoisie. Who fights against whom? We all fight each other. And there is always within each of us something that fights something else.

J.-A. MILLER: Which would mean that there are only ever transitory coalitions, some of which immediately break up, but others of which persist, but that strictly speaking individuals would be the first and last components?

FOUCAULT: Yes, individuals, or even sub-individuals.

J.-A. MILLER: Sub-individuals?

FOUCAULT: Why not?

G. MILLER: Regarding this question of power, if I could give my impression as a reader of your book, there are places where I would say it’s too neat...

FOUCAULT: That’s what ‘La Nouvelle Critique’ said about my previous book: it’s too neat not to be harbouring lies...

G. MILLER: What I mean is that this business of strategies
is all too neat. I don’t think it’s harbouring lies, but, after seeing everything so tidily arranged and organised on the local, the regional and the national level, and over periods of centuries, I wonder if one doesn’t still have to leave room for the shambles?

FOUCAULT: Oh, I quite agree. Judiciary and psychiatry join hands, but only after such a mess, such a shambles! Only my position is as if I were dealing with a battle: if one isn’t content with descriptions, if one wants to try and explain a victory or a defeat, then one does have to pose the problems in terms of strategies, and ask, ‘Why did that work? How did that hold up?’ That’s why I look at things from this angle, which may end up giving the impression the story is too pretty to be true.

Sex from Tertullian to Freud

GROSRICHARD: Now let’s talk about sex. You treat it as a historical object, engendered in some sense by the apparatus of sexuality.

J.-A. MILLER: Your previous book dealt with criminality. Sexuality, apparently, is a different kind of object. Unless it were more interesting to show that it’s the same? Which would you prefer?

FOUCAULT: I would say, let’s try and see if it isn’t the same. That’s the stake in the game, and if I’m thinking of writing six volumes, it’s precisely because it’s a game! This book is the only one I’ve written without knowing beforehand what I would call it, and right up to the last moment I couldn’t think of a title. I use ‘History of Sexuality’ for want of anything better. The first projected title, which I subsequently dropped, was ‘Sex and Truth’. All the same, that was my problem: what had to happen in the history of the West for the question of truth to be posed in regard to sexual pleasure? And this has been a problem that has exercised me ever since I wrote Madness and Civilisation. About that book historians say ‘Yes, that’s fine, but why didn’t you look at the different mental illnesses that are found in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? Why didn’t you do the history of the epidemics of mental illnesses during that period?’ I can’t seem to be able to explain to
them that indeed that is all extremely interesting, but that wasn’t my problem. Regarding madness, my problem was to find out how the question of madness could have been made to operate in terms of discourses of truth, that is to say, discourses having the status and function of true discourses. In the West that means scientific discourse. That was also the angle from which I wanted to approach the question of sexuality.

Grosrichard: How would you define what you call ‘sex’ in relation to this apparatus of sexuality? Is it an imaginary object, a phenomenon, an illusion?

Foucault: Well, I’ll tell you what happened when I was writing the book. There were several successive drafts. To start with, sex was taken as a pre-given datum, and sexuality figured as a sort of simultaneously discursive and institutional formation which came to graft itself on to sex, to overlay it and perhaps finally to obscure it. That was the first line of approach. Then I showed some people the manuscript and came to realise that it wasn’t very satisfactory. Then I turned the whole thing upside down. That was only a game, because I wasn’t sure . . . . But I said to myself, basically, couldn’t it be that sex—which seems to be an instance having its own laws and constraints, on the basis of which the masculine and feminine sexes are defined—be something which on the contrary is produced by the apparatus of sexuality? What the discourse of sexuality was initially applied to wasn’t sex but the body, the sexual organs, pleasures, kinship relations, interpersonal relations, and so forth.


Foucault: Yes, a heterogeneous ensemble, one which was finally completely overlaid by the apparatus of sexuality, which in turn at a certain moment produced, as the keystone of its discourse and perhaps of its very functioning, the idea of sex.

G. Miller: But isn’t this idea of sex contemporaneous with the establishment of the apparatus of sexuality?

Foucault: No, no! It seems to me that one sees sex emerging during the course of the nineteenth century.

G. Miller: We have only had sex since the nineteenth century?
FOUCAULT: We have had sexuality since the eighteenth century, and sex since the nineteenth. What we had before that was no doubt the flesh. The basic originator of it all was Tertullian.

J.-A. MILLER: You’ll have to explain that for us.

FOUCAULT: Well, Tertullian combined within a coherent theoretical discourse two fundamental elements: the essentials of the imperatives of Christianity—the ‘didaské’—and the principles by way of which it was possible to escape from the dualism of the Gnostics.

J.-A. MILLER: I can see you are looking for the devices that will enable you to erase the break that is located with Freud. You recall how at the time when Althusser was proclaiming the Marxian break, you were already there with your eraser. And now Freud is going to go the same way, at any rate I think that’s your objective, no doubt within a complex strategy, as you would say. Do you really think you can erase the break between Tertullian and Freud?

FOUCAULT: I’ll say this, that for me the whole business of breaks and non-breaks is always at once a point of departure and a very relative thing. In The Order of Things, I took as my starting-point some very manifest differences, the transformations of the empirical sciences around the end of the eighteenth century. It calls for a degree of ignorance (which I know isn’t yours) to fail to see that a treatise of medicine written in 1780 and a treatise of pathological anatomy written in 1820 belong to two different worlds. My problem was to ascertain the sets of transformations in the régime of discourses necessary and sufficient for people to use these words rather than those, a particular type of discourse rather than some other type, for people to be able to look at things from such and such an angle and not some other one. In the present case, for reasons which are conjunctural, since everyone is putting the stress on breaks, I’m saying, let’s try to shift the scenery and take as our starting point something else which is just as manifest as the ‘break’, provided one changes the reference points. One then finds this formidable mechanism emerging—the machinery of the confession, within which in fact psychoanalysis and Freud figure as episodes.
J.-A. MILLER: You're constructing a machine which swallows an enormous amount at a time . . . .

FOUCAULT: An enormous amount at a time, and then I'll try and establish what the transformations are . . . .

J.-A. MILLER: Making sure, of course, that the principal transformation doesn't come with Freud. You'll show, for example, that the focussing of sexuality on the family began prior to Freud, or that—.

FOUCAULT: — It seems to me that the mere fact that I've adopted this course undoubtedly excludes for me the possibility of Freud figuring as the radical break, on the basis of which everything else has to be re-thought. I may well attempt to show how around the eighteenth century there is installed, for economic reasons, historical reasons, and so forth, a general apparatus in which Freud will come to have his place. And no doubt I'll show how Freud turned the theory of degeneracy inside out, like a glove—which isn't the usual way of situating the Freudian break as an event in terms of scientificity.

J.-A. MILLER: Yes, you like to accentuate the artificial character of your procedure. Your results depend on the choice of reference points, and the choice of reference points depends on the conjuncture. It's all a matter of appearances, is that what you're telling us?

FOUCAULT: Not a delusive appearance, but a fabrication.

J.-A. MILLER: Right, and so it's motivated by what you want, your hopes, your . . . .

FOUCAULT: Correct, and that's where the polemical or political objective comes in. But as you know, I never go in for polemics, and I'm a good distance away from politics.

J.-A. MILLER: And what effects do you hope to produce regarding psychoanalysis?

FOUCAULT: Well, I would say that in the usual histories one reads that sexuality was ignored by medicine, and above all by psychiatry, and that at last Freud discovered the sexual aetiology of neuroses. Now everyone knows that that isn't true, that the problem of sexuality was massively and manifestly inscribed in the medicine and psychiatry of the nineteenth century, and that basically Freud was only taking literally what he heard Charcot say one evening: it is indeed all a question of sexuality. The strength of psychoanalysis
consists in its having opened out on to something quite different, namely the logic of the unconscious. And there sexuality is no longer what it was at the outset.

J.-A. Miller: Certainly. When you say psychoanalysis there, one could say Lacan, couldn’t one?

Foucault: I would say Freud and Lacan. In other words, the important part is not the Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality but The Interpretation of Dreams.

J.-A. Miller: Not the theory of development, but the logic of the signifier.

Foucault: Not the theory of development, nor the sexual secret behind the neuroses or psychoses, but a logic of the unconscious . . .

J.-A. Miller: That’s very Lacanian, opposing sexuality and the unconscious. And moreover it’s one of the axioms of that logic that there is no sexual relation.

Foucault: I didn’t know there was this axiom.

J.-A. Miller: It implies that sexuality isn’t historical in the sense that everything else is, through and through from the start. There isn’t a history of sexuality in the way that there is a history of bread.

Foucault: No, but there is one in the sense that there is a history of madness, I mean of madness as a question, posed in terms of truth, within a discourse in which human madness is held to signify something about the truth of what man, the subject, or reason is. From the day when madness ceased to appear as the mask of reason but was inscribed as a prodigious Other which is nevertheless present in every reasonable man, sole possessor of a part, if not of the essence of the secrets of reason: from that moment, something like a history of madness begins, or at least a new episode in the history of madness. And we have still not emerged from this episode. I would say in the same way that from the day when it was said to man, ‘You shall not merely make yourself pleasure with your sex, you will make yourself truth, and that truth will be your truth’, from the day Tertullian began saying to the Christians, ‘Where your chastity is concerned . . .’

J.-A. Miller: Here you are looking for an origin again, and now it’s all Tertullian’s fault . . .

Foucault: I was only joking there.
J.-A. Miller: Obviously, you’re going to say things are much more complicated, there are heterogeneous levels, movements from above to below and below to above . . . ! But seriously, this search for the point where it all may have begun, all this malady of speech, do you . . . ?

Foucault: I say that in a fictive manner, as a joke, to make a fable.

J.-A. Miller: But if one wasn’t joking, what would one say?

Foucault: What would one say? One would arguably find in Euripides, and linking this with certain elements of Jewish mysticism, and others from Alexandrian philosophy, and the notion of sexuality among the Stoics, and including also the notion of enkrateia, that assumption of a quality not to be found in the Stoics, chastity . . . . But what I’m concerned with, what I’m talking about, is how it comes about that people are told that the secret of their truth lies in the region of their sex.

Grosrichard: You talk about techniques of confession. There are also, it seems to me, techniques of listening. One finds, for example, in most of the manuals for confessors or dictionaries of cases of conscience, an article on ‘morose delectation’ which treats of the nature and gravity of the sin that consists in taking a lingering pleasure (that’s the morositas) in the representation, through thought or speech, of a past sexual pleasure. And here is what is directly of concern for the confessor: how is one to lend one’s ear to the recital of abominable scenes without sinning oneself, that is, taking pleasure oneself? There is a whole technique and casuistry of listening here, which evidently depends on the one hand on the relation of the thing itself to the thought of the thing, and on the other hand on the relation of the thought of the thing to the words which say it. Now, this double relationship has varied through time, as you clearly showed in The Order of Things where you delimited the initial and terminal bounds of the ‘episteme of representation’. This long history of the confessional, this will to hear the other speak the truth of his sex, which today still hasn’t ceased to exercise itself, is thus accompanied by a history of techniques of listening which have passed through profound changes. Is the line you trace from the
Middle Ages down to Freud a continuous one? When Freud—or any psychoanalyst—listens, is the way he listens, what he listens to, or the place occupied in this by the signifier still comparable with how things were for the confessors?

FOUCAULT: This first volume of my book is concerned with getting an overview on something whose permanent existence in the West is difficult to deny: regulated procedures for the confession of sex, sexuality and sexual pleasures. But it's true that these procedures were often profoundly altered at certain moments, under conditions which are often difficult to explain. In the eighteenth century one finds a very sharp falling away, not in pressure and injunctions to confess, but in the refinement of techniques of confession. During this period, where the direction of conscience and the confessional have lost the essential force of their role, one finds brutal medical techniques emerging, which consist in simply demanding that the subject tell his or her story, or narrate it in writing.

J.-A. MILLER: But do you believe that throughout this long period there perdures one and the same concept, not of sex, but of truth? Is truth localised and collected in the same way? Is it attributed causal powers?

FOUCAULT: What was constantly assumed and accepted, subject no doubt to all sorts of possible variations, was the notion that the production of truth is charged with effects on the subject.

J.-A. MILLER: Don't you ever have the feeling that you're putting together an argument, which—amusing as it is—is destined to let slip the essentials? That your net is so coarse-meshed that it will let all the fish through? Why, instead of using your microscope, are you now taking a telescope, and looking through the wrong end at that? The only way we will be able to understand why you're doing it is if you'll tell us what you hope to gain by it.

FOUCAULT: Is it permissible to talk of hope here? The term of confession (aveu) that I'm using is perhaps a little too broad. But I think I gave it a fairly precise meaning in my book. What I mean by 'confession', even though I can well see that the term may be a little annoying, is all those procedures by which the subject is incited to produce a
discourse of truth about his sexuality which is capable of having effects on the subject himself.

J.-A. MILLER: I'm not very happy with the huge concepts you're employing here. They seem to me to dissolve as soon as one looks at things more closely.

FOUCAULT: But they're meant to be dissolved, these are only very general definitions . . .

J.-A. MILLER: In confessional procedures it is assumed that the subject knows the truth. Isn't there a radical change at the point where it's assumed that the subject doesn't know this truth?

FOUCAULT: I see what you're getting at, but one of the fundamental points of the Christian method of direction of conscience is precisely that the subject doesn't know the truth.

J.-A. MILLER: And you want to show that his non-knowledge has the status of an unconscious? But re-inscribing the subject's discourse within a grid of reading, re-coding it in accordance with a questionnaire to establish whether such and such an act is a sin or not, this has nothing to do with imputing a knowledge to the subject whose truth he does not himself know.

FOUCAULT: In the direction of conscience, what the subject doesn't know is something quite different from whether an act is or isn't a sin, or whether it's a mortal or a venial sin. He doesn't know what takes place within him. And when the Christian comes in search of his director, and says to him, 'Listen . . .'.

J.-A. MILLER: So the relation of director and directed is exactly the analytical situation?

FOUCAULT: Listen, I want to finish. The Christian says, 'Listen, the trouble is that I can't pray at present, I have a feeling of spiritual dryness which has made me lose touch with God.' And the director says to him, 'Well, there is something happening in you which you don't know about. We will work together to find it out.'

J.-A. MILLER: I'm sorry, but I don't find the comparison quite convincing.

FOUCAULT: I fully realise we are touching here on what is, for you, for me, for all of us, the fundamental question. I'm not seeking to construct this notion of confession into a
framework enabling me to reduce everything to the same thing, from the confessors to Freud. On the contrary, as in The Order of Things, it's a matter of making the differences stand out more clearly. My field of objects here is the procedures for the extortion of truth: in the next volume, which will be concerned with the Christian notion of the flesh, I shall try to study the characteristics of these discursive procedures, from the tenth to the eighteenth century. And that will bring me to this transformation, one which seems to me enigmatic in a much profounder sense than that of psychoanalysis, since the question it poses was what led me to transform what was only meant to be a little book into this current rather mad project of mine: within the space of twenty years, throughout Europe, doctors and educators came to be exclusively obsessed with that incredible epidemic threatening the whole human race: child masturbation. Something that no one was supposed to have previously practiced!

Livi: Concerning child masturbation, do you think you are giving sufficient importance to the difference between the sexes? Or do you think pedagogical institutions functioned in the same way for girls as for boys?

Foucault: At first sight, the differences prior to the nineteenth century seemed slight to me.

Livi: I think it all seems to happen much more discreetly with girls. It's less talked about, whereas with boys there are very detailed descriptions.

Foucault: Yes . . . . The problem of sex in the eighteenth century was the problem of the male sex, and the discipline of sex was put into effect in boys' colleges, military schools, etc. Then, from the moment the woman begins to take on importance in medico-social terms, with the connected problems of child-bearing, breast-feeding, etc., at that point female masturbation comes to be on the order of the day. In the nineteenth century this seems to become the dominant problem. At the end of the nineteenth century, at any rate, great surgical operations are performed on girls, veritable tortures: cauterisation of the clitoris with red-hot irons was, if not habitual, at least fairly frequent at that time. In terms of the masturbation problem, this was a dramatic development.
Wajeman: Could you clarify what you were saying about Freud and Charcot?

Foucault: Freud comes to Charcot's clinic. He sees interns giving women inhalations of amyl nitrate, and they then bring them, intoxicated, for Charcot to see. The women adopt certain postures, say things. They are listened to and watched, and then at a certain moment Charcot declares that this is getting ugly. What we have here, then, is a superb gadget by means of which sexuality is actually extracted, induced, incited and titillated in all manner of ways, and then suddenly Charcot says that that's enough of that. As for Freud, he will ask why that is enough. Freud doesn't need to go hunting for anything other than what he had seen chez Charcot. Sexuality was there before his eyes in manifest form, orchestrated by Charcot and his worthy aides...

Wajeman: That isn't quite what you say in your book. All the same there did take place what you call the intervention of 'the most famous of Ears'. No doubt sexuality did pass from a mouth to an ear, Charcot's mouth to Freud's ear, and it's true that Freud saw the manifestation at La Salpêtrière of something of the order of sexuality. But did Charcot recognise the sexuality? Charcot had hysterical fits induced, like the circular-arc posture. Freud recognised in that something akin to coitus. But can one say that Charcot saw what Freud was to see?

Foucault: No, but I was speaking as an apologist for Freud. I meant that Freud's great originality wasn't discovering the sexuality hidden beneath neurosis. The sexuality was already there, Charcot was already talking about it. Freud's originality was taking all that literally, and then erecting on its basis the Interpretation of Dreams, which is something other than a sexual aetiology of neuroses. If I were to be very pretentious, I would say that I'm doing something a bit similar to that. I'm starting off from an apparatus of sexuality, a fundamental historical given which must be an indispensable point of departure for us. I'm taking it literally, at face value: I'm not placing myself outside it, because that isn't possible, but this allows me to get at something else.

J.-A. Miller: And in the Science of Dreams aren't you
aware of seeing a truly unprecedented form of relation between sex and discourse being instituted?

FOUCAULT: Possibly. I don’t exclude that at all. But the relation instituted with the direction of consciences after the Council of Trent is also unprecedented. It was a gigantic cultural phenomenon: this is undeniable.

J.-A. MILLER: And psychoanalysis isn’t?

FOUCAULT: Yes, of course, I’m not saying that psychoanalysis is already there with the directors of conscience. That would be an absurdity.

J.-A. MILLER: Yes, yes, you aren’t saying that, but all the same, you are! Would you say in the last analysis that the history of sexuality, in the sense of your understanding of that term, culminates in psychoanalysis?

FOUCAULT: Certainly! A culminating point is arrived at here in the history of procedures that set sex and truth in relation. In our time there isn’t a single one of the discourses on sexuality which isn’t, in one way or another, oriented in relation to that of psychoanalysis.

J.-A. MILLER: Well, what I find amusing is that a declaration like that is only conceivable in the French context and the conjuncture of today. Don’t you agree?

FOUCAULT: It’s true that there are countries where, owing to the way the cultural domain is institutionalised and functions, discourses on sex don’t perhaps have that position of subordination, derivation and fascination vis-à-vis psychoanalysis which they have here in France, where the intelligentsia, because of its place in the pyramidal hierarchy of recognised values, accords psychoanalysis a privileged value that no one can escape, not even Ménie Grégoire.¹

J.-A. MILLER: Perhaps you could say a little about the women’s and the homosexuals’ liberation movements?

FOUCAULT: Well, regarding everything that is currently being said about the liberation of sexuality, what I want to make apparent is precisely that the object ‘sexuality’ is in reality an instrument formed a long while ago, and one which has constituted a centuries-long apparatus of subjection. The real strength of the women’s liberation movements is not that of having laid claim to the specificity of their sexuality and the rights pertaining to it, but that they
have actually departed from the discourse conducted within the apparatuses of sexuality. These movements do indeed emerge in the nineteenth century as demands for sexual specificity. What has their outcome been? Ultimately, a veritable movement of de-sexualisation, a displacement effected in relation to the sexual centering of the problem, formulating the demand for forms of culture, discourse, language, and so on, which are no longer part of that rigid assignation and pinning-down to their sex which they had initially in some sense been politically obliged to accept in order to make themselves heard. The creative and interesting element in the women's movements is precisely that.

J.-A. Miller: The inventive element?

Foucault: Yes, the inventive element . . . The American homosexual movements make that challenge their starting-point. Like women, they begin to look for new forms of community, co-existence, pleasure. But, in contrast with the position of women, the fixing of homosexuals to their sexual specificity is much stronger, they reduce everything to the order of sex. The women don't.

Le Gaufey: All the same it was these movements that succeeded in removing homosexuality from the nomenclature of mental illnesses. There is still a fantastic difference in the fact of saying, 'You want us to be homosexuals, well, we are'.

Foucault: Yes, but the homosexual liberation movements remain very much caught at the level of demands for the right to their sexuality, the dimension of the sexological. Anyway that's quite normal since homosexuality is a sexual practice which is attacked, barred and disqualified as such. Women on the other hand are able to have much wider economic, political and other kinds of objectives than homosexuals.

Le Gaufey: Women's sexuality doesn't lead them to depart from the recognised kinship systems, while that of homosexuals places them immediately outside them. Homosexuals are in a different position vis-à-vis the social body.

Foucault: Yes, yes.

Le Gaufey: Look at the women's homosexual movements: they fall into the same traps as the male homo-
sexuals. There is no basic difference between them, precisely because they both refuse the kinship systems.

GROSRIICHARD: Does what you say in your book about perversions apply equally to sado-masochism? People who have themselves whipped for sexual pleasure have been talked about for a very long time....

FOUCAULT: Listen, that's something that's hard to demonstrate. Do you have any documentation?

GROSRIICHARD: Yes, there exists a treatise On the Use of the Whip in the Affairs of Venus, written by a doctor and dating, I think, from 1665, which gives a very complete catalogue of cases. It's cited precisely at the time of the convulsions at St Médard, in order to show that the alleged miracle actually concealed a sexual story.

FOUCAULT: Yes, but this pleasure in having oneself whipped isn't catalogued as a disease of the sexual instinct. That comes much later. I think, although I'm not certain, that the first edition of Krafft-Ebing only contains the one case of Sacher-Masoch. The emergence of perversion as a medical object is linked with that of instinct, which, as I've said, dates from the 1840s.

WAJEMAN: And yet when one reads a text by Plato or Hippocrates, one finds the uterus described as an animal which wanders about in the woman's insides, at the behest, precisely, of her instinct. But this instinct...

FOUCAULT: Yes, you no doubt understand very well that there is a difference between saying that the uterus is an animal which moves about, and saying that there exist organic and functional diseases, and that among the functional diseases there are some which affect the organs and others which affect the instincts, and that among the instincts, the sexual instinct can be affected in various classifiable ways. This difference corresponds to a wholly unprecedented type of medicalisation of sexuality. Compared with the idea of an organ that wanders about like a fox in its earth, one has a discourse which is, after all, of a different epistemological texture!

J.-A. MILLER: Ah yes, and what does the 'epistemological texture' of Freud's theory suggest to you, precisely on the matter of instinct? Do you think, as indeed people thought before Lacan, that Freud's instinct has the same 'texture' as
your instinct introduced in 1840? What are you going to make of that?

FOUCAULT: At present I've no idea!

J.-A. MILLER: Do you think the death-instinct stands in the direct line of this theory of the instinct which you show to appear in 1844?

FOUCAULT: I'd have to re-read the whole of Freud before I could answer that!

J.-A. MILLER: But you have read *The Interpretation of Dreams*?

FOUCAULT: Yes, but not the whole of Freud.

Racism

GROSRICHARD: To come now to the last part of your book . . . .

FOUCAULT: Yes, no one wants to talk about that last part. Even though the book is a short one, but I suspect people never got as far as this last chapter. All the same, it's the fundamental part of the book.

GROSRICHARD: You articulate the theme of racism there on to both the apparatus of sexuality and the question of degeneracy. But the theme seems to have been articulated much earlier than that in the West, in particular by the old French nobility hostile to Louis XIV's absolutism which favoured the commonalty. In Boulainvilliers, who represents this nobility, one finds already a whole history of the superiority of Germanic blood, from which the nobility was descended, over Gaulish blood.

FOUCAULT: This idea that the nobility came from Germany in fact goes back to the Renaissance, and it was a theme utilised first of all by the French Protestants, who said that France was formerly a Germanic state, and in German law there were limits to the power of the sovereign. It was this idea which was subsequently taken over by a fraction of the French nobility.

GROSRICHARD: Regarding the nobility, you talk in your book of a myth of blood, blood as a mythical object. But what strikes me as remarkable, apart from its symbolic function, is that blood was also regarded by this nobility as a biological object. Its racism wasn't founded on a mythical
tradition, but on a veritable theory of heredity by blood. It’s already a biological racism.

FOUCAULT: But I say that in my book.

GROSRICHARD: I had the impression that you were talking of blood mainly as a symbolic object.

FOUCAULT: Yes, it’s true that at the moment when historians of the nobility like Boulainvilliers were singing the praises of noble blood, saying that it was the bearer of physical qualities, courage, vertu, energy, there was a correlating of the themes of generation and of nobility. But what is new in the nineteenth century is the appearance of a racist biology, entirely centred around the concept of degeneracy. Racism wasn’t initially a political ideology. It was a scientific ideology which manifested itself everywhere, in Morel and the others. And the political utilisation of this ideology was made first of all by the socialists, those of the Left, before those of the Right.

LE GAUF: This was when the Left was nationalist?

FOUCAULT: Yes, but above all with the idea that the rotten, decadent class was that of the people at the top, and that a socialist society would have to be clean and healthy. Lombroso was a man of the Left. He wasn’t a socialist in the strict sense, but he had a lot of contacts with the socialists, and they took up his ideas. The breach only took place at the end of the nineteenth century.

LE GAUF: Couldn’t one see a confirmation of what you are saying in the nineteenth century vogue for vampire novels, in which the aristocracy is always presented as the beast to be destroyed? The vampire is always an aristocrat, and the saviour a bourgeois . . . .

FOUCAULT: In the eighteenth century, rumours were already circulating that debauched aristocrats abducted little children to slaughter them and regenerate themselves by bathing in their blood. The rumours even led to riots . . . .

LE GAUF: Yes, but that’s only the beginning. The way the idea becomes extended is strictly bourgeois, with that whole literature of vampires whose themes recur in films today: it’s always the bourgeois, without the resources of the police or the curé, who gets rid of the vampire.

FOUCAULT: Modern antisemitism began in that form. The new forces of antisemitism developed, in socialist milieus,
out of the theory of degeneracy. It was said that the Jews are necessarily degenerates, firstly because they are rich, secondly because they intermarry. They have totally aberrant sexual and religious practices, so it is they who are the carriers of degeneracy in our societies. One encounters this in socialist literature down to the Dreyfus affair. Pre-Hitlerism, the nationalist antisemitism of the Right, adopted exactly the same themes in 1910.

GROSRICHLAND: The Right will say that it's in the homeland of socialism that one encounters the same theme today . . . .

J.-A. MILLER: Did you know that a first congress on psychoanalysis is going to be held in the USSR?

FOUCAULT: So I've been told. Will there be Soviet psychoanalysts there?

J.-A. MILLER: No, they're trying to get psychoanalysts from elsewhere to come . . . .

FOUCAULT: So it will be a psychoanalysis congress in the Soviet Union where the speakers will be foreigners! Incredible! Although there was a Congress of Penal Sciences at St Petersburg in 1894, where a French criminologist, someone whose name is too little known—he was called Monsieur Larrivée—said to the Russians: everyone is now in agreement that criminals are impossible people, born criminals. What is to be done with them? In our countries, which are too small, we don't know how to dispose of them. But you Russians have Siberia: couldn't you put them there in sorts of great labour camps, and thus at the same time exploit that extraordinarily rich territory?

GROSRICHLAND: Weren't there any labour camps then in Siberia?

FOUCAULT: No! I was very surprised about that.

CELAS: Siberia was just a zone of exile. Lenin went there in 1898, got married, went hunting, had a maid, etc. There were also some penal colonies. Chekhov visited one on the Sakhalin Islands. The massive concentration camps where people were set to work were a socialist invention! They arose notably from initiatives like those of Trotsky, who organised the wreckage of the Red Army into a sort of labour army, which then constituted disciplinary camps which rapidly became places of internment. It came about through a combination of deliberate planning, pursuit of
efficiency through militarisation, re-education, coercion.

FOUCAULT: In fact that idea came from the French relegation laws. The idea of utilising prisoners during the period of their sentences as labour or for some useful purpose is as old as the prisons. But the idea that there is a basic group of criminals who are absolutely irredeemable and must somehow or other be eliminated from society, yet at the same time put to some use, that was the idea of relegation. In France, after a certain number of repeated convictions, the fellow was deported to Guyana or New Caledonia, and then became a settler there. This was what Monsieur Larrivée suggested to the Russians, so as to develop Siberia. It's incredible all the same that the Russians hadn't thought of that before. But if they had, there would have been a Russian there at the Congress to say, 'But Monsieur Larrivée, we have already thought of this wonderful idea!' And there wasn't. In France we don't have a Gulag, but we have ideas.

GROSRIICHARD: Maupertuis — yet another Frenchman, but one who was the Secretary of the Royal Academy in Berlin — suggested to sovereigns, in a Letter on the Progress of the Sciences, the utilisation of prisoners for carrying out useful experiments. That was in 1752.

J. MILLER. And apparently La Condamine, using an ear-trumpet because he had gone deaf after his expedition to Peru, went to listen to the words of those sentenced to the supplice, right to the moment of their death.

GROSRIICHARD: In this idea of making the supplice serve a useful purpose, utilising this absolute power of execution for the profit of a better knowledge of life by in a sense forcing the condemned to confess a truth concerning life, there is a link with what you were saying about the confession, and the phenomena you analyse in the final section of your book. You write that there is a shift at a certain moment from a power exercised in the form of a right to put to death, to a 'power over life'. One might ask you this: is this power over life, this concern to master its excesses or defects, specific to modern Western societies? Take an example: Book XXIII of Montesquieu's Esprit des Lois is entitled, 'Of laws in their relation to the number of inhabitants'. He discusses as a grave problem the depopulation of Europe,
and contrasts Louis XIV's edict of 1666 in favour of marriages with the different and much more effective measures practiced by the Romans. As though, under the Roman Empire, the question of a power over life—a discipline of sexuality from the standpoint of reproduction—had been posed and then forgotten, re-emerging finally in the middle of the eighteenth century. So is this shift from a power of death to a power over life really something unprecedented, or is it not rather periodic, linked for instance to ages and civilisations where urbanisation and the concentration of population, or conversely the depopulation caused by wars and epidemics seem to imperil the nation?

FOUCAULT: Certainly the problem of population in the form: 'Aren't we getting too numerous?' or 'Aren't we getting too few?' has long been posed, and there have long been different legislative solutions for it: taxes on bachelors, grants for numerous families, etc. But what is interesting in the eighteenth century is, firstly, the generalisation of these problems: account begins to be taken of all aspects of the phenomena of population (epidemics, conditions of habitats, hygiene . . .), and these aspects begin to be integrated into a central problem. Secondly, one finds all sorts of new types of knowledge being applied: the emergence of demography, observations regarding the spread of epidemics, enquiries into nurses and conditions of breastfeeding. Thirdly, the establishment of apparatuses of power making possible not only observation but also direct intervention and manipulation in all these areas. I would say that at that moment, where hitherto there had only been vague improvisatory measures of promotion designed to alter a situation which was scarcely known, something begins to develop which can be called a power over life. In the eighteenth century, for instance, despite significant efforts made in statistics, people were convinced that the population was falling, whereas historians now know that on the contrary there was a massive growth in population.

GROS RICHARD: Is there any light you can throw, in connection with the work of historians like Flandrin, on the development of contraceptive practices in the eighteenth century?

FOUCAULT: There I have to rely on these historians. They
have very sophisticated techniques for interpreting the notaries’ registers, baptismal registers, etc. Flandrin brings out a point which seems very interesting to me, relating to the interplay between breast-feeding and contraception, which is that the real issue was the survival of children, not their creation. In other words, contraception was practiced, not so much so in order that children should not be born as that those that were born should survive. Contraception encouraged by a natalist policy: it’s pretty amazing!

GROS RICHARD: But that’s something that the doctors and demographers of the period declare openly.

FOUCAULT: Yes, but there was a sort of countervailing effect which meant that children were nevertheless born at close intervals. Medical and popular traditions demanded that a woman who was still suckling her child was not permitted to have sexual intercourse, since otherwise her milk would spoil. So women, especially among the rich, sent their children to a wet-nurse, in order to be able to resume having sexual intercourse, and hence keep their husbands. There was a veritable nursing industry. Poor women did it so as to earn some money. But there was no way of checking how the nurse brought up the child, or even whether it was dead or alive, so that the nurses, and in particular the go-betweens with the parents, continued getting paid for a child which was already dead. Some nurses were scoring nineteen dead infants out of twenty entrusted to them. It was appalling! It was to prevent this mess, to re-establish a little order, that mothers were encouraged to feed their own children. The rule of incompatibility between sexual intercourse and suckling was broken at a stroke, but only on condition that women didn’t immediately get pregnant again. Hence the need for contraception. And the whole business ultimately turns on this idea that once you have made a child, you keep it.

GROS RICHARD: The astonishing thing is that a new argument appears among those used to get mothers to breast-feed. Suckling indeed enables the mother and child to keep in good health, but also what pleasure it gives! So the problem of weaning is posed in terms which are now psychological as well as physiological. How is the child to be separated from its mother? A well known doctor invented a
sort of spiked disc which the mother or nurse was to put on her teat. The child when it sucks experiences a pleasure mixed with pain, and if one increases the calibre of the spikes it has enough and detaches itself from the breast.

FOUCAULT: Is that a fact?

LIVI: Madame Roland recounts that when she was a little girl her nurse put mustard on her breast to wean her. She made fun of the child when the mustard got up her nose!

GROSRICHAUD: This was also the time when the modern feeding-bottle was introduced.

FOUCAULT: I don't know the date of that!

GROSRICHAUD: 1786, with the French translation of *The Way of Hand-feeding Children in the Absence of Nurses*, by an Italian, Baldini. It had a great success.

FOUCAULT: I renounce all my public and private functions! Shame overwhelms me! I cover myself with ashes! I didn’t know the date the feeding-bottle was introduced!

*Transcript edited by Alain Grosrichard.*

**Note**

1 Celebrated family agony-columnist on French radio.