

## REVIEW

**Philippe Artières, Jean-François Bert, Frédéric Gros and Judith Revel (eds.), *Cahier de L'Herne 95: Michel Foucault* (Paris: L'Herne, 2011) ISBN: 2851971646**

In this beautifully crafted edited volume, the multiplicity is the rule. Neither a single voice nor a single Pantheon, but fifty seven authors coming together in this *corpus* to further Foucault studies. The main advantage of this major contribution is that it successfully avoids the publishing virus of adding to the innumerable 'Introductions to Foucault'.

Overall, it takes a picture of the academic landscape—a panoramic view from the arts to social sciences—of the clever uses of Foucault's thoughts and concepts. In this volume, most of the contributors agree that Foucault is best understood when his thought is furthered and used, sometimes against Foucault's initial positions, but not "fetishised." (327)<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the use (or the usage) of Foucault's thought is what is most practical and political about his writings; how his authorship is turned into a toolbox, and his concepts can be folded, warped, twisted, cut up in order to suit the present situation.<sup>2</sup>

The biographical elements (35-70) do not aim at glorifying Foucault's life but we learn about Foucault's friends, relatives and colleagues, their lives and their encounters with the French philosopher.

Organised in seven sections, it seems however more relevant to classify the contents in six different parts:

- 1) Foucault's unpublished pieces;
- 2) Biographical information from friends, colleagues and Foucault's brother (Denys Foucault);
- 3) 'Foucault workshop,' essays from the members of *Le Centre Michel Foucault* about 'Foucault at work;'
- 4) The effect of reading Foucault on other renowned philosophers or sociologists;
- 5) A mapping of the different regional receptions of Foucault's work (in Germany, USSR/Russia, Poland, Turkey, China, Japan, Argentina, Brazil and Italy);
- 6) A more 'classic' collection of essays using Foucault in philosophy, social sciences, arts and medicine.

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<sup>1</sup> All the quotations from this book are my translations, and I indicate the page number in brackets.

<sup>2</sup> Mathieu Potte-Bonneville, "Politique des usages," *Vacarme*, vol. 29, (autumn 2004), Web: [www.vacarme.org/article1373.html](http://www.vacarme.org/article1373.html). Potte-Bonneville recalls how fundamental the role of "the receiver," "the user" is in Foucault's thought and writings (giving *History of Madness* and *Discipline and Punish* a real political ambition). And perhaps speaking to prisoners was already an achievement that not many intellectuals, let alone philosophers, could claim.

Finally, some pictures of Foucault taken by Michèle Bancilhon as well as reproductions of some paintings by Picasso and Manet accompany the multitude of essays.

Let us begin with certainly the most awaited part of the volume: some of Foucault's unpublished works. We find the first draft of the introduction to *Archaeology of Knowledge*, eight small articles or letters to be added to *Dits et écrits*, a text on Picasso's *Las Meninas*, and two conferences on Manet (1967 and 1971).

### **Foucault's 1970 essay on Picasso's *Las Meninas* series**

Deleuze already noted "Foucault's passion for describing scenes, or, even more so, for offering descriptions that stand as scenes: descriptions of *Las Meninas*, Manet, Magritte, the admirable descriptions of the chain gang, the asylum, the prison and the little prison van, as though they were scenes and Foucault were a painter. No doubt this is due to his affinity, to be found throughout all his work, with the new novel and with Raymond Roussel."<sup>3</sup> Foucault attempts to follow Picasso's ambitious series on *Las Meninas* (fifty eight paintings made from August to December 1957), by being attentive to the regularities and changes occurring from one "transformation" to the next. In his texts on Manet, Velasquez and Magritte, Foucault's prose is incisive due to the fluidity of his descriptions and narrations, driven by the same motive that governed his early book on Raymond Roussel, finding the "key" to the secret.<sup>4</sup> Most of the article explains the evolution of colours, the place given to each protagonist: who appears the most in the series, in which part of the sequence, with which colours? The rhythm of the discussion reminds us of a dance or at least a kind of performance, where the actors come and go, unfolding a story. However the story remains unclear at this stage, as if the grandeur of Picasso could not be fully grasped by Foucault himself.

### **On Manet**

Foucault's two texts on Manet belong to a series of conferences (from 1967 to 1971), that need to be taken as a coherent project given that in November 1967, he had a contract to publish an entire book on Manet (to be titled *Le noir et la couleur* [*The Black and the Colour*]) with *Les Editions de Minuit*. The first text "The Black and the Surface" (378-395) is a collection of notes taken by Foucault (the original scans are reproduced in the volume, and transcribed) for the book, that he read during a conference in Milan. The second text entitled "The Painting of Manet" is the last conference he gave on Manet and was delivered in May 1971 in Tunis,<sup>5</sup> but reading the first text and the last text together gives a fuller overview of Foucault's idea for the planned book. By emphasising 'the black' as a colour, a matter and a dimension, the analyses of Foucault remind us of his famous work on Blanchot in at least two aspects. Firstly, the theme of *exteriority* in *Le Balcon*<sup>6</sup> when the characters are, "by the intermediary of the shutters, thrown in a space outside the painting; a space made of invisible light." (390)

<sup>3</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, translated by Séan Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 80.

<sup>4</sup> See the first chapter "The Threshold and the Key," in Michel Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth. The World of Raymond Roussel*, translated by Charles Ruas (London: Continuum, 2004), 3-13.

<sup>5</sup> This conference was recently published as a separate book: Michel Foucault, *La peinture de Manet* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2004); translated by Matthew Barr as *Manet and The Object of Painting* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Edouard Manet, *Le Balcon*, 1868-1869, Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

Whereas 'the black' as a dark value ordered the space of classical paintings, and closed it in its frame to engage it into the perspective of the horizon, 'the black' for Manet gathers towards the surface the entire visibility of the painting, but by stretching it, twisting it and casting it in the lateral direction. And curiously this brings the visible outside the painting. (390)

Secondly, in a similar tone to the status that Foucault gives to Mallarmé and to Blanchot for literature, Manet explores the limits of painting<sup>7</sup> in underlining the borders and the outlines of the painting (as a material object). Again in *Le Balcon*, Foucault insists it is "clearly architected by vertical and horizontal lines. The window itself perfectly doubles the painting and reproduces its vertical and horizontal sides." (406) Hence the internal geography of the painting is what interests Foucault in these two studies, and more generally, in Manet. This project of the mapping of the painting transgresses for him the pictorial conventions and traditions that usually try to make the spectator forget the matter of the paintings for the benefit of the image (the signified). As a result, for Foucault, the painting of Manet focuses on the being of painting, its matter, what he justly calls "the space of the painting." Manet creates the space of painting, with its opening, its abundance and even the presence of the recto and the verso. (402-403) 'The black' both creates and destroys the space of the painting, "even though 'the black' is a colour as any other, it has a spatial function no other colour has." (389) The space of painting reminds us of what Blanchot calls "the literary space" that obsessed Foucault in his earlier writings.

#### **"The Book and the Subject." First version of the introduction to *Archaeology of Knowledge***

The scans of the hand-written pages of the manuscript are included and transcribed in this volume. This very personal text, written in May 1966, at the time of the publication of *Les mots et les choses* in France, aimed at presenting "the realms of research, indicating in advance the future objects of research, mobilising essential concepts, by giving them names and their functioning rules, stating the general principles so that by formulating them once and for all, they will not have to be repeated elsewhere. After all, I am forty years old." (72) Recognizing that he has been able to write a real book, he adds humbly "I've never written any books," (74) but questions whether the repetition of discourses, stories, myths and legends exists intrinsically for all civilisations. (90-91)

#### **Other (short) unpublished works**

Among the other unpublished writings available in this volume and that I will not be able to discuss further but are nonetheless significant in their own right (especially the conference on anti-psychiatry) we find: 1) "Return to the First Meditation of Descartes," (92-94) a letter written in November 1972 from Foucault to his friend, and specialist of Descartes, Jean-Marie Beyssade about his "reply to Derrida"; 2) "History of Madness and anti-psychiatry," (95-102) a conference given on 9th May 1973 in Québec closely linked to his 1973-1974 Collège de France lectures on *Psychiatric Power*; 3) "Response to Ronald Laing," (103-104) an extract from a roundtable on prisons and psychiatry organised at the University of Columbia on 19th November 1975 with Ronald Laing, Howie Hard, Judy Clark (previously published by *Semiotext(e)*); 4) An extract on Marc Aurèle (105-106) from Foucault's manuscript from the lectures

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<sup>7</sup> "Without doubt, there was something in Manet that made impressionism possible, [but also] something that resisted it." (380)

on *Hermeneutics of the Subject*; 5) Foucault's first text (107) ever sent for publication, a 13 line book review of Gérard Deledalle's *Histoire de la philosophie américaine* published in 1954; 6) "On Nietzsche," (108-110) an interview of Michel Foucault from 1967 about the publication of new editions of Nietzsche's writings; 7) An editorial note (111) by Jean Beaufret indicating that some of the unpublished fragments present in the new edition of *The Gay Science* were already published in *The Will to Power* and a response from Foucault thanking Beaufret; 8) A polemical note from 1983 (112) addressed to a French politician (Roger Badinter) who read *Discipline and Punish*.

### **Foucault's archives and the work of the Centre Michel Foucault**

The Centre Michel Foucault has been working on Foucault's reading notes that he systematically took and organised for the research and writing of *Les mots et les choses*.<sup>8</sup>

The texts of Pascal Michon, Luca Paltrinieri, Judith Revel, Philippe Chevallier and Michel Senellart focus on Foucault's preparation for both *Les mots et les choses* and the lectures at the Collège de France, each of them contributing to the understanding of Foucault at work (his sources, his readings, the exactitude of his scholarship). In this respect, these texts transport the reader into Foucault's head.

Roberto Nigro's text (142-146) continues his reflection<sup>9</sup> on Foucault's relation to Marx by outlining a few propositions, especially focusing on the role of the idea of alienation for Foucault.

The text by Mathieu Potte-Bonneville, "Is the writing of book reviews an impure art?" (169-174) constitutes one of the finest texts present in the volume. It questions the status of the eleven reviews that Foucault published, as well as fourteen prefaces (all reproduced in *Dits et écrits*). For Foucault, writing a review is to diagnose if a book manages to disrupt the order of things and discourse, and the preface or the review will then only talk on the surface about the book-event. Recalling the arguments of the book is secondary to describing the full effects that the book will produce (or has produced), and therefore creating an economy of the visible and the invisible in the order of discourse, "the space of the sayable" writes Potte-Bonneville. (171) Writing reviews with Foucault becomes an art.

Foucault's passage in the draft to the introduction of *Archaeology of Knowledge* echoes Potte-Bonneville's article where he almost gives himself a set of rules for interviews and responses that he will have to write (in the prospect of the publication and the reception of *Les mots et les choses*):

I know that on these empty sheets that wait for me, I will have to speak about what I wrote in the past and what was published under my name; I know that I will speak of them as finished things, as books arranged among millions of others on the shelves in the universal library. I will tackle them as it once enchanted me to take on books on economy, grammar, medicine and the registers of hospitals or prisons. (73)

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<sup>8</sup> These notes (856 sheets in total) were scanned and are now available online on a specially designed intelligent database: <http://lbf-ehess.ens-lyon.fr/pages/fonds.html>

<sup>9</sup> Roberto Nigro, "Foucault, Reader and Critic of Marx," in Jaques Bidet and Stathis Kouvelakis (eds.), *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 647-662.

### **Regional reception of Foucault's writings and thought**

The original section on the regional reception of Foucault's thought is very informative and often presents a chronological reception with the titles and the authors of the main contributions, but most of these essays agree on the claim that "the United States [became the] judge of French thinkers" (230) in many of these countries. The American reception of French thinkers, and particularly Foucault, had an impact in countries such as Russia, and China (in which Foucault's work was translated into Chinese from the English). Bacsko in Poland found in Foucault a way to avoid the official and orthodox Marxist party line, and had to immigrate to Switzerland to continue teaching his seminar. In Turkey it is through a reading of Said and of US social science scholarship that Foucault began to appear in the academic debates. Probably, the most successful and original reception is in Japan (yet somewhat still influenced by US academia), and Ishida's essay explains the quarrel between the two campuses of the University of Tokyo, Hongo and Komaba, the former being traditionalist whereas 'France Gendai Shisô' (French theory) was taught in the latter. We can only regret that no essay was included on the reception of Foucault in Sweden, where it all begun ('the Swedish night') according to his preface to *History of Madness*.

### **Arts**

Daniel Arasse (264-267) explains the falsity of Foucault's analysis of *Las Meninas*, since the King ordered Velasquez's painting and it was meant to be placed in the King's office, where only the King could have been the spectator. The historians of art had to undertake a enormous archival work in order to demonstrate Foucault's anachronism, but Arasse insists that "the philosopher gets it wrong but he is right," since only "by virtue of Foucault can [the art historians] interrogate a painting in such a way." (266) Arasse sees another Foucauldian anachronism in his writings on Manet when he envisages Titian's *Venus of Urbino*<sup>10</sup> as the possible inspiration for Manet's *Olympia*<sup>11</sup> this parallel "opens a passionate door to history of art, and for the reflection on what History is." (266)

The author of Jean-Luc Godard's biography, Antoine de Baecque, explains how Foucault's meeting with cinema<sup>12</sup> was forced upon him in 1974 by *Cahiers du Cinéma* that wanted to change its ideological foundation after their disillusion with Maoism, and thought the French philosopher could give the magazine "a sign of opening towards a type of critique." (282) Two years later, the film director René Allio asks Foucault to adapt Pierre Rivière's story for cinema. However de Baecque clearly emphasised how Foucault did not particularly like cinema neither was he regularly watching films, making literature and painting (and music) his favoured incursions in the world of the arts. For instance, Foucault writes "I believe that cinema is not allergic to anything more than the oeuvre of Sade." (285) However, the editors' note to the text on Picasso's *Las Meninas* series explains that it was written as a film script, proving that Foucault already envisioned a collaboration with film directors.

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<sup>10</sup> Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 1538, Florence, Uffizi.

<sup>11</sup> Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863, Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

<sup>12</sup> This echoes the recent publication by Patrice Maniglier and Dork Zabunyan, *Foucault au cinéma* (Paris: Bayard, 2011), in which seven essays by Foucault on cinema are published (all taken from *Dits et écrits*) together with an in-depth analysis of the (unusual) relation between Foucault and cinema.

### Knowledge and politics

Two brilliant essays by Pascal Engel and François Delaporte give different accounts of Foucault's relationship with epistemology. When Engel claims that he conducts a project of "de-mythologisation," (319) he calls him a "fictionalist regarding truth, as Hume (but also Nietzsche) is one regarding moral truths that are only projections of our psychological attitudes and feelings." (320) Foucault would have probably agreed with these characterisations, while Engel is harsh toward Veyne's reading of Foucault, he explains that both of them confuse 'truth' and 'beliefs', and perhaps referring to 'truths' (in the plural form) is nonsensical for the analytical philosopher. By rejecting the thought of 1968, Engel criticises the question "from where do you speak?" (322); Foucault would have probably replied "it does not matter from where I speak but for whom I speak."

Delaporte's essay (335-341)<sup>13</sup> demonstrates how Foucault was more influenced by Canguilhem for the status he conferred to epistemological history, more interested in the origin of scientific creations as well as their consequences:

In his *Cell Theory*<sup>14</sup> (1945), where Bachelard would have recorded discontinuities, Canguilhem emphasised continuities... [later on] he developed an epistemological status for the concept of 'scientific ideology' in order to ground the conjunction between the themes of continuity and discontinuity in the history of sciences. (338)

Bigo (326-334) presents a concise critical summary of the main social science debates on governmentality and biopolitics: critical because he explains that many do not fully understand or tackle the concept of 'security' which Foucault quickly turned away from in his lectures on *Security, Territory, Population*.

After quickly and inexhaustibly scanning through the diversity of these texts, we understand why Daniel Defert wanted to bring our attention to this collection of studies by accepting to publish some of Foucault's unpublished work. Finally, in piecing the texts together, the technique of montage used by the editors reminds us of a certain *geste foucauldien*.

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<sup>13</sup> This essay is a version of another article published by François Delaporte in 1998: "Foucault, epistemology and history," *Economy and Society* 27. 2 (1998), 285-297.

<sup>14</sup> Georges Canguilhem, "Cell Theory," in Paola Marrati and Todd Meyers (eds.), *Knowledge of Life*, trans. Stefanos Geroulanos and Daniela Ginsburg (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 29-58.