

# THE ORDER OF THINGS

*An Archaeology  
of the Human Sciences*

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*A translation of Les Mots et les choses*



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## Publisher's Note

A literal translation of the title of the French edition of this work (*Les Mots et les choses*) would have given rise to confusion with two other books that have already appeared under the title *Words and things*. The publisher therefore agreed with the author on the alternative title *The order of things*, which was, in fact, M. Foucault's original preference.

In view of the range of literature referred to in the text, it has not proved feasible in every case to undertake the bibliographical task of tracing English translations of works originating in other languages and locating the passages quoted by M. Foucault. The publisher has accordingly retained the author's references to French works and to French translations of Latin and German works, for example, but has, as far as possible, cited English editions of works originally written in that language.

## Foreword to the English edition

This foreword should perhaps be headed 'Directions for Use'. Not because I feel that the reader cannot be trusted – he is, of course, free to make what he will of the book he has been kind enough to read. What right have I, then, to suggest that it should be used in one way rather than another? When I was writing it there were many things that were not clear to me: some of these seemed too obvious, others too obscure. So I said to myself: this is how my ideal reader would have approached my book, if my intentions had been clearer and my project more ready to take form.

1. He would recognize that it was a study of a relatively neglected field. In France at least, the history of science and thought gives pride of place to mathematics, cosmology, and physics – noble sciences, rigorous sciences, sciences of the necessary, all close to philosophy: one can observe in their history the almost uninterrupted emergence of truth and pure reason. The other disciplines, however – those, for example, that concern living beings, languages, or economic facts – are considered too tinged with empirical thought, too exposed to the vagaries of chance or imagery, too age-old traditions and external events, for it to be supposed that their history could be anything other than irregular. At most, they are expected to provide evidence of a state of mind, an intellectual fashion, a mixture of archaism and bold conjecture, of intuition and blindness. But what if empirical knowledge, at a given time and in a given culture, *did* possess a well-defined regularity? If the very possibility of recording facts, of allowing oneself to be convinced by them, of distorting them in traditions or of making purely speculative use of them, if even this was not at the mercy of chance? If errors (and truths), the practice of old beliefs, including not only genuine discoveries, but also the most naïve notions, obeyed, at a given moment, the laws of a certain code of knowledge? If, in

short, the history of non-formal knowledge had itself a system? That was my initial hypothesis – the first risk I took.

2. This book must be read as a comparative, and not a symptomatological, study. It was not my intention, on the basis of a particular type of knowledge or body of ideas, to draw up a picture of a period, or to reconstitute the spirit of a century. What I wished to do was to present, side by side, a definite number of elements: the knowledge of living beings, the knowledge of the laws of language, and the knowledge of economic facts, and to relate them to the philosophical discourse that was contemporary with them during a period extending from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. It was to be not an analysis of Classicism in general, nor a search for a *Weltanschauung*, but a strictly 'regional' study.<sup>1</sup>

But, among other things, this comparative method produces results that are often strikingly different from those to be found in single-discipline studies. (So the reader must not expect to find here a history of biology juxtaposed with a history of linguistics, a history of political economy, and a history of philosophy.) There are shifts of emphasis: the calendar of saints and heroes is somewhat altered (Linnaeus is given more space than Buffon, Destutt de Tracy than Rousseau; the Physiocrats are opposed single-handed by Cantillon). Frontiers are redrawn and things usually far apart are brought closer, and vice versa: instead of relating the biological taxonomies to other knowledge of the living being (the theory of germination, or the physiology of animal movement, or the statics of plants), I have compared them with what might have been said at the same time about linguistic signs, the formation of general ideas, the language of action, the hierarchy of needs, and the exchange of goods.

This had two consequences: I was led to abandon the great divisions that are now familiar to us all. I did not look in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for the beginnings of nineteenth-century biology (or philosophy or economics). What I saw was the appearance of figures peculiar to the Classical age: a 'taxonomy' or 'natural history' that was relatively unaffected by the knowledge that then existed in animal or plant physiology; an 'analysis of wealth' that took little account of the assumptions of the 'political arithmetic' that was contemporary with it; and a 'general grammar' that was quite alien to the historical analyses and works of exegesis then being carried out. Epistemological figures, that is, that were not superimposed on the sciences as they were individualized

<sup>1</sup> I sometimes use terms like 'thought' or 'Classical science', but they refer practically always to the particular discipline under consideration.

and named in the nineteenth century. Moreover, I saw the emergence, between these different figures, of a network of analogies that transcended the traditional proximities: between the classification of plants and the theory of coinage, between the notion of generic character and the analysis of trade, one finds in the Classical sciences isomorphisms that appear to ignore the extreme diversity of the objects under consideration. The space of knowledge was then arranged in a totally different way from that systematized in the nineteenth century by Comte or Spencer. The second risk I took was in having wished to describe not so much the genesis of our sciences as an epistemological space specific to a particular period.

3. I did not operate, therefore, at the level that is usually that of the historian of science – I should say at the two levels that are usually his. For, on the one hand, the history of science traces the progress of discovery, the formulation of problems, and the clash of controversy; it also analyses theories in their internal economy; in short, it describes the processes and products of the scientific consciousness. But, on the other hand, it tries to restore what eluded that consciousness: the influences that affected it, the implicit philosophies that were subjacent to it, the unformulated thematics, the unseen obstacles; it describes the unconscious of science. This unconscious is always the negative side of science – that which resists it, deflects it, or disturbs it. What I would like to do, however, is to reveal a *positive unconscious* of knowledge: a level that eludes the consciousness of the scientist and yet is part of scientific discourse, instead of disputing its validity and seeking to diminish its scientific nature. What was common to the natural history, the economics, and the grammar of the Classical period was certainly not present to the consciousness of the scientist; or that part of it that was conscious was superficial, limited, and almost fanciful (Adanson, for example, wished to draw up an artificial denomination for plants; Turgot compared coinage with language); but, unknown to themselves, the naturalists, economists, and grammarians employed the same rules to define the objects proper to their own study, to form their concepts, to build their theories. It is these rules of formation, which were never formulated in their own right, but are to be found only in widely differing theories, concepts, and objects of study, that I have tried to reveal, by isolating, as their specific locus, a level that I have called, somewhat arbitrarily perhaps, archaeological. Taking as an example the period covered in this book, I have tried to determine the basis or archaeological system common to a whole series of scientific 'representations'

or 'products' dispersed throughout the natural history, economics, and philosophy of the Classical period.

4. I should like this work to be read as an open site. Many questions are laid out on it that have not yet found answers; and many of the gaps refer either to earlier works or to others that have not yet been completed, or even begun. But I should like to mention three problems.

The problem of change. It has been said that this work denies the very possibility of change. And yet my main concern has been with changes. In fact, two things in particular struck me: the suddenness and thoroughness with which certain sciences were sometimes reorganized; and the fact that at the same time similar changes occurred in apparently very different disciplines. Within a few years (around 1800), the tradition of general grammar was replaced by an essentially historical philology; natural classifications were ordered according to the analyses of comparative anatomy; and a political economy was founded whose main themes were labour and production. Confronted by such a curious combination of phenomena, it occurred to me that these changes should be examined more closely, without being reduced, in the name of continuity, in either abruptness or scope. It seemed to me at the outset that different kinds of change were taking place in scientific discourse – changes that did not occur at the same level, proceed at the same pace, or obey the same laws; the way in which, within a particular science, new propositions were produced, new facts isolated, or new concepts built up (the events that make up the everyday life of a science) did not, in all probability, follow the same model as the appearance of new fields of study (and the frequently corresponding disappearance of old ones); but the appearance of new fields of study must not, in turn, be confused with those overall redistributions that alter not only the general form of a science, but also its relations with other areas of knowledge. It seemed to me, therefore, that all these changes should not be treated at the same level, or be made to culminate at a single point, as is sometimes done, or be attributed to the genius of an individual, or a new collective spirit, or even to the fecundity of a single discovery; that it would be better to respect such differences, and even to try to grasp them in their specificity. In this way I tried to describe the combination of corresponding transformations that characterized the appearance of biology, political economy, philology, a number of human sciences, and a new type of philosophy, at the threshold of the nineteenth century.

The problem of causality. It is not always easy to determine what has

caused a specific change in a science. What made such a discovery possible? Why did this new concept appear? Where did this or that theory come from? Questions like these are often highly embarrassing because there are no definite methodological principles on which to base such an analysis. The embarrassment is much greater in the case of those general changes that alter a science as a whole. It is greater still in the case of several corresponding changes. But it probably reaches its highest point in the case of the empirical sciences: for the role of instruments, techniques, institutions, events, ideologies, and interests is very much in evidence; but one does not know how an articulation so complex and so diverse in composition actually operates. It seemed to me that it would not be prudent for the moment to force a solution I felt incapable, I admit, of offering: the traditional explanations – spirit of the time, technological or social changes, influences of various kinds – struck me for the most part as being more magical than effective. In this work, then, I left the problem of causes to one side;<sup>1</sup> I chose instead to confine myself to describing the transformations themselves, thinking that this would be an indispensable step if, one day, a theory of scientific change and epistemological causality was to be constructed.

The problem of the subject. In distinguishing between the epistemological level of knowledge (or scientific consciousness) and the archaeological level of knowledge, I am aware that I am advancing in a direction that is fraught with difficulty. Can one speak of science and its history (and therefore of its conditions of existence, its changes, the errors it has perpetrated, the sudden advances that have sent it off on a new course) without reference to the scientist himself – and I am speaking not merely of the concrete individual represented by a proper name, but of his work and the particular form of his thought? Can a valid history of science be attempted that would retrace from beginning to end the whole spontaneous movement of an anonymous body of knowledge? Is it legitimate, is it even useful, to replace the traditional 'X thought that . . .' by a 'it was known that . . .' ? But this is not exactly what I set out to do. I do not wish to deny the validity of intellectual biographies, or the possibility of a history of theories, concepts, or themes. It is simply that I wonder whether such descriptions are themselves enough, whether they do justice to the immense density of scientific discourse, whether there do not exist, outside their customary boundaries, systems of regularities that have a decisive

<sup>1</sup> I had approached this question in connection with psychiatry and clinical medicine in two earlier works.

role in the history of the sciences. I should like to know whether the subjects responsible for scientific discourse are not determined in their situation, their function, their perceptive capacity, and their practical possibilities by conditions that dominate and even overwhelm them. In short, I tried to explore scientific discourse not from the point of view of the individuals who are speaking, nor from the point of view of the formal structures of what they are saying, but from the point of view of the rules that come into play in the very existence of such discourse: what conditions did Linnaeus (or Petty, or Arnauld) have to fulfil, not to make his discourse coherent and true in general, but to give it, at the time when it was written and accepted, value and practical application as scientific discourse – or, more exactly, as naturalist, economic, or grammatical discourse?

On this point, too, I am well aware that I have not made much progress. But I should not like the effort I have made in one direction to be taken as a rejection of any other possible approach. Discourse in general, and scientific discourse in particular, is so complex a reality that we not only *can*, but *should*, approach it at different levels and with different methods. If there is one approach that I do reject, however, it is that (one might call it, broadly speaking, the phenomenological approach) which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity – which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness. It seems to me that the historical analysis of scientific discourse should, in the last resort, be subject, not to a theory of the knowing subject, but rather to a theory of discursive practice.

5. This last point is a request to the English-speaking reader. In France, certain half-witted 'commentators' persist in labelling me a 'structuralist'. I have been unable to get it into their tiny minds that I have used none of the methods, concepts, or key terms that characterize structural analysis.

I should be grateful if a more serious public would free me from a connection that certainly does me honour, but that I have not deserved. There may well be certain similarities between the works of the structuralists and my own work. It would hardly behove me, of all people, to claim that my discourse is independent of conditions and rules of which I am very largely unaware, and which determine other work that is being done today. But it is only too easy to avoid the trouble of analysing such work by giving it an admittedly impressive-sounding, but inaccurate, label.

## Preface

This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought – *our* thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography – breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other. This passage quotes a 'certain Chinese encyclopaedia' in which it is written that 'animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies'. In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*.

But what is it impossible to think, and what kind of impossibility are we faced with here? Each of these strange categories can be assigned a precise meaning and a demonstrable content; some of them do certainly involve fantastic entities – fabulous animals or sirens – but, precisely because it puts them into categories of their own, the Chinese encyclopaedia localizes their powers of contagion; it distinguishes carefully between the very real animals (those that are frenzied or have just broken the water pitcher) and those that reside solely in the realm of imagination. The possibility of dangerous mixtures has been exorcized, heraldry and fable have been relegated to their own exalted peaks: no inconceivable amphibious maidens, no clawed wings, no disgusting, squamous epidermis, none

of those polymorphous and demoniacal faces, no creatures breathing fire. The quality of monstrosity here does not affect any real body, nor does it produce modifications of any kind in the bestiary of the imagination; it does not lurk in the depths of any strange power. It would not even be present at all in this classification had it not insinuated itself into the empty space, the interstitial blanks *separating* all these entities from one another. It is not the 'fabulous' animals that are impossible, since they are designated as such, but the narrowness of the distance separating them from (and juxtaposing them to) the stray dogs, or the animals that from a long way off look like flies. What transgresses the boundaries of all imagination, of all possible thought, is simply that alphabetical series (a, b, c, d) which links each of those categories to all the others.

Moreover, it is not simply the oddity of unusual juxtapositions that we are faced with here. We are all familiar with the disconcerting effect of the proximity of extremes, or, quite simply, with the sudden vicinity of things that have no relation to each other; the mere act of enumeration that heaps them all together has a power of enchantment all its own: 'I am no longer hungry,' Eusthenes said. 'Until the morrow, safe from my saliva all the following shall be: Aspics, Acalephs, Acanthocephalates, Amoebocytes, Ammonites, Axolotls, Amblystomas, Aphislions, Anacondas, Ascarids, Amphisbaenas, Angeworms, Amphipods, Anaerobes, Annelids, Anthozoans. . . .' But all these worms and snakes, all these creatures redolent of decay and slime are slithering, like the syllables which designate them, in Eusthenes' saliva: that is where they all have their *common locus*, like the umbrella and the sewing-machine on the operating table; startling though their propinquity may be, it is nevertheless warranted by that *and*, by that *in*, by that *on* whose solidity provides proof of the possibility of juxtaposition. It was certainly improbable that arachnids, ammonites, and annelids should one day mingle on Eusthenes' tongue, but, after all, that welcoming and voracious mouth certainly provided them with a feasible lodging, a roof under which to coexist.

The monstrous quality that runs through Borges's enumeration consists, on the contrary, in the fact that the common ground on which such meetings are possible has itself been destroyed. What is impossible is not the propinquity of the things listed, but the very site on which their propinquity would be possible. The animals '(i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush' - where could they ever meet, except in the immaterial sound of the voice pronouncing their enumeration, or on the page transcribing it? Where else could they be

juxtaposed except in the non-place of language? Yet, though language can spread them before us, it can do so only in an unthinkable space. The central category of animals 'included in the present classification', with its explicit reference to paradoxes we are familiar with, is indication enough that we shall never succeed in defining a stable relation of contained to container between each of these categories and that which includes them all: if all the animals divided up here can be placed without exception in one of the divisions of this list, then aren't all the other divisions to be found in that one division too? And then again, in what space would that single, inclusive division have *its* existence? Absurdity destroys the *and* of the enumeration by making impossible the *in* where the things enumerated would be divided up. Borges adds no figure to the atlas of the impossible; nowhere does he strike the spark of poetic confrontation; he simply dispenses with the least obvious, but most compelling, of necessities; he does away with the *site*, the mute ground upon which it is possible for entities to be juxtaposed. A vanishing trick that is masked or, rather, laughably indicated by our alphabetical order, which is to be taken as the clue (the only visible one) to the enumerations of a Chinese encyclopaedia. . . . What has been removed, in short, is the famous 'operating table'; and rendering to Roussel<sup>1</sup> a small part of what is still his due, I use that word 'table' in two superimposed senses: the nickel-plated, rubbery table swathed in white, glittering beneath a glass sun devouring all shadow - the table where, for an instant, perhaps forever, the umbrella encounters the sewing-machine; and also a table, a *tabula*, that enables thought to operate upon the entities of our world, to put them in order, to divide them into classes, to group them according to names that designate their similarities and their differences - the table upon which, since the beginning of time, language has intersected space.

That passage from Borges kept me laughing a long time, though not without a certain uneasiness that I found hard to shake off. Perhaps because there arose in its wake the suspicion that there is a worse kind of disorder than that of the *incongruous*, the linking together of things that are inappropriate; I mean the disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry, of the *heteroclit*; and that word should be taken in its most literal, etymological sense: in such a state, things are 'laid', 'placed', 'arranged' in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible

<sup>1</sup> Raymond Roussel, the French novelist. Cf. Michel Foucault's *Raymond Roussel* (Paris, 1963). [Translator's note.]

to find a place of residence for them, to define a *common locus* beneath them all. *Utopias* afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold; they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical. *Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'. This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*; heterotopias (such as those to be found so often in Borges) desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences.

It appears that certain aphasiacs, when shown various differently coloured skeins of wool on a table top, are consistently unable to arrange them into any coherent pattern; as though that simple rectangle were unable to serve in their case as a homogeneous and neutral space in which things could be placed so as to display at the same time the continuous order of their identities or differences as well as the semantic field of their denomination. Within this simple space in which things are normally arranged and given names, the aphasiac will create a multiplicity of tiny, fragmented regions in which nameless resemblances agglutinate things into unconnected islets; in one corner, they will place the lightest-coloured skeins, in another the red ones, somewhere else those that are softest in texture, in yet another place the longest, or those that have a tinge of purple or those that have been wound up into a ball. But no sooner have they been adumbrated than all these groupings dissolve again, for the field of identity that sustains them, however limited it may be, is still too wide not to be unstable; and so the sick mind continues to infinity, creating groups then dispersing them again, heaping up diverse similarities, destroying those that seem clearest, splitting up things that are identical, superimposing different criteria, frenziedly beginning all over again, becoming more and more disturbed, and teetering finally on the brink of anxiety.

The uneasiness that makes us laugh when we read Borges is certainly related to the profound distress of those whose language has been

destroyed: loss of what is 'common' to place and name. Atopia, aphasia. Yet our text from Borges proceeds in another direction; the mythical homeland Borges assigns to that distortion of classification that prevents us from applying it, to that picture that lacks all spatial coherence, is a precise region whose name alone constitutes for the West a vast reservoir of utopias. In our dreamworld, is not China precisely this privileged *site of space*? In our traditional imagery, the Chinese culture is the most meticulous, the most rigidly ordered, the one most deaf to temporal events, most attached to the pure delineation of space; we think of it as a civilization of dikes and dams beneath the eternal face of the sky; we see it, spread and frozen, over the entire surface of a continent surrounded by walls. Even its writing does not reproduce the fugitive flight of the voice in horizontal lines; it erects the motionless and still-recognizable images of things themselves in vertical columns. So much so that the Chinese encyclopaedia quoted by Borges, and the taxonomy it proposes, lead to a kind of thought without space, to words and categories that lack all life and place, but are rooted in a ceremonial space, overburdened with complex figures, with tangled paths, strange places, secret passages, and unexpected communications. There would appear to be, then, at the other extremity of the earth we inhabit, a culture entirely devoted to the ordering of space, but one that does not distribute the multiplicity of existing things into any of the categories that make it possible for us to name, speak, and think.

When we establish a considered classification, when we say that a cat and a dog resemble each other less than two greyhounds do, even if both are tame or embalmed, even if both are frenzied, even if both have just broken the water pitcher, what is the ground on which we are able to establish the validity of this classification with complete certainty? On what 'table', according to what grid of identities, similitudes, analogies, have we become accustomed to sort out so many different and similar things? What is this coherence – which, as is immediately apparent, is neither determined by an *a priori* and necessary concatenation, nor imposed on us by immediately perceptible contents? For it is not a question of linking consequences, but of grouping and isolating, of analysing, of matching and pigeon-holing concrete contents; there is nothing more tentative, nothing more empirical (superficially, at least) than the process of establishing an order among things; nothing that demands a sharper eye or a surer, better-articulated language; nothing that more insistently requires that one allow oneself to be carried along by the proliferation of



qualities and forms. And yet an eye not consciously prepared might well group together certain similar figures and distinguish between others on the basis of such and such a difference: in fact, there is no similitude and no distinction, even for the wholly untrained perception, that is not the result of a precise operation and of the application of a preliminary criterion. A 'system of elements' – a definition of the segments by which the resemblances and differences can be shown, the types of variation by which those segments can be affected, and, lastly, the threshold above which there is a difference and below which there is a similitude – is indispensable for the establishment of even the simplest form of order. Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language; and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself in depth as though already there, waiting in silence for the moment of its expression.

The fundamental codes of a culture – those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices – establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home. At the other extremity of thought, there are the scientific theories or the philosophical interpretations which explain why order exists in general, what universal law it obeys, what principle can account for it, and why this particular order has been established and not some other. But between these two regions, so distant from one another, lies a domain which, even though its role is mainly an intermediary one, is nonetheless fundamental: it is more confused, more obscure, and probably less easy to analyse. It is here that a culture, imperceptibly deviating from the empirical orders prescribed for it by its primary codes, instituting an initial separation from them, causes them to lose their original transparency, relinquishes its immediate and invisible powers, frees itself sufficiently to discover that these orders are perhaps not the only possible ones or the best ones; this culture then finds itself faced with the stark fact that there exists, below the level of its spontaneous orders, things that are in themselves capable of being ordered, that belong to a certain unspoken order; the fact, in short, that order exists. As though emancipating itself to some extent from its linguistic, perceptual, and practical grids, the culture superimposed on them another kind of grid which neutralized them, which by this superimposition both revealed and ex-

cluded them at the same time, so that the culture, by this very process, came face to face with order in its primary state. It is on the basis of this newly perceived order that the codes of language, perception, and practice are criticized and rendered partially invalid. It is on the basis of this order, taken as a firm foundation, that general theories as to the ordering of things, and the interpretation that such an ordering involves, will be constructed. Thus, between the already 'encoded' eye and reflexive knowledge there is a middle region which liberates order itself: it is here that it appears, according to the culture and the age in question, continuous and graduated or discontinuous and piecemeal, linked to space or constituted anew at each instant by the driving force of time, related to a series of variables or defined by separate systems of coherences, composed of resemblances which are either successive or corresponding, organized around increasing differences, etc. This middle region, then, in so far as it makes manifest the modes of being of order, can be posited as the most fundamental of all: anterior to words, perceptions, and gestures, which are then taken to be more or less exact, more or less happy, expressions of it (which is why this experience of order in its pure primary state always plays a critical role); more solid, more archaic, less dubious, always more 'true' than the theories that attempt to give those expressions explicit form, exhaustive application, or philosophical foundation. Thus, in every culture, between the use of what one might call the ordering codes and reflections upon order itself, there is the pure experience of order and of its modes of being.

The present study is an attempt to analyse that experience. I am concerned to show its developments, since the sixteenth century, in the mainstream of a culture such as ours: in what way, as one traces – against the current, as it were – language as it has been spoken, natural creatures as they have been perceived and grouped together, and exchanges as they have been practised; in what way, then, our culture has made manifest the existence of order, and how, to the modalities of that order, the exchanges owed their laws, the living beings their constants, the words their sequence and their representative value; what modalities of order have been recognized, posited, linked with space and time, in order to create the positive basis of knowledge as we find it employed in grammar and philology, in natural history and biology, in the study of wealth and political economy. Quite obviously, such an analysis does not belong to the history of ideas or of science: it is rather an inquiry whose aim is to rediscover on what basis knowledge and theory became possible; within



what space of order knowledge was constituted; on the basis of what historical *a priori*, and in the element of what positivity, ideas could appear, sciences be established, experience be reflected in philosophies, rationalities be formed, only, perhaps, to dissolve and vanish soon afterwards. I am not concerned, therefore, to describe the progress of knowledge towards an objectivity in which today's science can finally be recognized; what I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the *episteme* in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility; in this account, what should appear are those configurations within the *space* of knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science. Such an enterprise is not so much a history, in the traditional meaning of that word, as an 'archaeology'.<sup>1</sup>

Now, this archaeological inquiry has revealed two great discontinuities in the *episteme* of Western culture: the first inaugurates the Classical age (roughly half-way through the seventeenth century) and the second, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, marks the beginning of the modern age. The order on the basis of which we think today does not have the same mode of being as that of the Classical thinkers. Despite the impression we may have of an almost uninterrupted development of the European *ratio* from the Renaissance to our own day, despite our possible belief that the classifications of Linnaeus, modified to a greater or lesser degree, can still lay claim to some sort of validity, that Condillac's theory of value can be recognized to some extent in nineteenth-century marginalism, that Keynes was well aware of the affinities between his own analyses and those of Cantillon, that the language of *general grammar* (as exemplified in the authors of Port-Royal or in Bauzée) is not so very far removed from our own – all this quasi-continuity on the level of ideas and themes is doubtless only a surface appearance; on the archaeological level, we see that the system of positivities was transformed in a wholesale fashion at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. Not that reason made any progress: it was simply that the mode of being of things, and of the order that divided them up before presenting them to the understanding, was profoundly altered. If the natural history of Tournefort, Linnaeus, and Buffon can be related to anything

<sup>1</sup> The problems of method raised by such an 'archaeology' will be examined in a later work.

as all other than itself, it is not to biology, to Cuvier's comparative anatomy, or to Darwin's theory of evolution, but to Bauzée's general grammar, to the analysis of money and wealth as found in the works of Law, or Véron de Fortbonnaix, or Turgot. Perhaps knowledge succeeds in engendering knowledge, ideas in transforming themselves and actively modifying one another (but how? – historians have not yet enlightened us on this point); one thing, in any case, is certain: archaeology, addressing itself to the general space of knowledge, to its configurations, and to the mode of being of the things that appear in it, defines systems of simultaneity, as well as the series of mutations necessary and sufficient to circumscribe the threshold of a new positivity.

In this way, analysis has been able to show the coherence that existed, throughout the Classical age, between the theory of representation and the theories of language, of the natural orders, and of wealth and value. It is this configuration that, from the nineteenth century onward, changes entirely; the theory of representation disappears as the universal foundation of all possible orders; language as the spontaneous *tabula*, the primary grid of things, as an indispensable link between representation and things, is eclipsed in its turn; a profound historicity penetrates into the heart of things, isolates and defines them in their own coherence, imposes upon them the forms of order implied by the continuity of time; the analysis of exchange and money gives way to the study of production, that of the organism takes precedence over the search for taxonomic characteristics, and, above all, language loses its privileged position and becomes, in its turn, a historical form coherent with the density of its own past. But as things become increasingly reflexive, seeking the principle of their intelligibility only in their own development, and abandoning the space of representation, man enters in his turn, and for the first time, the field of Western knowledge. Strangely enough, man – the study of whom is supposed by the naïve to be the oldest investigation since Socrates – is probably no more than a kind of rift in the order of things, or, in any case, a configuration whose outlines are determined by the new position he has so recently taken up in the field of knowledge. Whence all the chimeras of the new humanisms, all the facile solutions of an 'anthropology' understood as a universal reflection on man, half-empirical, half-philosophical. It is comforting, however, and a source of profound relief to think that man is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge, and that he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form.

## PREFACE

It is evident that the present study is, in a sense, an echo of my undertaking to write a history of madness in the Classical age; it has the same articulations in time, taking the end of the Renaissance as its starting-point, then encountering, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, just as my history of madness did, the threshold of a modernity that we have not yet left behind. But whereas in the history of madness I was investigating the way in which a culture can determine in a massive, general form the difference that limits it, I am concerned here with observing how a culture experiences the propinquity of things, how it establishes the *tabula* of their relationships and the order by which they must be considered. I am concerned, in short, with a history of resemblance: on what conditions was Classical thought able to reflect relations of similarity or equivalence between things, relations that would provide a foundation and a justification for their words, their classifications, their systems of exchange? What historical *a priori* provided the starting-point from which it was possible to define the great checkerboard of distinct identities established against the confused, undefined, faceless, and, as it were, indifferent background of differences? The history of madness would be the history of the Other – of that which, for a given culture, is at once interior and foreign, therefore to be excluded (so as to exorcize the interior danger) but by being shut away (in order to reduce its otherness); whereas the history of the order imposed on things would be the history of the Same – of that which, for a given culture, is both dispersed and related, therefore to be distinguished by kinds and to be collected together into identities.

And if one considers that disease is at one and the same time disorder – the existence of a perilous otherness within the human body, at the very heart of life – and a natural phenomenon with its own constants, resemblances, and types, one can see what scope there would be for an archaeology of the medical point of view. From the limit-experience of the Other to the constituent forms of medical knowledge, and from the latter to the order of things and the conceptions of the Same, what is available to archaeological analysis is the whole of Classical knowledge, or rather the threshold that separates us from Classical thought and constitutes our modernity. It was upon this threshold that the strange figure of knowledge called man first appeared and revealed a space proper to the human sciences. In attempting to uncover the deepest strata of Western culture, I am restoring to our silent and apparently immobile soil its rifts, its instability, its flaws; and it is the same ground that is once more stirring under our feet.

## PART 1

## CHAPTER I

# Las Meninas

### I

The painter is standing a little back from his canvas[1]. He is glancing at his model; perhaps he is considering whether to add some finishing touch, though it is also possible that the first stroke has not yet been made. The arm holding the brush is bent to the left, towards the palette; it is motionless, for an instant, between canvas and paints. The skilled hand is suspended in mid-air, arrested in rapt attention on the painter's gaze; and the gaze, in return, waits upon the arrested gesture. Between the fine point of the brush and the steely gaze, the scene is about to yield up its volume.

But not without a subtle system of feints. By standing back a little, the painter has placed himself to one side of the painting on which he is working. That is, for the spectator at present observing him he is to the right of his canvas, while the latter, the canvas, takes up the whole of the extreme left. And the canvas has its back turned to that spectator: he can see nothing of it but the reverse side, together with the huge frame on which it is stretched. The painter, on the other hand, is perfectly visible in his full height; or at any rate, he is not masked by the tall canvas which may soon absorb him, when, taking a step towards it again, he returns to his task; he has no doubt just appeared, at this very instant, before the eyes of the spectator, emerging from what is virtually a sort of vast cage projected backwards by the surface he is painting. Now he can be seen, caught in a moment of stillness, at the neutral centre of this oscillation. His dark torso and bright face are half-way between the visible and the invisible: emerging from that canvas beyond our view, he moves into our gaze; but when, in a moment, he makes a step to the right, removing himself from our gaze, he will be standing exactly in front of the canvas he is painting; he will enter that region where his painting, neglected for an instant, will, for him, become visible once more, free of shadow and

free of reticence. As though the painter could not at the same time be seen on the picture where he is represented and also see that upon which he is representing something. He rules at the threshold of those two incompatible visibilities.

The painter is looking, his face turned slightly and his head leaning towards one shoulder. He is staring at a point to which, even though it is invisible, we, the spectators, can easily assign an object, since it is we, ourselves, who are that point: our bodies, our faces, our eyes. The spectacle he is observing is thus doubly invisible: first, because it is not represented within the space of the painting, and, second, because it is situated precisely in that blind point, in that essential hiding-place into which our gaze disappears from ourselves at the moment of our actual looking. And yet, how could we fail to see that invisibility, there in front of our eyes, since it has its own perceptible equivalent, its sealed-in figure, in the painting itself? We could, in effect, guess what it is the painter is looking at if it were possible for us to glance for a moment at the canvas he is working on; but all we can see of that canvas is its texture, the horizontal and vertical bars of the stretcher, and the obliquely rising foot of the easel. The tall, monotonous rectangle occupying the whole left portion of the real picture, and representing the back of the canvas within the picture, reconstitutes in the form of a surface the invisibility in depth of what the artist is observing: that space in which we are, and which we are. From the eyes of the painter to what he is observing there runs a compelling line that we, the onlookers, have no power of evading: it runs through the real picture and emerges from its surface to join the place from which we see the painter observing us; this dotted line reaches out to us ineluctably, and links us to the representation of the picture.

In appearance, this locus is a simple one; a matter of pure reciprocity: we are looking at a picture in which the painter is in turn looking out at us. A mere confrontation, eyes catching one another's glance, direct looks superimposing themselves upon one another as they cross. And yet this slender line of reciprocal visibility embraces a whole complex network of uncertainties, exchanges, and feints. The painter is turning his eyes towards us only in so far as we happen to occupy the same position as his subject. We, the spectators, are an additional factor. Though greeted by that gaze, we are also dismissed by it, replaced by that which was always there before we were: the model itself. But, inversely, the painter's gaze, addressed to the void confronting him outside the picture, accepts as many models as there are spectators; in this precise but neutral place, the observer

and the observed take part in a ceaseless exchange. No gaze is stable, or rather, in the neutral furrow of the gaze piercing at a right angle through the canvas, subject and object, the spectator and the model, reverse their roles to infinity. And here the great canvas with its back to us on the extreme left of the picture exercises its second function: stubbornly invisible, it prevents the relation of these gazes from ever being discoverable or definitely established. The opaque fixity that it establishes on one side renders forever unstable the play of metamorphoses established in the centre between spectator and model. Because we can see only that reverse side, we do not know who we are, or what we are doing. Seen or seeing? The painter is observing a place which, from moment to moment, never ceases to change its content, its form, its face, its identity. But the attentive immobility of his eyes refers us back to another direction which they have often followed already, and which soon, there can be no doubt, they will take again: that of the motionless canvas upon which is being traced, has already been traced perhaps, for a long time and forever, a portrait that will never again be erased. So that the painter's sovereign gaze commands a virtual triangle whose outline defines this picture of a picture: at the top – the only visible corner – the painter's eyes; at one of the base angles, the invisible place occupied by the model; at the other base angle, the figure probably sketched out on the invisible surface of the canvas.

As soon as they place the spectator in the field of their gaze, the painter's eyes seize hold of him, force him to enter the picture, assign him a place at once privileged and inescapable, levy their luminous and visible tribute from him, and project it upon the inaccessible surface of the canvas within the picture. He sees his invisibility made visible to the painter and transposed into an image forever invisible to himself. A shock that is augmented and made more inevitable still by a marginal trap. At the extreme right, the picture is lit by a window represented in very sharp perspective; so sharp that we can see scarcely more than the embrasure; so that the flood of light streaming through it bathes at the same time, and with equal generosity, two neighbouring spaces, overlapping but irreducible: the surface of the painting, together with the volume it represents (which is to say, the painter's studio, or the salon in which his easel is now set up), and, in front of that surface, the real volume occupied by the spectator (or again, the unreal site of the model). And as it passes through the room from right to left, this vast flood of golden light carries both the spectator towards the painter and the model towards the canvas; it is this light too, which, washing over the painter, makes him visible to the spectator and

turns into golden lines, in the model's eyes, the frame of that enigmatic canvas on which his image, once transported there, is to be imprisoned. This extreme, partial, scarcely indicated window frees a whole flow of daylight which serves as the common locus of the representation. It balances the invisible canvas on the other side of the picture: just as that canvas, by turning its back to the spectators, folds itself in against the picture representing it, and forms, by the superimposition of its reverse and visible side upon the surface of the picture depicting it, the ground, inaccessible to us, on which there shimmers the Image *par excellence*, so does the window, a pure aperture, establish a space as manifest as the other is hidden; as much the common ground of painter, figures, models, and spectators, as the other is solitary (for no one is looking at it, not even the painter). From the right, there streams in through an invisible window the pure volume of a light that renders all representation visible; to the left extends the surface that conceals, on the other side of its all too visible woven texture, the representation it bears. The light, by flooding the scene (I mean the room as well as the canvas, the room represented on the canvas, and the room in which the canvas stands), envelops the figures and the spectators and carries them with it, under the painter's gaze, towards the place where his brush will represent them. But that place is concealed from us. We are observing ourselves being observed by the painter, and made visible to his eyes by the same light that enables us to see him. And just as we are about to apprehend ourselves, transcribed by his hand as though in a mirror, we find that we can in fact apprehend nothing of that mirror but its lustreless back. The other side of a psyche.

Now, as it happens, exactly opposite the spectators – ourselves – on the wall forming the far end of the room, Velázquez has represented a series of pictures; and we see that among all those hanging canvases there is one that shines with particular brightness. Its frame is wider and darker than those of the others; yet there is a fine white line around its inner edge diffusing over its whole surface a light whose source is not easy to determine; for it comes from nowhere, unless it be from a space within itself. In this strange light, two silhouettes are apparent, while above them, and a little behind them, is a heavy purple curtain. The other pictures reveal little more than a few paler patches buried in a darkness without depth. This particular one, on the other hand, opens onto a perspective of space in which recognizable forms recede from us in a light that belongs only to itself. Among all these elements intended to provide representations, while impeding them, hiding them, concealing them because of their

position or their distance from us, this is the only one that fulfils its function in all honesty and enables us to see what it is supposed to show. Despite its distance from us, despite the shadows all around it. But it isn't a picture: it is a mirror. It offers us at last that enchantment of the double that until now has been denied us, not only by the distant paintings but also by the light in the foreground with its ironic canvas.

Of all the representations represented in the picture this is the only one visible; but no one is looking at it. Upright beside his canvas, his attention entirely taken up by his model, the painter is unable to see this looking-glass shining so softly behind him. The other figures in the picture are also, for the most part, turned to face what must be taking place in front – towards the bright invisibility bordering the canvas, towards that balcony of light where their eyes can gaze at those who are gazing back at them, and not towards that dark recess which marks the far end of the room in which they are represented. There are, it is true, some heads turned away from us in profile: but not one of them is turned far enough to see, at the back of the room, that solitary mirror, that tiny glowing rectangle which is nothing other than visibility, yet without any gaze able to grasp it, to render it actual, and to enjoy the suddenly ripe fruit of the spectacle it offers.

It must be admitted that this indifference is equalled only by the mirror's own. It is reflecting nothing, in fact, of all that is there in the same space as itself: neither the painter with his back to it, nor the figures in the centre of the room. It is not the visible it reflects, in those bright depths. In Dutch painting it was traditional for mirrors to play a duplicating role: they repeated the original contents of the picture, only inside an unreal, modified, contracted, concave space. One saw in them the same things as one saw in the first instance in the painting, but decomposed and re-composed according to a different law. Here, the mirror is saying nothing that has already been said before. Yet its position is more or less completely central: its upper edge is exactly on an imaginary line running half-way between the top and the bottom of the painting, it hangs right in the middle of the far wall (or at least in the middle of the portion we can see); it ought, therefore, to be governed by the same lines of perspective as the picture itself; we might well expect the same studio, the same painter, the same canvas to be arranged within it according to an identical space; it could be the perfect duplication.

In fact, it shows us nothing of what is represented in the picture itself. Its motionless gaze extends out in front of the picture, into that necessarily

invisible region which forms its exterior face, to apprehend the figures arranged in that space. Instead of surrounding visible objects, this mirror cuts straight through the whole field of the representation, ignoring all it might apprehend within that field, and restores visibility to that which resides outside all view. But the invisibility that it overcomes in this way is not the invisibility of what is hidden: it does not make its way around any obstacle, it is not distorting any perspective, it is addressing itself to what is invisible both because of the picture's structure and because of its existence as painting. What it is reflecting is that which all the figures within the painting are looking at so fixedly, or at least those who are looking straight ahead; it is therefore what the spectator would be able to see if the painting extended further forward, if its bottom edge were brought lower until it included the figures the painter is using as models. But it is also, since the picture does stop there, displaying only the painter and his studio, what is exterior to the picture, in so far as it is a picture – in other words, a rectangular fragment of lines and colours intended to represent something to the eyes of any possible spectator. At the far end of the room, ignored by all, the unexpected mirror holds in its glow the figures that the painter is looking at (the painter in his represented, objective reality, the reality of the painter at his work); but also the figures that are looking at the painter (in that material reality which the lines and the colours have laid out upon the canvas). These two groups of figures are both equally inaccessible, but in different ways: the first because of an effect of composition peculiar to the painting; the second because of the law that presides over the very existence of all pictures in general. Here, the action of representation consists in bringing one of these two forms of invisibility into the place of the other, in an unstable superimposition – and in rendering them both, at the same moment, at the other extremity of the picture – at that pole which is the very height of its representation: that of a reflected depth in the far recess of the painting's depth. The mirror provides a metathesis of visibility that affects both the space represented in the picture and its nature as representation; it allows us to see, in the centre of the canvas, what in the painting is of necessity doubly invisible.

A strangely literal, though inverted, application of the advice given, so it is said, to his pupil by the old Pachero when the former was working in his studio in Seville: 'The image should stand out from the frame.'

## II

But perhaps it is time to give a name at last to that image which appears in the depths of the mirror, and which the painter is contemplating in front of the picture. Perhaps it would be better, once and for all, to determine the identities of all the figures presented or indicated here, so as to avoid embroiling ourselves forever in those vague, rather abstract designations, so constantly prone to misunderstanding and duplication, 'the painter', 'the characters', 'the models', 'the spectators', 'the images'. Rather than pursue to infinity a language inevitably inadequate to the visible fact, it would be better to say that Velázquez composed a picture; that in this picture he represented himself, in his studio or in a room of the Escorial, in the act of painting two figures whom the Infanta Margarita has come there to watch, together with an entourage of duennas, maids of honour, courtiers, and dwarfs; that we can attribute names to this group of people with great precision: tradition recognizes that here we have Doña Maria Agustina Sarmiente, over there Nieto, in the foreground Nicoloso Pertusato, an Italian jester. We could then add that the two personages serving as models to the painter are not visible, at least directly; but that we can see them in a mirror; and that they are, without any doubt, King Philip IV and his wife, Mariana.

These proper names would form useful landmarks and avoid ambiguous designations; they would tell us in any case what the painter is looking at, and the majority of the characters in the picture along with him. But the relation of language to painting is an infinite relation. It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other's terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendour is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax. And the proper name, in this particular context, is merely an artifice: it gives us a finger to point with, in other words, to pass surreptitiously from the space where one speaks to the space where one looks; in other words, to fold one over the other as though they were equivalents. But if one wishes to keep the relation of language to vision open, if one wishes to treat their incompatibility as a starting-point for speech instead of as an obstacle to be avoided, so as to stay as close as possible to both, then one must erase those proper names



simultaneously endless and closed, full and tautological world of resemblance now finds itself dissociated and, as it were, split down the middle: on the one side, we shall find the signs that have become tools of analysis, marks of identity and difference, principles whereby things can be reduced to order, keys for a taxonomy; and, on the other, the empirical and murmuring resemblance of things, that unreacting similitude that lies beneath thought and furnishes the infinite raw material for divisions and distributions. On the one hand, the general theory of signs, divisions, and classifications; on the other, the problem of immediate resemblances, of the spontaneous movement of the imagination, of nature's repetitions. And between the two, the new forms of knowledge that occupy the area opened up by this new split.

### III THE REPRESENTATION OF THE SIGN

What is a sign in the Classical age? For what was altered in the first half of the seventeenth century, and for a long time to come – perhaps right up to our own day – was the entire organization of signs, the conditions under which they exercise their strange function; it is this, among so many other things one knows or sees, that causes them to emerge suddenly as signs; it is their very being. On the threshold of the Classical age, the sign ceases to be a form of the world; and it ceases to be bound to what it marks by the solid and secret bonds of resemblance or affinity.

Classical thought defines it according to three variables[11]. First, the certainty of the relation: a sign may be so constant that one can be sure of its accuracy (in the sense that breathing denotes life), but it may also be simply probable (in the sense that pallor probably denotes pregnancy). Second, the type of relation: a sign may belong to the whole that it denotes (in the sense that a healthy appearance is part of the health it denotes) or be separate from it (in the sense that the figures of the Old Testament are distant signs of the Incarnation and Redemption). Third, the origin of the relation: a sign may be natural (in the sense that a reflection in a mirror denotes that which it reflects) or conventional (in the sense that a word may signify an idea to a given group of men). None of these forms of relation necessarily implies resemblance; even the natural sign does not require that: a cry is a spontaneous sign of fear, but not analogous to it; or again, as Berkeley puts it, visual sensations are signs of touch established in us by God, yet they do not resemble it in any way[12].

These three variables replace resemblance in defining the sign's efficacy in the domains of empirical knowledge.

1. The sign, since it is always either certain or probable, should find its area of being within knowledge. In the sixteenth century, signs were thought to have been placed upon things so that men might be able to uncover their secrets, their nature or their virtues; but this discovery was merely the ultimate purpose of signs, the justification of their presence; it was a possible way of using them, and no doubt the best; but they did not need to be known in order to exist: even if they remained silent, even if no one were to perceive them, they were just as much *there*. It was not knowledge that gave them their signifying function, but the very language of things. From the seventeenth century onward, the whole domain of the sign is divided between the certain and the probable: that is to say, there can no longer be an unknown sign, a mute mark. This is not because men are in possession of all the possible signs, but because there can be no sign until there exists a *known* possibility of substitution between two *known* elements. The sign does not wait in silence for the coming of a man capable of recognizing it: it can be constituted only by an act of knowing.

It is here that knowledge breaks off its old kinship with *divinatio*. The latter always presupposed signs anterior to it: so that knowledge always resided entirely in the opening up of a discovered, affirmed, or secretly transmitted, sign. Its task was to uncover a language which God had previously distributed across the face of the earth; it is in this sense that it was the divination of an essential implication, and that the object of its divination was *divine*. From now on, however, it is within knowledge itself that the sign is to perform its signifying function; it is from knowledge that it will borrow its certainty or its probability. And though God still employs signs to speak to us through nature, he is making use of our knowledge, and of the relations that are set up between our impressions, in order to establish in our minds a relation of signification. Such is the role of feeling in Malebranche or of sensation in Berkeley; in natural judgement, in feeling, in visual impressions, and in the perception of the third dimension, what we are dealing with are hasty and confused, but pressing, inevitable, and obligatory kinds of knowledge serving as signs for discursive kinds of knowledge which we humans, because we are not pure intelligences, no longer have the time or the permission to attain to ourselves and by the unaided strength of our own minds. In Malebranche and Berkeley, the sign arranged by God is the cunning and



thoughtful superimposition of two kinds of knowledge. There is no longer any *divinatio* involved – no insertion of knowledge in the enigmatic, open, and sacred area of signs – but a brief and concentrated kind of knowledge: the contraction of a long sequence of judgements into the rapidly assimilated form of the sign. And it will also be seen how, by a reversal of direction, knowledge, having enclosed the signs within its own space, is now able to accommodate probability: between one impression and another the relation will be that of sign to signified, in other words, a relation which, like that of succession, will progress from the weakest probability towards the greatest certainty.

The connection of ideas does not imply the relation of *cause* and *effect*, but only of a mark or *sign* with the thing *signified*. The fire which I see is not the cause of the pain I suffer upon my approaching it, but the mark that forewarns me of it[13].

The knowledge that divined, *at random*, signs that were absolute and older than itself has been replaced by a network of signs built up step by step in accordance with a knowledge of what is probable. Hume has become possible.

2. The second variable of the sign: the form of its relation with what it signifies. By means of the interplay of expediency, emulation, and above all sympathy, similitude was able in the sixteenth century to triumph over space and time; for it was within the power of the sign to draw things together and unite them. With the advent of Classical thought, on the other hand, the sign becomes characterized by its essential dispersion. The circular world of converging signs is replaced by an infinite progression. Within this space, the sign can have one of two positions: either it can be claimed, as an element, to be part of that which it serves to designate; or else it is really and actually separated from what it serves to designate. The truth is, however, that this alternative is not a radical one, since the sign, in order to function, must be simultaneously an insertion in that which it signifies and also distinct from it. For the sign to be, in effect, what it is, it must be presented as an object of knowledge at the same time as that which it signifies. As Condillac points out, a sound could never become the verbal sign of something for a child unless the child had heard it at least once at the moment of perceiving the object[14]. But if one element of a perception is to become a sign for it, it is not enough merely for that element to be part of the perception; it must be differentiated *qua* element and be distinguished from the total impression

with which it is confusedly linked; consequently, that total impression itself must have been divided up, and attention must have been directed towards one of the intermingled regions composing it, in order to isolate one of them. The constitution of the sign is thus inseparable from analysis. Indeed, it is the result of it, since without analysis the sign could not become apparent. But it is also the instrument of analysis, since once defined and isolated it can be applied to further impressions; and in relation to them it plays the role of a grid, as it were. Because the mind analyses, the sign appears. Because the mind has signs at its disposal, analysis never ceases. It is understandable why, from Condillac to Destutt de Tracy and Gerando, the general theory of signs and the definition of the power of analysis of thought were so exactly superimposed to form a single and unbroken theory of knowledge.

When the *Logique de Port-Royal* states that a sign can be inherent in what it designates or separate from it, it is demonstrating that the sign, in the Classical age, is charged no longer with the task of keeping the world close to itself and inherent in its own forms, but, on the contrary, with that of spreading it out, of juxtaposing it over an indefinitely open surface, and of taking up from that point the endless deployment of the substitutes in which we conceive of it. And it is by this means that it is offered simultaneously to analysis and to combination, and can be ordered from beginning to end. The sign in Classical thought does not erase distances or abolish time: on the contrary, it enables one to unfold them and to traverse them step by step. It is the sign that enables things to become distinct, to preserve themselves within their own identities, to dissociate themselves or bind themselves together. Western reason is entering the age of judgement.

3. There remains a third variable: the one that can assume the two values of nature and of convention. It had long been known – and well before Plato's *Cratylus* – that signs can be either given by nature or established by man. Nor was the sixteenth century ignorant of this fact, since it recognized human languages to be instituted signs. But the artificial signs owed their power only to their fidelity to natural signs. These latter, even at a remove, were the foundation of all others. From the seventeenth century, the values allotted to nature and convention in this field are inverted: if natural, a sign is no more than an element selected from the world of things and constituted as a sign by our knowledge. It is therefore strictly limited, rigid, inconvenient, and impossible for the mind to master. When, on the other hand, one establishes a

conventional sign, it is always possible (and indeed necessary) to choose it in such a way that it will be simple, easy to remember, applicable to an indefinite number of elements, susceptible of subdivision within itself and of combination with other signs; the man-made sign is the sign at the peak of its activity. It is the man-made sign that draws the dividing-line between man and animal; that transforms imagination into voluntary memory, spontaneous attention into reflection, and instinct into rational knowledge[15]. It is also what Itard found lacking in the 'wild man of Aveyron'[16]. Natural signs are merely rudimentary sketches for these conventional signs, the vague and distant design that can be realized only by the establishment of arbitrariness.

But this arbitrariness is measured by its function; and has its rules very exactly defined by that function. An arbitrary system of signs must permit the analysis of things into their simplest elements; it must be capable of decomposing them into their very origins; but it must also demonstrate how combinations of those elements are possible, and permit the ideal genesis of the complexity of things. 'Arbitrary' stands in opposition to 'natural' only if one is attempting to designate the manner in which signs have been established. But this arbitrariness is also the grid of analysis and the combinative space through which nature is to posit itself as that which it is – at the level of primal impressions and in all the possible forms of their combination. In its perfect state, the system of signs is that simple, absolutely transparent language which is capable of naming what is elementary; it is also that complex of operations which defines all possible conjunctions. To our eyes, this search for origins and this calculus of combinations appear incompatible, and we are only too ready to interpret them as an ambiguity in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thought. The same is true of the interaction between the system and nature. In fact, there is no contradiction at all for thought at that time. More precisely, there exists a single, necessary arrangement running through the whole of the Classical *episteme*: the association of a universal calculus and a search for the elementary within a system that is artificial and is, for that very reason, able to make nature visible from its primary elements right to the simultaneity of all their possible combinations. In the Classical age, to make use of signs is not, as it was in preceding centuries, to attempt to rediscover beneath them the primitive text of a discourse sustained, and retained, forever; it is an attempt to discover the arbitrary language that will authorize the deployment of nature within its space, the final terms of its analysis and the laws of its composition. It is no longer the task of

knowledge to dig out the ancient Word from the unknown places where it may be hidden; its job now is to fabricate a language, and to fabricate it well – so that, as an instrument of analysis and combination, it will really be the language of calculation.

It is now possible to define the instruments laid down for the use of Classical thought by the sign system. It was this system that introduced into knowledge probability, analysis, and combination, and the justified arbitrariness of the system. It was the sign system that gave rise simultaneously to the search for origins and to calculability; to the constitution of tables that would fix the possible compositions, and to the restitution of a genesis on the basis of the simplest elements; it was the sign system that linked all knowledge to a language, and sought to replace all languages with a system of artificial symbols and operations of a logical nature. At the level of the history of opinions, all this would appear, no doubt, as a tangled network of influences in which the individual parts played by Hobbes, Berkeley, Leibniz, Condillac, and the 'Idéologues' would be revealed. But if we question Classical thought at the level of what, archaeologically, made it possible, we perceive that the dissociation of the sign and resemblance in the early seventeenth century caused these new forms – probability, analysis, combination, and universal language system – to emerge, not as successive themes engendering one another or driving one another out, but as a single network of necessities. And it was this network that made possible the individuals we term Hobbes, Berkeley, Hume, or Condillac.

#### IV DUPLICATED REPRESENTATION

However, the property of signs most fundamental to the Classical *episteme* has not yet been mentioned. Indeed, the very fact that the sign can be more or less probable, more or less distant from what it signifies, that it can be either natural or arbitrary, without its nature or its value as a sign being affected – all this shows clearly enough that the relation of the sign to its content is not guaranteed by the order of things in themselves. The relation of the sign to the signified now resides in a space in which there is no longer any intermediary figure to connect them: what connects them is a bond established, inside knowledge, between the *idea of one thing* and the *idea of another*. The *Logique de Port-Royal* states this as follows: 'The sign encloses two ideas, one of the thing representing, the other of the thing represented; and its nature consists in exciting the first

by means of the second'[17]. This dual theory of the sign is in unequivocal opposition to the more complex organization of the Renaissance; at that time, the theory of the sign implied three quite distinct elements: that which was marked, that which did the marking, and that which made it possible to see in the first the mark of the second; and this last element was, of course, resemblance: the sign provided a mark exactly in so far as it was 'almost the same thing' as that which it designated. It is this unitary and triple system that disappears at the same time as 'thought by resemblance', and is replaced by a strictly binary organization.

But there is one condition that must be fulfilled if the sign is indeed to be this pure duality. In its simple state as an idea, or an image, or a perception, associated with or substituted for another, the signifying element is not a sign. It can become a sign only on condition that it manifests, in addition, the relation that links it to what it signifies. It must represent; but that representation, in turn, must also be represented within it. This is a condition indispensable to the binary organization of the sign, and one that the *Logique de Port-Royal* sets forth even before telling us what a sign is: 'When one looks at a certain object only in so far as it represents another, the idea one has of it is the idea of a sign, and that first object is called a sign'[18]. The signifying idea becomes double, since superimposed upon the idea that is replacing another there is also the idea of its representative power. This appears to give us three terms: the idea signified, the idea signifying, and, within this second term, the idea of its role as representation. What we are faced with here is not, however, a surreptitious return to a ternary system, but rather an inevitable displacement within the two-term figure, which moves backward in relation to itself and comes to reside entirely within the signifying element. In fact, the signifying element has no content, no function, and no determination other than what it represents: it is entirely ordered upon and transparent to it. But this content is indicated only in a representation that posits itself as such, and that which is signified resides, without residuum and without opacity, within the representation of the sign. It is characteristic that the first example of a sign given by the *Logique de Port-Royal* is not the word, nor the cry, nor the symbol, but the spatial and graphic representation – the drawing as map or picture. This is because the picture has no other content in fact than that which it represents, and yet that content is made visible only because it is represented by a representation. The binary arrangement of the sign, as it appears in the seventeenth century, replaces an organization which, in different modes, had been

ternary ever since the time of the Stoics, and even since the first Greek grammarians; and this new binary arrangement presupposes that the sign is a duplicated representation doubled over upon itself. An idea can be the sign of another, not only because a bond of representation can be established between them, but also because this representation can always be represented within the idea that is representing. Or again, because representation in its peculiar essence is always perpendicular to itself: it is at the same time *indication* and *appearance*; a relation to an object and a manifestation of itself. From the Classical age, the sign is the *representativity* of the representation in so far as it is *representable*.

This has very considerable consequences. First, the importance of signs in Classical thought. Before, they were means of knowing and the keys to knowledge; now, they are co-extensive with representation, that is, with thought as a whole; they reside within it but they run through its entire extent. Whenever one representation is linked to another and represents that link within itself, there is a sign: the abstract idea signifies the concrete perception from which it has been formed (Condillac); the general idea is no more than a particular idea serving as a sign for other particular ideas (Berkeley); imaginings are signs of the perceptions from which they arose (Hume, Condillac); sensations are signs of one another (Berkeley, Condillac); and, finally, it is possible that sensations may themselves be (as in Berkeley) signs of what God wishes to tell us, which would make them, as it were, signs for a complex of signs. Analysis of representation and the theory of signs interpenetrate one another absolutely; and when the day came, at the end of the eighteenth century, for Ideology to raise the question of whether the idea or the sign should be accorded primacy, when Destutt could reproach Gerando for having created a theory of signs before defining the idea[19], this meant that their immediate link was already becoming confused, and that idea and sign would soon cease to be perfectly transparent to one another.

A second consequence: this universal extension of the sign within the field of representation precludes even the possibility of a theory of signification. For to ask ourselves questions about what signification is presupposes that it is a determinate form in our consciousness. But if phenomena are posited only in a representation that, in itself and because of its own representability, is wholly a sign, then signification cannot constitute a problem. Moreover, it is not even visible. All representations are interconnected as signs; all together, they form, as it were, an immense

network; each one posits itself in its transparency as the sign of what it represents; and yet – or rather, by this very fact – no specific activity of consciousness can ever constitute a signification. No doubt it is because Classical thought about representation excludes any analysis of signification that we today, who conceive of signs only upon the basis of such an analysis, have so much trouble, despite the evidence, in recognizing that Classical philosophy, from Malebranche to Ideology, was through and through a philosophy of the sign.

No meaning exterior or anterior to the sign; no implicit presence of a previous discourse that must be reconstituted in order to reveal the autochthonous meaning of things. Nor, on the other hand, any act constitutive of signification or any genesis interior to consciousness. This is because there is no intermediary element, no opacity intervening between the sign and its content. Signs, therefore, have no other laws than those that may govern their contents: any analysis of signs is at the same time, and without need for further inquiry, the decipherment of what they are trying to say. Inversely, the discovery of what is signified is nothing more than a reflection upon the signs that indicate it. As in the sixteenth century, 'semiology' and 'hermeneutics' are superimposed – but in a different form. In the Classical age they no longer meet and join in the third element of resemblance; their connection lies in that power proper to representation of representing itself. There will therefore be no theory of signs separate and differing from an analysis of meaning. Yet the system does grant a certain privilege to the former over the latter; since it does not accord that which is signified a nature different from that accorded to the sign, meaning cannot be anything more than the totality of the signs arranged in their progression; it will be given in the complete *table* of signs. But, on the other hand, the complete network of signs is linked together and articulated according to patterns proper to meaning. The table of the signs will be the *image* of the things. Though the meaning itself is entirely on the side of the sign, its functioning is entirely on the side of that which is signified. This is why the analysis of language, from Lancelot to Destutt de Tracy, is conducted on the basis of an abstract theory of verbal signs and in the form of a general grammar: but it always takes the meaning of words as its guiding thread; it is also why natural history manifests itself as an analysis of the characters of living beings, and why, nevertheless, the taxonomies used, artificial though they may be, are always intended to unite with the natural order, or at least to dissociate it as little as possible; it is also why the analysis of wealth

is conducted on the basis of money and exchange, but value is always based upon need. In the Classical age, the pure science of signs has value as the direct discourse of that which is signified.

Finally, a third consequence, which probably extends up to our own time: the binary theory of the sign, the theory upon which the whole general science of the sign has been founded since the seventeenth century, is linked according to a fundamental relation with a general theory of representation. If the sign is the pure and simple connection between what signifies and what is signified (a connection that may be arbitrary or not, voluntary or imposed, individual or collective), then the relation can be established only within the general element of representation: the signifying element and the signified element are linked only in so far as they are (or have been or can be) represented, and in so far as the one actually represents the other. It was therefore necessary that the Classical theory of the sign should provide itself with an 'ideology' to serve as its foundation and philosophical justification, that is, a general analysis of all forms of representation, from elementary sensation to the abstract and complex idea. It was also necessary that Saussure, rediscovering the project of a general semiology, should have given the sign a definition that could seem 'psychologistic' (the linking of a concept and an image): this is because he was in fact rediscovering the Classical condition for conceiving of the binary nature of the sign.

## V THE IMAGINATION OF RESEMBLANCE

So signs are now set free from that teeming world throughout which the Renaissance had distributed them. They are lodged henceforth within the confines of representation, in the interstices of ideas, in that narrow space in which they interact with themselves in a perpetual state of decomposition and recomposition. As for similitude, it is now a spent force, outside the realm of knowledge. It is merely empiricism in its most unrefined form; like Hobbes, one can no longer 'regard it as being a part of philosophy', unless it has first been erased in its inexact form of resemblance and transformed by knowledge into a relationship of equality or order. And yet similitude is still an indispensable border of knowledge. For no equality or relation of order can be established between two things unless their resemblance has at least occasioned their comparison. Hume placed the relation of identity among those 'philosophical' relations that presuppose reflection; whereas, for him, resemblance belonged to natural

relations, to those that constrain our minds by means of an inevitable but 'calm force'.

Let the philosopher pride himself on his precision as much as he will . . . I nevertheless dare defy him to make a single step in his progress without the aid of resemblance. Throw but one glance upon the metaphysical aspect of the sciences, even the least abstract of them, and then tell me whether the general inductions that are derived from particular facts, or rather the kinds themselves, the species and all abstract notions, can be formed otherwise than by means of resemblance[20].

At the border of knowledge, similitude is that barely sketched form, that rudimentary relation which knowledge must overlay to its full extent, but which continues, indefinitely, to reside below knowledge in the manner of a mute and ineffaceable necessity.

As in the sixteenth century, resemblance and sign respond inevitably to one another, but in a new way. Whereas similitude once required a mark in order for its secret to be uncovered, it is now the undifferentiated, shifting, unstable base upon which knowledge can establish its relations, its measurements, and its identities. This results in a double reversal: first, because it is the sign – and with it the whole of discursive knowledge – that requires a basis of similitude, and, second, because it is no longer a question of making a previous content manifest to knowledge but of providing a content that will be able to offer a ground upon which forms of knowledge can be applied. Whereas in the sixteenth century resemblance was the fundamental relation of being to itself, and the hinge of the whole world, in the Classical age it is the simplest form in which what is to be known, and what is furthest from knowledge itself, appears. It is through resemblance that representation can be known, that is, compared with other representations that may be similar to it, analysed into elements (elements common to it and other representations), combined with those representations that may present partial identities, and finally laid out into an ordered table. Similitude in Classical philosophy (that is, in a philosophy of analysis) plays a role parallel to that which will be played by diversity in critical thought and the philosophies of judgement.

In this limiting and conditional position (that without which and beyond which one cannot know), resemblance is situated on the side of imagination, or, more exactly, it can be manifested only by virtue of imagination, and imagination, in turn, can be exercised only with the aid of resemblance. And, in effect, if we suppose in the uninterrupted chain of

representation certain impressions, the very simplest that can be, without the slightest degree of resemblance between them, then there would be no possibility whatever of the second recalling the first, causing it to reappear, and thus authorizing its representation in the imagination; those impressions would succeed one another in the most total differentiation – so total that it could not even be perceived, since no representation would be able to immobilize itself in one place, reanimate a former one, and juxtapose itself to it so as to give rise to a comparison; even that tiny overlap of identity necessary for all differentiation would not be provided. Perpetual change would pass before us without guidelines and in perpetual monotony. If representation did not possess the obscure power of making a past impression present once more, then no impression would ever appear as either similar to or dissimilar from a previous one. This power of recall implies at least the possibility of causing two impressions to appear as quasi-likenesses (as neighbours or contemporaries, existing in almost the same way) when one of those impressions only is present, while the other has ceased, perhaps a long time ago, to exist. Without imagination, there would be no resemblance between things.

The double requisite is patent. There must be, in the things represented, the insistent murmur of resemblance; there must be, in the representation, the perpetual possibility of imaginative recall. And neither of these requisites can dispense with the other, which completes and confronts it. Hence the two directions of analysis followed throughout the Classical age, consistently drawing closer and closer together until finally, in the second half of the eighteenth century, they were able to express their common truth in Ideology. On the one hand, we find the analysis that provides an account of the inversion of the series of representations to form a non-actual but simultaneous table of comparisons: the analysis of impressions, of reminiscence, of imagination, of memory, of all that involuntary background which is, as it were, the mechanics of the image in time. And, on the other hand, there is the analysis that gives an account of the resemblance between things – of their resemblance before their reduction to order, their decomposition into identical and different elements, the tabular redistribution of their unordered similitudes. Why is it, then, that things are given in an overlapping mixture, in an interpenetrating jumble in which their essential order is confused, yet still visible enough to show through in the form of resemblances, vague similitudes, and allusive opportunities for a memory on the alert? The first series of problems corresponds roughly with the *analytic of imagination*,



as a positive power to transform the linear time of representation into a simultaneous space containing virtual elements; the second corresponds roughly with the *analysis of nature*, including the *lacunae*, the disorders that confuse the tabulation of beings and scatter it into a series of representations that vaguely, and from a distance, resemble one another.

Now, these two opposing stages (the first the negative one of the disorder in nature and in our impressions, the other the positive one of the power to reconstitute order out of those impressions) are united in the idea of a 'genesis'. And this in two possible ways. Either the negative stage (that of disorder and vague resemblance) is attributed to the imagination itself, which then exercises a double function: if it is able to restore order solely by duplicating representation, it is able to do so only in so far as it would prevent us from perceiving directly, and in their analytic truth, the identities and differences of things. The power of imagination is only the inverse, the other side, of its defect. It exists within man, at the suture of body and soul. It is there that Descartes, Malebranche, and Spinoza analysed it, both as the locus of error and as the power of attaining to truth, even mathematical truth; they recognized in it the stigma of finitude, whether as the sign of a fall outside the area of intelligibility or as the mark of a limited nature. Alternatively, the positive stage of imagination can be attributed to shifting resemblances and the vague murmur of similitudes. It is the disorder of nature due to its own history, to its catastrophes, or perhaps merely to its jumbled plurality, which is no longer capable of providing representation with anything but things that resemble one another. So that representation, perpetually bound to contents so very close to one another, repeats itself, recalls itself, duplicates itself quite naturally, causes almost identical impressions to arise again and again, and engenders imagination. It was in just this proliferation of a nature that is multiple, yet obscurely and irrationally re-created, in the enigmatic fact of a nature that prior to all order resembles itself, that Condillac and Hume sought for the link between resemblance and imagination. Their solutions were strictly contradictory, but they were both answers to the same problem. It is in any case understandable that the second type of analysis should have so easily been deployed in the mythical form of the first man (Rousseau), or that of the awakening consciousness (Condillac), or that of the stranger suddenly thrust into the world (Hume): this genesis functioned exactly instead of and in place of *Genesis* itself.

One further remark. Though the notions of nature and human nature have a certain importance in the Classical age, this is not because the hidden and inexhaustibly rich source of power which we call nature had suddenly been discovered as a field for empirical inquiry; nor is it because a tiny, singular, and complex subregion called human nature had been isolated within this vast field of nature. In fact, these two concepts function in such a way as to guarantee the kinship, the reciprocal bond, between imagination and resemblance. It is true that imagination is apparently only one of the properties of human nature, and resemblance one of the effects of nature; but if we follow the archaeological network that provides Classical thought with its laws, we see quite clearly that human nature resides in that narrow overlap of representation which permits it to represent itself to itself (all human nature is there: just enough outside representation for it to present itself again, in the blank space that separates the presence of representation and the 're-' of its repetition); and that nature is nothing but the impalpable confusion within representation that makes the resemblance there perceptible before the order of the identities is yet visible. Nature and human nature, within the general configuration of the *episteme*, permit the reconciliation of resemblance and imagination that provides a foundation for, and makes possible, all the empirical sciences of order.

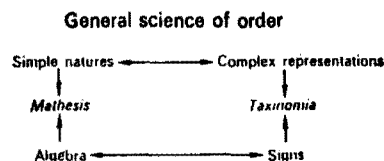
In the sixteenth century, resemblance was linked to a system of signs; and it was the interpretation of those signs that opened up the field of concrete knowledge. From the seventeenth century, resemblance was pushed out to the boundaries of knowledge, towards the humblest and basest of its frontiers. There, it links up with imagination, with doubtful repetitions, with misty analogies. And instead of opening up the way to a science of interpretation, it implies a genesis that leads from those unrefined forms of the Same to the great tables of knowledge developed according to the forms of identity, of difference, and of order. The project of a science of order, with a foundation such as it had in the seventeenth century, carried the implication that it had to be paralleled by an accompanying genesis of consciousness, as indeed it was, effectively and uninterruptedly, from Locke to the 'Idéologues'.

#### VI MATHESIS AND 'TAXINOMIA'

The project of a general science of order; a theory of signs analysing representation; the arrangement of identities and differences into ordered

tables: these constituted an area of empiricity in the Classical age that had not existed until the end of the Renaissance and that was destined to disappear early in the nineteenth century. It is so difficult for us to reinstate now, and so thickly overlaid by the system of positivities to which our own knowledge belongs, that it has for long passed unperceived. It is distorted and masked by the use of categories and patterns that are our own. An attempt is apparently being made to reconstitute what the 'sciences of life', of 'nature' or 'man', were, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while it is quite simply forgotten that man and life and nature are none of them domains that present themselves to the curiosity of knowledge spontaneously and passively.

What makes the totality of the Classical *episteme* possible is primarily the relation to a knowledge of order. When dealing with the ordering of simple natures, one has recourse to a *mathesis*, of which the universal method is algebra. When dealing with the ordering of complex natures (representations in general, as they are given in experience), one has to constitute a *taxinomia*, and to do that one has to establish a system of signs. These signs are to the order of composite natures what algebra is to the order of simple natures. But in so far as empirical representations must be analysable into simple natures, it is clear that the *taxinomia* relates wholly to the *mathesis*; on the other hand, since the perception of proofs is only one particular case of representation in general, one can equally well say that *mathesis* is only one particular case of *taxinomia*. Similarly, the signs established by thought itself constitute, as it were, an algebra of complex representations; and algebra, inversely, is a method of providing simple natures with signs and of operating upon those signs. We therefore have the arrangement shown below:



But that is not all. *Taxinomia* also implies a certain continuum of things (a non-discontinuity, a plenitude of being) and a certain power of the imagination that renders apparent what is not, but makes possible, by this very fact, the revelation of that continuity. The possibility of a science of empirical orders requires, therefore, an analysis of knowledge – an

analysis that must show how the hidden (and as it were confused) continuity of being can be reconstituted by means of the temporal connection provided by discontinuous representations. Hence the necessity, constantly manifested throughout the Classical age, of questioning the origin of knowledge. In fact, these empirical analyses are not in opposition to the project of a universal *mathesis*, in the sense that scepticism is to rationalism; they were already included in the requisites of a knowledge that is no longer posited as experience of the Same but as the establishment of Order. Thus, at the two extremities of the Classical *episteme*, we have a *mathesis* as the science of calculable order and a *genesis* as the analysis of the constitution of orders on the basis of empirical series. On the one hand, we have a utilization of the symbols of possible operations upon identities and differences; on the other, we have an analysis of the marks progressively imprinted in the mind by the resemblances between things and the retrospective action of imagination. Between the *mathesis* and the *genesis* there extends the region of signs – of signs that span the whole domain of empirical representation, but never extend beyond it. Hedged in by calculus and genesis, we have the area of the *table*. This kind of knowledge involves the allotting of a sign to all that our representation can present us with: perceptions, thoughts, desires; these signs must have a value as characters, that is, they must articulate the representation as a whole into distinct subregions, all separated from one another by assignable characteristics; in this way they authorize the establishment of a simultaneous system according to which the representations express their proximity and their distance, their adjacency and their separateness – and therefore the network, which, outside chronology, makes patent their kinship and reinstates their relations of order within a permanent area. In this manner the table of identities and differences may be drawn up.

It is in this area that we encounter *natural history* – the science of the characters that articulate the continuity and the tangle of nature. It is also in this area that we encounter the *theory of money* and the *theory of value* – the science of the signs that authorize exchange and permit the establishment of equivalences between men's needs or desires. Lastly, it is also in this region that we find *general grammar* – the science of the signs by means of which men group together their individual perceptions and pattern the continuous flow of their thoughts. Despite their differences, these three domains existed in the Classical age only in so far as the fundamental area of the ordered table was established between the calculation of equalities and the genesis of representations.



It is patent that these three notions – *mathesis*, *taxinomia*, *genesis* – designate not so much separate domains as a solid grid of kinships that defines the general configuration of knowledge in the Classical age. *Taxinomia* is not in opposition to *mathesis*: it resides within it and is distinguished from it; for it too is a science of order – a qualitative *mathesis*. But understood in the strict sense *mathesis* is a science of equalities, and therefore of attributions and judgements; it is the science of *truth*. *Taxinomia*, on the other hand, treats of identities and differences; it is the science of articulations and classifications; it is the knowledge of *beings*. In the same way, *genesis* is contained within *taxinomia*, or at least finds in it its primary possibility. But *taxinomia* establishes the table of visible differences; *genesis* presupposes a progressive series; the first treats of signs in their spatial simultaneity, as a syntax; the second divides them up into an analogon of time, as a chronology. In relation to *mathesis*, *taxinomia* functions as an ontology confronted by an apophantics; confronted by *genesis*, it functions as a semiology confronted by history. It defines, then, the general law of beings, and at the same time the conditions under which it is possible to know them. Hence the fact that the theory of signs in the Classical period was able to support simultaneously both a science with a dogmatic approach, which purported to be a knowledge of nature itself, and a philosophy of representation, which, in the course of time, became more and more nominalist and more and more sceptical. Hence, too, the fact that such an arrangement has disappeared so completely that later ages have lost even the memory of its existence; this is because after the Kantian critique, and all that occurred in Western culture at the end of the eighteenth century, a new type of division was established: on the one hand *mathesis* was regrouped so as to constitute an apophantics and an ontology, and it is in this form that it has dominated the formal disciplines right up to our day; on the other hand, history and semiology (the latter absorbed, moreover, by the former) united to form those interpretative disciplines whose power has extended from Schleiermacher to Nietzsche and Freud.

In any case, the Classical *episteme* can be defined in its most general arrangement in terms of the articulated system of a *mathesis*, a *taxinomia*, and a *genetic analysis*. The sciences always carry within themselves the project, however remote it may be, of an exhaustive ordering of the world; they are always directed, too, towards the discovery of simple elements and their progressive combination; and at their centre they form a table on which knowledge is displayed in a system contemporary with itself.

The centre of knowledge, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is the *table*. As for the great controversies that occupied men's minds, these are accommodated quite naturally in the folds of this organization.

It is quite possible to write a history of thought in the Classical period using these controversies as starting-points or themes. But one would then be writing only a history of opinions, that is, of the choices operated according to individuals, environments, social groups; and a whole method of inquiry is thereby implied. If one wishes to undertake an archaeological analysis of knowledge itself, it is not these celebrated controversies that ought to be used as the guidelines and articulation of such a project. One must reconstitute the general system of thought whose network, in its positivity, renders an interplay of simultaneous and apparently contradictory opinions possible. It is this network that defines the conditions that make a controversy or problem possible, and that bears the historicity of knowledge. If the Western world did battle with itself in order to know whether life was nothing but movement or whether nature was sufficiently well ordered to prove the existence of God, it was not because a problem had been opened up; it was because, after dispersing the undefined circle of signs and resemblances, and before organizing the series of causality and history, the *episteme* of Western culture had opened up an area to form a table over which it wandered endlessly, from the calculable forms of order to the analysis of the most complex representations. And we see the marks of this movement on the historical surface of the themes, controversies, problems, and preferences of opinion. Acquired learning spanned from one end to the other a 'space of knowledge' which had suddenly appeared in the seventeenth century and which was not to be closed again until a hundred and fifty years later.

We must now undertake the analysis of this tabulated space, in those subregions in which it is visible in its clearest form, that is, in the theories of language, classification, and money.

It may be objected that the mere fact of attempting to analyse general grammar, natural history, and economics simultaneously and *en bloc* – by relating them to a general theory of signs and representation – presupposes a question that could originate only in our own century. It is true that the Classical age was no more able than any other culture to circumscribe or name its own general system of knowledge. But that system was in fact sufficiently constricting to cause the visible forms of knowledge to trace their kinships upon it themselves, as though methods, concepts, types of analysis, acquired experiences, minds, and finally men themselves,

had all been displaced at the behest of a fundamental network defining the implicit but inevitable unity of knowledge. History has provided us with innumerable examples of these displacements. The connecting paths between the theories of knowledge, of signs, and of grammar were trodden so many times: Port-Royal produced its *Grammaire* as a complement and natural sequel to its *Logique*, the former being connected to the latter by a common analysis of signs; Condillac, Destutt de Tracy, and Gerando articulated one upon the other the decomposition of knowledge into its conditions or 'elements', and the reflection upon those signs of which language forms only the most visible application and use. There is also a well-trodden connection between the analysis of representation and signs and the analysis of wealth: Quesnay the physiocrat wrote the article on 'Évidence' for the *Encyclopédie*; Condillac and Destutt included in their theory of knowledge and language that of trade and economics, which for them possessed political and also moral value; it is well known that Turgot wrote the article on 'Étymologie' for the *Encyclopédie* and the first systematic parallel between money and words; that Adam Smith, in addition to his great work on economics, wrote a treatise on the origin of languages. There is a connecting path between the theory of natural classifications and theories of language: Adanson did not merely attempt to create, in the botanical field, a nomenclature that was both artificial and coherent; he aimed at (and in part carried out) a whole reorganization of writing in terms of the phonetic data of language; Rousseau left among his posthumous works some rudiments of botany and a treatise on the origin of languages.

Such, traced out, as it were, in dotted lines, was the great grid of empirical knowledge: that of non-quantitative orders. And perhaps the deferred but insistent unity of a *Taxinomia universalis* appeared in all clarity in the work of Linnaeus, when he conceived the project of discovering in all the concrete domains of nature or society the same distributions and the same order[21]. The limit of knowledge would be the perfect transparency of representations to the signs by which they are ordered.

## NOTES

- [1] Descartes, *Œuvres philosophiques* (Paris, 1963 edn., t. I, p. 77).
- [2] F. Bacon, *Novum Organum* (1620, book I, xlv and lix).
- [3] Descartes, *Regulae*, XIV, p. 168.
- [4] *Ibid.*, XIV, p. 168.
- [5] *Ibid.*, XIV, p. 182.

- [6] *Ibid.*, VI, p. 102; VII, p. 109.
- [7] *Ibid.*, XIV, p. 182.
- [8] *Ibid.*, VI, p. 103.
- [9] *Ibid.*, VII, p. 110.
- [10] *Ibid.*, III, p. 86.
- [11] *Logique de Port-Royal*, 1ère partie, chap. IV.
- [12] G. Berkeley, *An essay towards a new theory of vision* (1709, CXLVII).
- [13] G. Berkeley, *A treatise concerning the principles of human knowledge* (1710, LXV).
- [14] Condillac, *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (*Œuvres*, Paris, 1798, t. I, pp. 188-208).
- [15] *Ibid.*, p. 75.
- [16] J. Itard, *Rapport sur les nouveaux développements de Victor de l'Aveyron* (1806); reprinted in L. Malson, *Les Enfants sauvages* (Paris, 1964).
- [17] *Logique de Port-Royal*, 1ère partie, chap. IV.
- [18] *Ibid.*
- [19] Destutt de Tracy, *Éléments d'Idéologie* (Paris, year XI, t. II, p. 1).
- [20] Merian, *Réflexions philosophiques sur la ressemblance* (1767, pp. 3 and 4).
- [21] Linnaeus, *Philosophie botanique*, sections 155 and 256.

[34] J. Horne Tooke, *On the study of language* (London, 1798).

[35] Grimm has often been criticized for having confused letters and sounds (he analyses *Schrift* into eight elements because he divides the *f* into *p* and *h*). That is how difficult it was to treat language as an element composed purely of sounds.

[36] J. Grimm, *Deutsche Grammatik* (2nd edn., 1822, vol. I, p. 5). These analyses do not occur in the first edition (1818).

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[38] Bopp, *A comparative grammar* (London, 1845, p. I, note).

[39] J. Grimm, *L'Origine du langage* (Fr. trans. Paris, 1859, p. 7).

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 37. Cf. also *Deutsche Grammatik*, I, p. 588.

[41] J. Grimm, *L'Origine du langage*, p. 41.

[42] Bopp, *Über das Konjugationssystem der Sanskritsprache*.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 147 et seq.

[44] J. Grimm, *L'Origine du langage*, p. 39.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

[46] F. von Schlegel, *On the language and philosophy of the Indians*, p. 429.

[47] Cf. p. 115 above.

[48] Cf. G. Cuvier, *Rapport historique sur le progrès des sciences naturelles*, p. 4.

[49] Nietzsche, *The twilight of the idols* (First German edn. 1889; Fr. trans. 1911, p. 130).

## Man and his Doubles

### I THE RETURN OF LANGUAGE

With the appearance of literature, with the return of exegesis and the concern for formalization, with the development of philology—in short, with the reappearance of language as a multiple profusion, the order of Classical thought can now be eclipsed. At this time, from any retrospective viewpoint, it enters a region of shade. Even so, we should speak not of darkness but of a somewhat blurred light, deceptive in its apparent clarity, and hiding more than it reveals: it seems to us, in fact, that we know all there is to be known about Classical knowledge if we understand that it is rationalistic, that, since Galileo and Descartes, it has accorded an absolute privilege to Mechanism, that it presupposes a general ordering of nature, that it accepts the possibility of an analysis sufficiently radical to discover elements or origins, but that it already has a presentiment, beyond and despite all these concepts of understanding, of the movement of life, of the density of history, and of the disorder, so difficult to master, in nature. But to recognize Classical thought by such signs alone is to misunderstand its fundamental arrangement; it is to neglect entirely the relation between such manifestations and what made them possible. And how, after all (if not by a slow and laborious technique), are we to discover the complex relation of representations, identities, orders, words, natural beings, desires, and interests, once that vast grid has been dismantled, once needs have organized their production for themselves, once living beings have turned in towards the essential functions of life, once words have become weighed down with their own material history—in short, once the identities of representation have ceased to express the order of beings completely and openly? The entire system of grids which analysed the sequence of representations (a thin temporal series unfolding in men's minds), arresting its movement, fragmenting it,

spreading it out and redistributing it in a permanent table, all these distinctions created by words and discourse, characters and classification, equivalences and exchange, have been so completely abolished that it is difficult today to rediscover how that structure was able to function. The last 'bastion' to fall – and the one whose disappearance cut us off from Classical thought forever – was precisely the first of all those grids: discourse, which ensured the initial, spontaneous, unconsidered deployment of representation in a table. When discourse ceased to exist and to function within representation as the first means of ordering it, Classical thought ceased at the same time to be directly accessible to us.

The threshold between Classicism and modernity (though the terms themselves have no importance – let us say between our prehistory and what is still contemporary) had been definitively crossed when words ceased to intersect with representations and to provide a spontaneous grid for the knowledge of things. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, they rediscovered their ancient, enigmatic density; though not in order to restore the curve of the world which had harboured them during the Renaissance, nor in order to mingle with things in a circular system of signs. Once detached from representation, language has existed, right up to our own day, only in a dispersed way: for philologists, words are like so many objects formed and deposited by history; for those who wish to achieve a formalization, language must strip itself of its concrete content and leave nothing visible but those forms of discourse that are universally valid; if one's intent is to interpret, then words become a text to be broken down, so as to allow that other meaning hidden in them to emerge and become clearly visible; lastly, language may sometimes arise for its own sake in an act of writing that designates nothing other than itself. This dispersion imposes upon language, if not a privileged position, at least a destiny that seems singular when compared with that of labour or of life. When the table of natural history was dissociated, the living beings within it were not dispersed, but, on the contrary, regrouped around the central enigma of life; when the analysis of wealth had disappeared, all economic processes were regrouped around the central fact of production and all that rendered it possible; on the other hand, when the unity of general grammar – discourse – was broken up, language appeared in a multiplicity of modes of being, whose unity was probably irrecoverable. It is for this reason, perhaps, that philosophical reflection for so long held itself aloof from language. Whereas it sought tirelessly in the regions of life or labour for something that might provide it with an

object, or with its conceptual models, or its real and fundamental ground, it paid relatively little attention to language; its main concern was to clear away the obstacles that might oppose it in its task; for example, words had to be freed from the silent content that rendered them alien, or language had to be made more flexible and more fluid, as it were, from within, so that once emancipated from the spatializations of the understanding it would be able to express the movement and temporality of life. Language did not return into the field of thought directly and in its own right until the end of the nineteenth century. We might even have said until the twentieth, had not Nietzsche the philologist – and even in that field he was so wise, he knew so much, he wrote such good books – been the first to connect the philosophical task with a radical reflection upon language.

And now, in this philosophical-philological space opened up for us by Nietzsche, language wells up in an enigmatic multiplicity that must be mastered. There appear, like so many projects (or chimeras, who can tell as yet?), the themes of a universal formalization of all discourse, or the themes of an integral exegesis of the world which would at the same time be its total demystification, or those of a general theory of signs; or again, the theme (historically probably the first) of a transformation without residuum, of a total reabsorption of all forms of discourse into a single word, of all books into a single page, of the whole world into one book. The great task to which Mallarmé dedicated himself, right up to his death, is the one that dominates us now; in its stammerings, it embraces all our current efforts to confine the fragmented being of language once more within a perhaps impossible unity. Mallarmé's project – that of enclosing all possible discourse within the fragile density of the word, within that slim, material black line traced by ink upon paper – is fundamentally a reply to the question imposed upon philosophy by Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, it was not a matter of knowing what good and evil were in themselves, but of who was being designated, or rather *who was speaking* when one said *Agathos* to designate oneself and *Deilos* to designate others[1]. For it is there, in the *holder* of the discourse and, more profoundly still, in the *possessor* of the word, that language is gathered together in its entirety. To the Nietzschean question: 'Who is speaking?', Mallarmé replies – and constantly reverts to that reply – by saying that what is speaking is, in its solitude, in its fragile vibration, in its nothingness, the word itself – not the meaning of the word, but its enigmatic and precarious being. Whereas Nietzsche maintained his questioning as to who

is speaking right up to the end, though forced, in the last resort, to irrupt into that questioning himself and to base it upon himself as the speaking and questioning subject: *Ecce homo*, Mallarmé was constantly effacing himself from his own language, to the point of not wishing to figure in it except as an executant in a pure ceremony of the Book in which the discourse would compose itself. It is quite possible that all those questions now confronting our curiosity (What is language? What is a sign? What is unspoken in the world, in our gestures, in the whole enigmatic heraldry of our behaviour, our dreams, our sicknesses – does all that speak, and if so in what language and in obedience to what grammar? Is everything significant, and, if not, what is, and for whom, and in accordance with what rules? What relation is there between language and being, and is it really to being that language is always addressed – at least, language that speaks truly? What, then, is this language that says nothing, is never silent, and is called 'literature'?) – it is quite possible that all these questions are presented today in the distance that was never crossed between Nietzsche's question and Mallarmé's reply.

We know now where these questions come from. They were made possible by the fact that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the law of discourse having been detached from representation, the being of language itself became, as it were, fragmented; but they became inevitable when, with Nietzsche, and Mallarmé, thought was brought back, and violently so, towards language itself, towards its unique and difficult being. The whole curiosity of our thought now resides in the question: What is language, how can we find a way round it in order to make it appear in itself, in all its plenitude? In a sense, this question takes up from those other questions that, in the nineteenth century, were concerned with life or labour. But the status of this inquiry and of all the questions into which it breaks down is not perfectly clear. Is it a sign of the approaching birth, or, even less than that, of the very first glow, low in the sky, of a day scarcely even heralded as yet, but in which we can already divine that thought – the thought that has been speaking for thousands of years without knowing what speaking is or even that it is speaking – is about to re-apprehend itself in its entirety, and to illumine itself once more in the lightning flash of being? Is that not what Nietzsche was paving the way for when, in the interior space of his language, he killed man and God both at the same time, and thereby promised with the Return the multiple and re-illuminated light of the gods? Or must we quite simply admit that such a plethora of questions on the subject of language is no more than a

continuance, or at most a culmination, of the event that, as archaeology has shown, came into existence and began to take effect at the end of the eighteenth century? The fragmentation of language, occurring at the same time as its transition to philological objectivity, would in that case be no more than the most recently visible (because the most secret and most fundamental) consequence of the breaking up of Classical order; by making the effort to master this schism and to make language visible in its entirety, we would bring to completion what had occurred before us, and without us, towards the end of the eighteenth century. But what, in that case, would that culmination be? In attempting to reconstitute the lost unity of language, is one carrying to its conclusion a thought which is that of the nineteenth century, or is one pursuing forms that are already incompatible with it? The dispersion of language is linked, in fact, in a fundamental way, with the archaeological event we may designate as the disappearance of Discourse. To discover the vast play of language contained once more within a single space might be just as decisive a leap towards a wholly new form of thought as to draw to a close a mode of knowing constituted during the previous century.

It is true that I do not know what to reply to such questions, or, given these alternatives, what term I should choose. I cannot even guess whether I shall ever be able to answer them, or whether the day will come when I shall have reasons enough to make any such choice. Nevertheless, I now know why I am able, like everyone else, to ask them – and I am unable not to ask them today. Only those who cannot read will be surprised that I have learned such a thing more clearly from Cuvier, Bopp, and Ricardo than from Kant or Hegel.

## II THE PLACE OF THE KING

Faced with so many instances of ignorance, so many questions remaining in suspense, no doubt some decision must be made. One must say: there is where discourse ends, and perhaps labour begins again. Yet there are still a few more words to be said – words whose status it is probably difficult to justify, since it is a matter of introducing at the last moment, rather like some *deus ex machina*, a character who has not yet appeared in the great Classical interplay of representations. And let us, if we may, look for the previously existing law of that interplay in the painting of *Las Meninas*, in which representation is represented at every point: the painter, the palette, the broad dark surface of the canvas with its back to

sciences are no more within these sciences than they give them interiority by deflecting them towards man's subjectivity; if they take them up again in the dimension of representation, it is rather by re-apprehending them upon their outer slope, by leaving them their opacity, by accepting as things the mechanisms and functions they isolate, by questioning those functions and mechanisms not in terms of what they are but in terms of what they cease to be when the space of representation is opened up; and upon that basis they show how a representation of what they are can come into being and be deployed. Surreptitiously, they lead the sciences of life, labour, and language back to that analytic of finitude which shows how man, in his being, can be concerned with the things he knows, and know the things that, in positivity, determine his mode of being. But what the analytic requires in the interiority, or at least in the profound kinship, of a being who owes his finitude only to himself, the human sciences develop in the exteriority of knowledge. This is why what characterizes the human sciences is not that they are directed at a certain content (that singular object, the human being); it is much more a purely formal characteristic: the simple fact that, in relation to the sciences in which the human being is given as object (exclusive in the case of economics and philology, or partial in that of biology), they are in a position of duplication, and that this duplication can serve *a fortiori* for themselves.

This position is made perceptible on two levels: the human sciences do not treat man's life, labour, and language in the most transparent state in which they could be posited, but in that stratum of conduct, behaviour, attitudes, gestures already made, sentences already pronounced or written, within which they have already been given once to those who act, behave, exchange, work, and speak; at another level (it is still the same formal property, but carried to its furthest, rarest point), it is always possible to treat in the style of the human sciences (of psychology, sociology, and the history of culture, ideas, or science) the fact that for certain individuals or certain societies there is something like a speculative knowledge of life, production, and language – at most, a biology, an economics, and a philology. This is probably no more than the indication of a possibility which is rarely realized and is perhaps not capable, at the level of the empiricities, of yielding much of value; but the fact that it exists as a possible distance, as a space given to the human sciences to withdraw into, away from what they spring from, and the fact, too, that this action can be applied to themselves (it is always possible to make human sciences of human sciences – the psychology of psychology, the sociology of

sociology, etc.) suffice to demonstrate their peculiar configuration. In relation to biology, to economics, to the sciences of language, they are not, therefore, lacking in exactitude and rigour; they are rather like sciences of duplication, in a 'meta-epistemological' position. Though even that prefix is perhaps not very well chosen: for one can speak of meta-language only when defining the rules of interpretation of a primary language. Here, the human sciences, when they duplicate the sciences of language, labour, and life, when at their finest point they duplicate themselves, are directed not at the establishment of a formalized discourse: on the contrary, they thrust man, whom they take as their object in the area of finitude, relativity, and perspective, down into the area of the endless erosion of time. It would perhaps be better to speak in their case of an 'ana-' or 'hypo-epistemological' position; if the pejorative connotations of this last prefix were removed, it would no doubt provide a good account of the facts: it would suggest how the invincible impression of haziness, inexactitude, and imprecision left by almost all the human sciences is merely a surface effect of what makes it possible to define them in their positivity.

### III THE THREE MODELS

At first glance, one could say that the domain of the human sciences is covered by three 'sciences' – or rather by three epistemological regions, all subdivided within themselves, and all interlocking with one another; these regions are defined by the triple relation of the human sciences in general to biology, economics, and philology. Thus one could admit that the 'psychological region' has found its locus in that place where the living being, in the extension of its functions, in its neuro-motor blueprints, its physiological regulations, but also in the suspense that interrupts and limits them, opens itself to the possibility of representation; in the same way, the 'sociological region' would be situated where the labouring, producing, and consuming individual offers himself a representation of the society in which this activity occurs, of the groups and individuals among which it is divided, of the imperatives, sanctions, rites, festivities, and beliefs by which it is upheld or regulated; lastly, in that region where the laws and forms of a language hold sway, but where, nevertheless, they remain on the edge of themselves, enabling man to introduce into them the play of his representations, in that region arise the study of literature and myths, the analysis of all oral expressions and written documents, in short, the analysis of the verbal traces that a culture or an individual may

leave behind them. This division, though very summary, is probably not too inexact. It does, however, leave two fundamental problems unsolved: one concerns the form of positivity proper to the human sciences (the concepts around which they are organized, the type of rationality to which they refer and by means of which they seek to constitute themselves as knowledge); the other is their relation to representation (and the paradoxical fact that even while they take place only where there is representation, it is to unconscious mechanisms, forms, and processes, or at least to the exterior boundaries of consciousness, that they address themselves).

The controversies to which the search for a specific positivity in the field of the human sciences has given rise are only too well known: Genetic or structural analysis? Explanation or comprehension? Recourse to what is 'underneath' or decipherment kept strictly to the level of reading? In fact, all these theoretical discussions did not arise and were not pursued throughout the history of the human sciences because the latter had to deal, in man, with an object so complex that it was not yet possible to find a unique mode of access towards it, or because it was necessary to use several in turn. These discussions were able to exist only in so far as the positivity of the human sciences rests simultaneously upon the transference of three distinct models. This transference is not a marginal phenomenon for the human sciences (a sort of supporting framework, a detour to include some exterior intelligibility, a confirmation derived from sciences already constituted); nor is it a limited episode in their history (a crisis of formation, at a time when they were still so young that they could not fix their concepts and their laws themselves). On the contrary, it is a matter of an ineffaceable fact, which is bound up, forever, with their particular arrangement in the epistemological space. We should, indeed, distinguish between two different sorts of model utilized by the human sciences (leaving aside models of formalization). On the one hand, there were – and often still are – concepts introduced from another domain of knowledge, which, losing all operational efficacy in the process, now play only the role of an image (organic metaphors in nineteenth-century sociology; energy metaphors in Janet; geometrical and dynamic metaphors in Lewin). But there are also constituent models, which are not just techniques of formalization for the human sciences, or simple means of devising methods of operation with less effort; they make it possible to create groups of phenomena as so many 'objects' for a possible branch of knowledge; they ensure their connection in the

empirical sphere, but they offer them to experience already linked together. They play the role of 'categories' in the area of knowledge particular to the human sciences.

These constituent models are borrowed from the three domains of biology, economics, and the study of language. It is upon the projected surface of biology that man appears as a being possessing *functions* – receiving stimuli (physiological ones, but also social, interhuman, and cultural ones), reacting to them, adapting himself, evolving, submitting to the demands of an environment, coming to terms with the modifications it imposes, seeking to erase imbalances, acting in accordance with regularities, having, in short, conditions of existence and the possibility of finding average *norms* of adjustment which permit him to perform his functions. On the projected surface of economics, man appears as having needs and desires, as seeking to satisfy them, and therefore as having interests, desiring profits, entering into opposition with other men; in short, he appears in an irreducible situation of *conflict*; he evades these conflicts, he escapes from them or succeeds in dominating them, in finding a solution that will – on one level at least, and for a time – appease their contradictions; he establishes a body of *rules* which are both a limitation of the conflict and a result of it. Lastly, on the projected surface of language, man's behaviour appears as an attempt to say something; his slightest gestures, even their involuntary mechanisms and their failures, have a *meaning*; and everything he arranges around him by way of objects, rites, customs, discourse, all the traces he leaves behind him, constitute a coherent whole and a *system* of signs. Thus, these three pairs of *function* and *norm*, *conflict* and *rule*, *signification* and *system* completely cover the entire domain of what can be known about man.

It must not be supposed, however, that any of these pairs of concepts remains localized on the projected surface on which it may have appeared: function and norm are not psychological concepts exclusively; conflict and rule do not have an application limited wholly to the sociological domain; signification and system are not valid solely for phenomena more or less akin to language. All these concepts occur throughout the entire volume common to the human sciences and are valid in each of the regions included within it: hence the frequent difficulty in fixing limits, not merely between the objects, but also between the methods proper to psychology, sociology, and the analysis of literature and myth. Nevertheless, we can say in a general way that psychology is fundamentally a study of man in terms of functions and norms (functions and norms which can,



in a secondary fashion, be interpreted on the basis of conflicts and significations, rules and systems); sociology is fundamentally a study of man in terms of rules and conflicts (but these may be interpreted, and one is constantly led to interpret them, in a secondary way, either on the basis of functions, as though they were individuals organically connected to themselves, or on the basis of systems of significations, as though they were written or spoken texts); lastly, the study of literature and myth is essentially the province of an analysis of significations and signifying systems, but we all know that this analysis may be carried out in terms of functional coherence or of conflicts and rules. In this way all the human sciences interlock and can always be used to interpret one another: their frontiers become blurred, intermediary and composite disciplines multiply endlessly, and in the end their proper object may even disappear altogether. But whatever the nature of the analysis and the domain to which it is applied, we have a formal criterion for knowing what is on the level of psychology, what on that of sociology, and what on that of language analysis: this is the choice of the fundamental model and the position of the secondary models, which make it possible to know at what point one begins to 'psychologize' or 'sociologize' in the study of literature and myth, or at what point in psychology one has moved over into the decipherment of texts or into sociological analysis. But this superimposition of several models is not a defect of method. It becomes a defect only if the models have not been precisely ordered and explicitly articulated in relation to one another. As we know, it proved possible to conduct an admirably precise study of the Indo-European mythologies by using the sociological model superimposed upon the basic analysis of significant and significations. We know also, on the other hand, to what syncretic platitudes the still mediocre undertaking of founding a so-called 'clinical' psychology has led.

Whether properly founded and controlled, or carried out in confusion, this interlocking of constituent models explains the discussions of method referred to above. They do not have their origin and justification in a sometimes contradictory complexity which we know as the character proper to man; but in the play of oppositions, which makes it possible to define each of the three models in relation to the two others. To oppose genesis to structure is to oppose function (in its development, in its progressively diversified operations, in the powers of adaptation it has acquired and balanced in time) to the synchronism of conflict and rule, of signification and system; to oppose analysis by means of that which is

'underneath' to analysis on the same level as its object is to oppose conflict (a primary, archaic datum inscribed at the same time as man's fundamental needs) to function and signification as they are deployed in their particular realization; to oppose comprehension to explanation is to oppose the technique that makes it possible to decipher a meaning on the basis of a signifying system to those that make it possible to give an account of a conflict together with its consequences, or of the forms and deformations that a function and its organs may assume or undergo. But we must go further. We know that in the human sciences the point of view of discontinuity (the threshold between nature and culture, the irreducibility one to another of the balances or solutions found by each society or each individual, the absence of intermediary forms, the non-existence of a continuum existing in space or time) is in opposition to the point of view of continuity. The existence of this opposition is to be explained by the bipolar character of the models: analysis in a continuous mode relies upon the permanence of function (which is to be found in the very depths of life in an identity that authorizes and provides roots for succeeding adaptations), upon the interconnection of conflicts (they may take various forms, but they are always present in the background), upon the fabric of significations (which link up with one another and constitute, as it were, the continuous expanse of a discourse); on the contrary, the analysis of discontinuities seeks rather to draw out the internal coherence of signifying systems, the specificity of bodies of rules and the decisive character they assume in relation to what must be regulated, and the emergence of the norm above the level of functional fluctuations.

It might be possible to retrace the entire history of the human sciences, from the nineteenth century onward, on the basis of these three models. They have, in fact, covered the whole of that history, since we can follow the dynasty of their privileges for more than a century: first, the reign of the biological model (man, his psyche, his group, his society, the language he speaks – all these exist in the Romantic period as living beings and in so far as they were, in fact, alive; their mode of being is organic and is analysed in terms of function); then comes the reign of the economic model (man and his entire activity are the locus of conflicts of which they are both the more or less manifest expression and the more or less successful solution); lastly – just as Freud comes after Comte and Marx – there begins the reign of the philological (when it is a matter of interpretation and the discovery of hidden meanings) and linguistic model (when it is a matter of giving a structure to and clarifying the signifying system). That

a vast shift has led the human sciences from a form more dense in living models to another more saturated with models borrowed from language. But this shift was paralleled by another: that which caused the first term in each of the constituent pairs (function, conflict, signification) to recede, and the second term (norm, rule, system) to emerge with a correspondingly greater intensity and importance: Goldstein, Mauss, Dumezil may be taken to represent, as near as makes no difference, the moment at which the reversal took place within each of the models. Such a reversal has two series of noteworthy consequences: as long as the functional point of view continued to carry more weight than the normative point of view (as long as it was not on the basis of the norm and the interior of the activity determining that norm that the attempt was made to understand how a function was performed), it was of course necessary, *de facto*, to share the normal functions with the non-normal; thus a pathological psychology was accepted side by side with normal psychology, but forming as it were an inverted image of it (hence the importance of the Jacksonian notion of disintegration in Ribot or Janet); in the same way, a pathology of societies (Durkheim), of irrational and quasi-morbid forms of belief (Lévy-Bruhl, Blondel) was also accepted; similarly, as long as the point of view of conflict carried more weight than that of the rule, it was supposed that certain conflicts could not be overcome, that individuals and societies ran the risk of destroying themselves by them; finally, as long as the point of view of signification carried more weight than that of system, a division was made between significant and non-significant: it was accepted that there was meaning in certain domains of human behaviour or certain regions of the social area, but not in others. So that the human sciences laid down an essential division within their own field: they always extended between a positive pole and a negative pole; they always designated an alterity (based, furthermore, on the continuity they were analysing). When, on the other hand, the analysis was conducted from the point of view of the norm, the rule, and the system, each area provided its own coherence and its own validity; it was no longer possible to speak of 'morbid consciousness' (even referring to the sick), of 'primitive mentalities' (even with reference to societies left behind by history), or of 'insignificant discourse' (even when referring to absurd stories, or to apparently incoherent legends). Everything may be thought within the order of the system, the rule, and the norm. By pluralizing itself – since systems are isolated, since rules form closed wholes, since norms are posited in their autonomy – the field of the human sciences

found itself unified: suddenly, it was no longer fissured along its former dichotomy of values. And bearing in mind that Freud more than anyone else brought the knowledge of man closer to its philological and linguistic model, and that he was also the first to undertake the radical erasure of the division between positive and negative (between the normal and the pathological, the comprehensible and the incommunicable, the significant and the non-significant), it is easy to see how he prefigures the transition from an analysis in terms of functions, conflicts, and significations to an analysis in terms of norms, rules, and systems: thus all this knowledge, within which Western culture had given itself in one century a certain image of man, pivots on the work of Freud, though without, for all that, leaving its fundamental arrangement. But even so, it is not here – as we shall see later on – that the most decisive importance of psychoanalysis lies.

In any case, this transition to the point of view of the norm, the rule, and the system brings us to a problem that has been left in suspense: that of the role of representation in the human sciences. It might already appear extremely contestable to include the human sciences (as opposed to biology, economics, and philology) within the space of representation: was it not already necessary to point out that a function can be performed, a conflict can develop its consequences, a signification can impose its intelligibility, without passing through the stage of explicit consciousness? And now, is it not necessary to recognize that the peculiar property of the norm in relation to the function it determines, of the rule in relation to the conflict it regulates, of the system in relation to the signification it makes possible, is precisely that of not being given to consciousness? Are we not forced to add a third historical gradient to the two already isolated, and to say that since the nineteenth century the human sciences have never ceased to approach that region of the unconscious where the action of representation is held in suspense? In fact, representation is not consciousness, and there is nothing to prove that this bringing to light of elements or structures that are never presented to consciousness as such enables the human sciences to escape the law of representation. The role of the concept of signification is, in fact, to show how something like a language, even if it is not in the form of explicit discourse, and even if it has not been deployed for a consciousness, can in general be given to representation; the role of the complementary concept of system is to show how signification is never primary and contemporaneous with itself, but always secondary and as it were derived in relation to a system that

precedes it, constitutes its positive origin, and posits itself, little by little, in fragments and outlines through signification; in relation to the consciousness of a signification, the system is indeed always unconscious since it was there before the signification, since it is within it that the signification resides and on the basis of it that it becomes effective; but because the system is always promised to a future consciousness which will perhaps never add it up. In other words, the signification/system pair is what ensures both the representability of language (as text or structure analysed by philology and linguistics) and the near but withdrawn presence of the origin (as it is manifested as man's mode of being by means of the analytic of finitude). In the same way, the notion of conflict shows how need, desire, and interest, even if they are not presented to the consciousness experiencing them, can take form in representation; and the role of the inverse concept of rule is to show how the violence of conflict, the apparently untamed insistence of need, the lawless infinity of desire are in fact already organized by an unthought which not only prescribes their rules, but renders them possible upon the basis of a rule. The conflict/rule pair ensures the representability of need (of the need that economics studies as an objective process in labour and production) and the representability of the unthought that is unveiled by the analytic of finitude. Lastly, the concept of function has the role of showing how the structures of life may give rise to representation (even though they are not conscious), and the concept of norm how function provides its own conditions of possibility and the frontiers within which it is effective.

Thus it can be understood why these broad categories can structure the entire field of the human sciences: it is because they span it from end to end, because they both hold apart and link together the empirical positivities of life, labour, and language (on the basis of which man first detached himself historically as a form of possible knowledge) and the forms of finitude that characterize man's mode of being (as he constituted himself when representation ceased to define the general space of knowledge). These categories are not, therefore, mere empirical concepts of rather broad generality; they are indeed the basis on which man is able to present himself to a possible knowledge; they traverse the entire field of his possibility and articulate it boldly in accordance with the two dimensions that form its frame.

But that is not all: they also permit the dissociation, which is characteristic of all contemporary knowledge about man, of consciousness and representation. They define the manner in which the empiricities can be

given to representation but in a form that is not present to the consciousness (function, conflict, and signification are indeed the manner in which life, need, and language are doubled over in representation, but in a form that may be completely unconscious); on the other hand, they define the manner in which the fundamental finitude can be given to representation in a form both positive and empirical, yet not transparent to the naïve consciousness (neither norm, not rule, not system is given in daily experience: they run through it, give rise to partial consciousnesses of themselves, but can never be wholly illumined except by a reflexive form of knowledge). So the human sciences speak only within the element of the representable, but in accordance with a conscious/unconscious dimension, a dimension that becomes more and more marked as one attempts to bring the order of systems, rules, and norms to light. It is as though the dichotomy between normal and pathological were tending to be eclipsed in favour of the bipolarity of consciousness and the unconscious.

It must not be forgotten, therefore, that the increasingly marked importance of the unconscious in no way compromises the primacy of representation. This primacy does, however, raise an important problem. Now that the empirical forms of knowledge, such as those of life, labour, and language, have escaped from its law, now that the attempt to define man's mode of being is being made outside the field of representation, what is representation, if not a phenomenon of an empirical order which occurs within man, and could be analysed as such? And if representation occurs within man, what difference is there between it and consciousness? But representation is not simply an object for the human sciences; it is, as we have just seen, the very field upon which the human sciences occur, and to their fullest extent; it is the general pedestal of that form of knowledge, the basis that makes it possible. Two consequences emerge from this. One is of a historical order: it is the fact that the human sciences, unlike the empirical sciences since the nineteenth century, and unlike modern thought, have been unable to find a way around the primacy of representation; like the whole of Classical knowledge, they reside within it; but they are in no way its heirs or its continuation, for the whole configuration of knowledge has been modified and they came into being only to the degree to which there appeared, with man, a being who did not exist before in the field of the *episteme*. However, it is easy to understand why every time one tries to use the human sciences to philosophize, to pour back into the space of thought what one has been able to learn of man, one finds oneself imitating the philosophical posture of the eighteenth

century, in which, nevertheless, man had no place; for by extending the domain of knowledge about man beyond its limits one is similarly extending the reign of representation beyond itself, and thus taking up one's position once more in a philosophy of the Classical type. The other consequence is that the human sciences, when dealing with what is representation (in either conscious or unconscious form), find themselves treating as their object what is in fact their condition of possibility. They are always animated, therefore, by a sort of transcendental mobility. They never cease to exercise a critical examination of themselves. They proceed from that which is given to representation to that which renders representation possible, but which is still representation. So that, unlike other sciences, they seek not so much to generalize themselves or make themselves more precise as to be constantly demystifying themselves: to make the transition from an immediate and non-controlled evidence to less transparent but more fundamental forms. This quasi-transcendental process is always given in the form of an unveiling. It is always by an unveiling that they are able, as a consequence, to become sufficiently generalized or refined to conceive of individual phenomena. On the horizon of any human science, there is the project of bringing man's consciousness back to its real conditions, of restoring it to the contents and forms that brought it into being, and elude us within it; this is why the problem of the unconscious – its possibility, status, mode of existence, the means of knowing it and of bringing it to light – is not simply a problem within the human sciences which they can be thought of as encountering by chance in their steps; it is a problem that is ultimately coextensive with their very existence. A transcendental raising of level that is, on the other side, an unveiling of the non-conscious is constitutive of all the sciences of man.

We may find in this the means of isolating them in their essential property. In any case, we can see that what manifests this peculiar property of the human sciences is not that privileged and singularly blurred object which is man. For the good reason that it is not man who constitutes them and provides them with a specific domain; it is the general arrangement of the *episteme* that provides them with a site, summons them, and establishes them – thus enabling them to constitute man as their object. We shall say, therefore, that a 'human science' exists, not wherever man is in question, but wherever there is analysis – within the dimension proper to the unconscious – of norms, rules, and signifying totalities which unveil to consciousness the conditions of its forms and contents. To speak

of 'sciences of man' in any other case is simply an abuse of language. We can see, then, how vain and idle are all those wearisome discussions as to whether such and such forms of knowledge may be termed truly scientific, and to what conditions they ought to be subjected in order to become so. The 'sciences of man' are part of the modern *episteme* in the same way as chemistry or medicine or any other such science; or again, in the same way as grammar and natural history were part of the Classical *episteme*. But to say that they are part of the epistemological field means simply that their positivity is rooted in it, that that is where they find their condition of existence, that they are therefore not merely illusions, pseudo-scientific fantasies motivated at the level of opinions, interests, or beliefs, that they are not what others call by the bizarre name of 'ideology'. But that does not necessarily mean that they are sciences.

Although it is true that any science, any science whatever, when it is questioned on the archaeological level and when an attempt is made to clear the ground of its positivity, always reveals the epistemological configuration that made it possible, any epistemological configuration, on the other hand, even if it is completely assignable in its positivity, may very well not be a science: it does not thereby reduce itself, *ipso facto*, to the status of an imposture. We must distinguish carefully between three things. There are themes with scientific pretensions that one may encounter at the level of opinion and that are not (or are no longer) part of a culture's epistemological network: from the seventeenth century, for example, natural magic ceased to belong to the Western *episteme*, but it persisted for a long time in the interaction of beliefs and affective valorizations. Then there are epistemological figures whose outline, position, and function can be reconstituted in their positivity by means of an analysis of the archaeological type; and these, in turn, may obey two different organizations: some present characteristics of objectivity and systematicity which make it possible to define them as sciences; others do not answer to those criteria, that is, their form of coherence and their relation to their object are determined by their positivity alone. The fact that these latter do not possess the formal criteria of a scientific form of knowledge does not prevent them from belonging, nevertheless, to the positive domain of knowledge. It would thus be as futile and unjust to analyse them as phenomena of opinion as to contrast them historically or critically with scientific formations proper; it would be more absurd still to treat them as a combination which mixes together in variable proportions 'rational elements' and other elements that are not rational. They must be replaced

on the level of positivity that renders them possible and necessarily determines their form. Archaeology, then, has two tasks with regard to these figures: to determine the manner in which they are arranged in the *episteme* in which they have their roots; and to show, also, in what respect their configuration is radically different from that of the sciences in the strict sense. There is no reason to treat this peculiar configuration of theirs as a negative phenomenon: it is not the presence of an obstacle nor some internal deficiency which has left them stranded across the threshold of scientific forms. They constitute, in their own form, side by side with the sciences and on the same archaeological ground, *other* configurations of knowledge.

We have already encountered examples of such configurations in general grammar or in the Classical theory of value; they possessed the same ground of positivity as Cartesian mathematics, but they were not sciences, at least for the majority of those who were their contemporaries. Such is also the case with what we today call the human sciences; when analysed archaeologically, they provide the outlines of completely positive configurations; but as soon as these configurations and the way in which they are arranged within the modern *episteme* are determined, we understand why they cannot be sciences: what renders them possible, in fact, is a certain situation of 'vicinity' with regard to biology, economics, and philology (or linguistics); they exist only in so far as they dwell side by side with those sciences – or rather beneath them, in the space of their projections. However, they maintain a relationship with those sciences that is radically different from that which can be established between two 'related' or 'germane' sciences: this relationship presupposes, in fact, the transposition of external models within the dimension of the unconscious and consciousness, and the flowing back of critical reflection towards the very place from which those models come. It is useless, then, to say that the 'human sciences' are false sciences; they are not sciences at all; the configuration that defines their positivity and gives them their roots in the modern *episteme* at the same time makes it impossible for them to be sciences; and if it is then asked why they assumed that title, it is sufficient to recall that it pertains to the archaeological definition of their roots that they summon and receive the transference of models borrowed from the sciences. It is therefore not man's irreducibility, what is designated as his invincible transcendence, nor even his excessively great complexity, that prevents him from becoming an object of science. Western culture has constituted, under the name of man, a being who, by one and the same

interplay of reasons, must be a positive domain of *knowledge* and ~~cannot~~ be an object of *science*.

## IV HISTORY

We have spoken of the human sciences; we have spoken of those broad regions delimited more or less by psychology, sociology, and the analysis of literature and mythology. We have not yet mentioned history, though it is the first and as it were the mother of all the sciences of man, and is perhaps as old as human memory. Or rather, it is for that very reason that we have until now passed it over in silence. Perhaps history has no place, in fact, among the human sciences, or beside them: it may well be that it maintains with them all a relation that is strange, undefined, ineffaceable, and more fundamental than any relation of adjacency in a common space would be.

It is true that History existed long before the constitution of the human sciences; from the beginnings of the Ancient Greek civilization, it has performed a certain number of major functions in Western culture: memory, myth, transmission of the Word and of Example, vehicle of tradition, critical awareness of the present, decipherment of humanity's destiny, anticipation of the future, or promise of a return. What characterized this History – or at least what may be used to define it in its general features, as opposed to our own – was that by ordering the time of human beings upon the world's development (in a sort of great cosmic chronology such as we find in the works of the Stoics), or inversely by extending the principle and movement of a human destiny to even the smallest particles of nature (rather in the same way as Christian Providence), it was conceived of as a vast historical stream, uniform in each of its points, drawing with it in one and the same current, in one and the same fall or ascension, or cycle, all men, and with them things and animals, every living or inert being, even the most unmoved aspects of the earth. And it was this unity that was shattered at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in the great upheaval that occurred in the Western *episteme*: it was discovered that there existed a historicity proper to nature; forms of adaptation to the environment were defined for each broad type of living being, which would make possible a subsequent definition of its evolutionary outline; moreover, it became possible to show that activities as peculiarly human as labour or language contained within themselves a historicity that could not be placed within the great narrative common to things and to men:



production has its modes of development, capital its modes of accumulation, prices their laws of fluctuation and change which cannot be fitted over natural laws or reduced to the general progress of humanity; in the same way, language is not modified as much by migrations, trade, and wars, by what happens to man or what his imagination is able to invent, as by conditions that properly belong to the phonetic and grammatical forms of which it is constituted; and if it has been possible to say that the various languages are born, live, lose their energy as they age, and finally die, this biological metaphor is not intended to dissolve their history in a time which would be that of life, but rather to underline the fact that they too have internal laws of functioning, and that their chronology unfolds in accordance with a time that refers in the first place to their own particular coherence.

We are usually inclined to believe that the nineteenth century, largely for political and social reasons, paid closer attention to human history, that the idea of an order or a continuous level of time was abandoned, as well as that of an uninterrupted progress, and that the bourgeoisie, in attempting to recount its own ascension, encountered, in the calendar of its victory, the historical density of institutions, the specific gravity of habits and beliefs, the violence of struggles, the alternation of success and failure. And we suppose that, on this basis, the historicity discovered within man was extended to the objects he had made, the language he spoke, and – even further still – to life. According to this point of view, the study of economies, the history of literatures and grammars, and even the evolution of living beings are merely effects of the diffusion, over increasingly more distant areas of knowledge, of a historicity first revealed in man. In reality, it was the opposite that happened. Things first of all received a historicity proper to them, which freed them from the continuous space that imposed the same chronology upon them as upon men. So that man found himself dispossessed of what constituted the most manifest contents of his history: nature no longer speaks to him of the creation or the end of the world, of his dependency or his approaching judgement; it no longer speaks of anything but a natural time; its wealth no longer indicates to him the antiquity or the imminent return of a Golden Age; it speaks only of conditions of production being modified in the course of history; language no longer bears the marks of a time before Babel or of the first cries that rang through the jungle; it carries the weapons of its own affiliation. The human being no longer has any history: or rather, since he speaks, works, and lives, he finds himself interwoven in his own

being with histories that are neither subordinate to him nor homologous with him. By the fragmentation of the space over which ~~Classical~~ knowledge extended in its continuity, by the folding over of each ~~separated~~ domain upon its own development, the man who appears at the beginning of the nineteenth century is 'dehistoricized'.

And the imaginative values then assumed by the past, the whole lyrical halo that surrounded the consciousness of history at that period, the lively curiosity shown for documents or for traces left behind by time – all this is a surface expression of the simple fact that man found himself emptied of history, but that he was already beginning to recover in the depths of his own being, and among all the things that were still capable of reflecting his image (the others have fallen silent and folded back upon themselves), a historicity linked essentially to man himself. But this historicity is immediately ambiguous. Since man posits himself in the field of positive knowledge only in so far as he speaks, works, and lives, can his history ever be anything but the inextricable nexus of different times, which are foreign to him and heterogeneous in respect of one another? Will the history of man ever be more than a sort of modulation common to changes in the conditions of life (climate, soil fertility, methods of agriculture, exploitation of wealth), to transformations in the economy (and consequently in society and its institutions), and to the succession of forms and usages in language? But, in that case, man is not himself historical: since time comes to him from somewhere other than himself, he constitutes himself as a subject of history only by the superimposition of the history of living beings, the history of things, and the history of words. He is subjected to the pure events those histories contain. But this relation of simple passivity is immediately reversed; for what speaks in language, what works and consumes in economics, what lives in human life, is man himself; and, this being so, he too has a right to a development quite as positive as that of beings and things, one no less autonomous – and perhaps even more fundamental: is it not a historicity proper to man, one inscribed in the very depths of his being, that enables him to adapt himself like any living being, and to evolve like any living being (though with the help of tools, techniques, and organizations belonging to no other living being), that enables him to invent forms of production, to stabilize, prolong, or abridge the validity of economic laws by means of the consciousness he attains of them and by means of the institutions he constructs upon or around them, and that enables him to exercise upon language, with every word he speaks, a sort of constant interior pressure which

makes it shift imperceptibly upon itself at any given moment in time. Thus, behind the history of the positivities, there appears another, more radical, history, that of man himself – a history that now concerns man's very being, since he now realizes that he not only 'has history' all around him, but is himself, in his own historicity, that by means of which a history of human life, a history of economics, and a history of languages are given their form. In which case, at a very deep level, there exists a historicity of man which is itself its own history but also the radical dispersion that provides a foundation for all other histories. It was just this primary erosion that the nineteenth century sought in its concern to historicize everything, to write a general history of everything, to go back ceaselessly through time, and to place the most stable of things in the liberating stream of time. Here again, we should no doubt revise the way in which we traditionally write the history of History; we are accustomed to saying that the nineteenth century brought an end to the pure chronicle of events, the simple memory of a past peopled only by individuals and accidents, and that it began the search for the general laws of development. In fact, no history was ever more 'explanatory', more preoccupied with general laws and constants, than were the histories of the Classical age – when the world and man were inextricably linked in a single history. What first comes to light in the nineteenth century is a simple form of human historicity – the fact that man as such is exposed to the event. Hence the concern either to find laws for this pure form (which gives us philosophies such as that of Spengler) or to define it on the basis of the fact that man lives, works, speaks, and thinks; and this gives us interpretations of history from the standpoint of man envisaged as a living species, or from the standpoint of economic laws, or from that of cultural totalities.

In any case, this arrangement of history within the epistemological space is of great importance for its relation with the human sciences. Since historical man is living, working, and speaking man, any content of History is the province of psychology, sociology, or the sciences of language. But, inversely, since the human being has become historical, through and through, none of the contents analysed by the human sciences can remain stable in itself or escape the movement of History. And this for two reasons: because psychology, sociology, and philosophy, even when applied to objects – that is, men – which are contemporaneous with them, are never directed at anything other than synchronological patternings within a historicity that constitutes and traverses them; and

because the forms successively taken by the human sciences, the objects they make, and the methods they apply to them, are determined by History, ceaselessly borne along by it, and modified at its pleasure. The more History attempts to transcend its own rootedness in humanity, and the greater the efforts it makes to attain, beyond the historical activity of its origin and its choices, the sphere of universality, the more clearly it bears the marks of its historical birth, and the more evidently there appears through it the history of which it is itself a part (and this, again, is to be found in Spengler and all the philosophers of history); inversely, the more it accepts its relativity, and the more deeply it sinks into the movement it shares with what it is recounting, then the more it tends to the slenderness of the narrative, and all the positive content it obtained for itself through the human sciences is dissipated.

History constitutes, therefore, for the human sciences, a favourable environment which is both privileged and dangerous. To each of the sciences of man it offers a background, which establishes it and provides it with a fixed ground and, as it were, a homeland; it determines the cultural area – the chronological and geographical boundaries – in which that branch of knowledge can be recognized as having validity; but it also surrounds the sciences of man with a frontier that limits them and destroys, from the outset, their claim to validity within the element of universality. It reveals in this way that though man – even before knowing it – has always been subjected to the determinations that can be expressed by psychology, sociology, and the analysis of language, he is not therefore the intemporal object of a knowledge which, at least at the level of its rights, must itself be thought of as ageless. Even when they avoid all reference to history, the human sciences (and history may be included among them) never do anything but relate one cultural episode to another (that to which they apply themselves as their object, and that in which their existence, their mode of being, their methods, and their concepts have their roots); and though they apply themselves to their own synchronology, they relate the cultural episode from which they emerged to itself. Man, therefore, never appears in his positivity and that positivity is not immediately limited by the limitlessness of History.

Here we see being reconstituted a movement analogous to that which animated from within the entire domain of the human sciences: as analysed above, this movement perpetually referred certain positivities determining man's being to the finitude that caused those same positivities to appear; so that the sciences were themselves taken up in that great

The choice of  
all provided



oscillation, but in such a way that they in turn took it up in the form of their own positivity by seeking to move ceaselessly backwards and forwards between the conscious and the unconscious. And now we find the beginning of a similar oscillation in the case of History; but this time it does not move between the positivity of man taken as object (and empirically manifested by labour, life, and language) and the radical limits of his being; it moves instead between the temporal limits that define the particular forms of labour, life, and language, and the historical positivity of the subject which, by means of knowledge, gains access to them. Here again, the subject and the object are bound together in a reciprocal questioning of one another; but whereas, before, this questioning took place within positive knowledge itself, and by the progressive unveiling of the unconscious by consciousness, here it takes place on the outer limits of the object and subject; it designates the erosion to which both are subjected, the dispersion that creates a hiatus between them, wrenching them loose from a calm, rooted, and definitive positivity. By unveiling the unconscious as their most fundamental object, the human sciences showed that there was always something still to be thought in what had already been thought on a manifest level; by revealing the law of time as the external boundary of the human sciences, History shows that everything that has been thought will be thought again by a thought that does not yet exist. But perhaps all we have here, in the concrete forms of the unconscious and History, is the two faces of that finitude which, by discovering that it was its own foundation, caused the figure of man to appear in the nineteenth century: a finitude without infinity is no doubt a finitude that has never finished, that is always in recession with relation to itself, that always has something still to think at the very moment when it thinks, that always has time to think again what it has thought.

In modern thought, historicism and the analytic of finitude confront one another. Historicism is a means of validating for itself the perpetual critical relation at play between History and the human sciences. But it establishes it solely at the level of the positivities: the positive knowledge of man is limited by the historical positivity of the knowing subject, so that the moment of finitude is dissolved in the play of a relativity from which it cannot escape, and which itself has value as an absolute. To be finite, then, would simply be to be trapped in the laws of a perspective which, while allowing a certain apprehension – of the type of perception or understanding – prevents it from ever being universal and definitive intellection. All knowledge is rooted in a life, a society, and a language

that have a history; and it is in that very history that knowledge finds the element enabling it to communicate with other forms of life, other types of society, other significations: that is why historicism always implies a certain philosophy, or at least a certain methodology, of living comprehension (in the element of the *Lebenswelt*), of interhuman communication (against a background of social structures), and of hermeneutics (as the re-apprehension through the manifest meaning of the discourse of another meaning at once secondary and primary, that is, more hidden but also more fundamental). By this means, the different positivities formed by History and laid down in it are able to enter into contact with one another, surround one another in the form of knowledge, and free the content dormant within them; it is not, then, the limits themselves that appear, in their absolute rigour, but partial totalities, totalities that turn out to be limited by fact, totalities whose frontiers can be made to move, up to a certain point, but which will never extend into the space of a definitive analysis, and will never raise themselves to the status of absolute totality. This is why the analysis of finitude never ceases to use, as a weapon against historicism, the part of itself that historicism has neglected: its aim is to reveal, at the foundation of all the positivities and before them, the finitude that makes them possible; where historicism sought for the possibility and justification of concrete relations between limited totalities, whose mode of being was predetermined by life, or by social forms, or by the significations of language, the analytic of finitude tries to question this relation of the human being to the being which, by designating finitude, renders the positivities possible in their concrete mode of being.

## V PSYCHOANALYSIS AND ETHNOLOGY

Psychoanalysis and ethnology occupy a privileged position in our knowledge – not because they have established the foundations of their positivity better than any other human science, and at last accomplished the old attempt to be truly scientific; but rather because, on the confines of all the branches of knowledge investigating man, they form an undoubted and inexhaustible treasure-hoard of experiences and concepts, and above all a perpetual principle of dissatisfaction, of calling into question, of criticism and contestation of what may seem, in other respects, to be established. Now, there is a reason for this that concerns the object they respectively give to one another, but concerns even more the position they

occupy and the function they perform within the general space of the *episteme*.

Psychoanalysis stands as close as possible, in fact, to that critical function which, as we have seen, exists within all the human sciences. In setting itself the task of making the discourse of the unconscious speak through consciousness, psychoanalysis is advancing in the direction of that fundamental region in which the relations of representation and finitude come into play. Whereas all the human sciences advance towards the unconscious only with their back to it, waiting for it to unveil itself as fast as consciousness is analysed, as it were backwards, psychoanalysis, on the other hand, points directly towards it, with a deliberate purpose – not towards that which must be rendered gradually more explicit by the progressive illumination of the implicit, but towards what is there and yet is hidden, towards what exists with the mute solidity of a thing, of a text closed in upon itself, or of a blank space in a visible text, and uses that quality to defend itself. It must not be supposed that the Freudian approach is the combination of an interpretation of meaning and a dynamics of resistance or defence; by following the same path as the human sciences, but with its gaze turned the other way, psychoanalysis moves towards the moment – by definition inaccessible to any theoretical knowledge of man, to any continuous apprehension in terms of signification, conflict, or function – at which the contents of consciousness articulate themselves, or rather stand gaping, upon man's finitude. This means that, unlike the human sciences, which, even while turning back towards the unconscious, always remain within the space of the representable, psychoanalysis advances and leaps over representation, overflows it on the side of finitude, and thus reveals, where one had expected functions bearing their norms, conflicts burdened with rules, and significations forming a system, the simple fact that it is possible for there to be system (therefore signification), rule (therefore conflict), norm (therefore function). And in this region where representation remains in suspense, on the edge of itself, open, in a sense, to the closed boundary of finitude, we find outlined the three figures by means of which life, with its function and norms, attains its foundation in the mute repetition of Death, conflicts and rules their foundation in the naked opening of Desire, significations and systems their foundation in a language which is at the same time Law. We know that psychologists and philosophers have dismissed all this as Freudian mythology. It was indeed inevitable that this approach of Freud's should have appeared to them in this way; to a knowledge

situated within the representable, all that function on the side, the very possibility of representation can be seen in the mythology. But when one follows the movement of psychoanalysis, progresses, or when one traverses the epistemological space, one sees that these figures are in fact – though imaginary in the myopic gaze – the very forms of finitude, as it is analysed in thought. Is death not that upon the basis of which knowledge is made possible – so much so that we can think of it as being, in the area of psychoanalysis, the figure of that empirico-transcendental *duplication* that characterizes man's mode of being within finitude? Is desire not that which remains always *unthought* at the heart of thought? And the law-language (at once word and word-system) that psychoanalysis takes such pains to make speak, is it not that in which all signification assumes an *origin* more distant than itself, but also that whose return is promised in the very act of analysis? It is indeed true that this Death, and this Desire, and this Law can never meet within the knowledge that traverses in its positivity the empirical domain of man; but the reason for this is that they designate the conditions of possibility of all knowledge about man.

And precisely when this language emerges in all its nudity, yet at the same time eludes all signification as if it were a vast and empty despotic system, when Desire reigns in the wild state, as if the rigour of its rule had levelled all opposition, when Death dominates every psychological function and stands above it as its unique and devastating norm – then we recognize madness in its present form, madness as it is posited in the modern experience, as its truth and its alterity. In this figure, which is at once empirical and yet foreign to (and in) all that we can experience, our consciousness no longer finds – as it did in the sixteenth century – the trace of another world; it no longer observes the wandering of a straying reason; it sees welling up that which is, perilously, nearest to us – as if, suddenly, the very hollowness of our existence is outlined in relief; the finitude upon the basis of which we are, and think, and know, is suddenly there before us: an existence at once real and impossible, thought that we cannot think, an object for our knowledge that always eludes it. This is why psychoanalysis finds in that madness *par excellence* – which psychiatrists term schizophrenia – its intimate, its most invincible torture: for, given in this form of madness, in an absolutely manifest and absolutely withdrawn form, are the forms of finitude towards which it usually advances unceasingly (and interminably) from the starting-point of that which is voluntarily-involuntarily offered to it in the patient's language.

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Psychoanalysis

So psychoanalysis 'recognizes itself' when it is confronted with those very psychoses which nevertheless (or rather, for that very reason) it has scarcely any means of reaching: as if the psychosis were displaying in a savage illumination, and offering in a mode not too distant but just too close, that towards which analysis must make its laborious way.

But this relation of psychoanalysis with what makes all knowledge in general possible in the sphere of the human sciences has yet another consequence – namely, that psychoanalysis cannot be deployed as pure speculative knowledge or as a general theory of man. It cannot span the entire field of representation, attempt to evade its frontiers, or point towards what is more fundamental, in the form of an empirical science constructed on the basis of careful observation; that breakthrough can be made only within the limits of a praxis in which it is not only the knowledge we have of man that is involved, but man himself – man together with the Death that is at work in his suffering, the Desire that has lost its object, and the language by means of which, through which, his Law is silently articulated. All analytic knowledge is thus invincibly linked with a praxis, with that strangulation produced by the relation between two individuals, one of whom is listening to the other's language, thus freeing his desire from the object it has lost (making him understand he has lost it), liberating him from the ever-repeated proximity of death (making him understand that one day he will die). This is why nothing is more alien to psychoanalysis than anything resembling a general theory of man or an anthropology.

Just as psychoanalysis situates itself in the dimension of the unconscious (of that critical animation which disturbs from within the entire domain of the sciences of man), so ethnology situates itself in the dimension of historicity (of that perpetual oscillation which is the reason why the human sciences are always being contested, from without, by their own history). It is no doubt difficult to maintain that ethnology has a fundamental relation with historicity since it is traditionally the knowledge we have of peoples without histories; in any case, it studies (both by systematic choice and because of the lack of documents) the structural invariables of cultures rather than the succession of events. It suspends the long 'chronological' discourse by means of which we try to reflect our own culture within itself, and instead it reveals synchronological correlations in other cultural forms. And yet ethnology itself is possible only on the basis of a certain situation, of an absolutely singular event which involves not only our historicity but also that of all men who can con-

stitute the object of an ethnology (it being understood that we can perfectly well apprehend our own society's ethnology): ethnology has its roots, in fact, in a possibility that properly belongs to the history of our culture, even more to its fundamental relation with the whole of history, and enables it to link itself to other cultures in a mode of pure theory. There is a certain position of the Western *ratio* that was constituted in its history and provides a foundation for the relation it can have with all other societies, even with the society in which it historically appeared. Obviously, this does not mean that the colonizing situation is indispensable to ethnology: neither hypnosis, nor the patient's alienation within the fantasmatic character of the doctor, is constitutive of psychoanalysis; but just as the latter can be deployed only in the calm violence of a particular relationship and the transference it produces, so ethnology can assume its proper dimensions only within the historical sovereignty – always restrained, but always present – of European thought and the relation that can bring it face to face with all other cultures as well as with itself.

But this relation (in so far as ethnology does not seek to efface it, but on the contrary deepens it by establishing itself definitively within it) does not imprison it within the circular system of actions and reactions proper to historicism; rather, it places it in a position to find a way round that danger by inverting the movement that gave rise to it; in fact, instead of relating empirical contents – as revealed in psychology, sociology, or the analysis of literature and myth – to the historical positivity of the subject perceiving them, ethnology places the particular forms of each culture, the differences that contrast it with others, the limits by which it defines itself and encloses itself upon its own coherence, within the dimension in which its relations occur with each of the three great positivities (life, need and labour, and language): thus, ethnology shows how, within a given culture, there occur the normalization of the broad biological functions, the rules that render possible or obligatory all the forms of exchange, production, and consumption, and the systems that are organized around or on the model of linguistic structures. Ethnology, then, advances towards that region where the human sciences are articulated upon that biology, that economics, and that philology and linguistics which, as we have seen, dominate the human sciences from such a very great height: this is why the general problem of all ethnology is in fact that of the relations (of continuity or discontinuity) between nature and culture. But in this mode of questioning, the problem of history is found to have been reversed: for it then becomes a matter of determining, according to

the symbolic systems employed, according to the prescribed rules, according to the functional norms chosen and laid down, what sort of historical development each culture is susceptible of; it is seeking to re-apprehend, in its very roots, the mode of historicity that may occur within that culture, and the reasons why its history must inevitably be cumulative or circular, progressive or subjected to regulating fluctuations, capable of spontaneous adjustments or subject to crises. And thus is revealed the foundation of that historical flow within which the different human sciences assume their validity and can be applied to a given culture and upon a given synchronological area.

Ethnology, like psychoanalysis, questions not man himself, as he appears in the human sciences, but the region that makes possible knowledge about man in general; like psychoanalysis, it spans the whole field of that knowledge in a movement that tends to reach its boundaries. But psychoanalysis makes use of the particular relation of the transference in order to reveal, on the outer confines of representation, Desire, Law, and Death, which outline, at the extremity of analytic language and practice, the concrete figures of finitude; ethnology, on the other hand, is situated within the particular relation that the Western *ratio* establishes with all other cultures; and from that starting-point it avoids the representations that men in any civilization may give themselves of themselves, of their life, of their needs, of the significations laid down in their language; and it sees emerging behind those representations the norms by which men perform the functions of life, although they reject their immediate pressure, the rules through which they experience and maintain their needs, the systems against the background of which all signification is given to them. The privilege of ethnology and psychoanalysis, the reason for their profound kinship and symmetry, must not be sought, therefore, in some common concern to pierce the profound enigma, the most secret part of human nature; in fact, what illuminates the space of their discourse is much more the historical *a priori* of all the sciences of man – those great caesuras, furrows, and dividing-lines which traced man's outline in the Western *episteme* and made him a possible area of knowledge. It was quite inevitable, then, that they should both be sciences of the unconscious: not because they reach down to what is below consciousness in man, but because they are directed towards that which, outside man, makes it possible to know, with a positive knowledge, that which is given to or eludes his consciousness.

On this basis, a certain number of decisive facts become comprehensible.

And the first is this: that psychoanalysis and ethnology are not so much two human sciences among others, but that they span the entire domain of those sciences, that they animate its whole surface, spread their concepts throughout it, and are able to propound their methods of decipherment and their interpretations everywhere. No human science can be sure that it is out of their debt, or entirely independent of what they may have discovered, or certain of not being beholden to them in one way or another. But their development has one particular feature, which is that, despite their quasi-universal 'bearing', they never, for all that, come near to a general concept of man: at no moment do they come near to isolating a quality in him that is specific, irreducible, and uniformly valid wherever he is given to experience. The idea of a 'psychoanalytic anthropology', and the idea of a 'human nature' reconstituted by ethnology, are no more than pious wishes. Not only are they able to do without the concept of man, they are also unable to pass through it, for they always address themselves to that which constitutes his outer limits. One may say of both of them what Lévi-Strauss said of ethnology: that they dissolve man. Not that there is any question of revealing him in a better, purer, and as it were more liberated state; but because they go back towards that which foments his positivity. In relation to the 'human sciences', psychoanalysis and ethnology are rather 'counter-sciences'; which does not mean that they are less 'rational' or 'objective' than the others, but that they flow in the opposite direction, that they lead them back to their epistemological basis, and that they ceaselessly 'unmake' that very man who is creating and re-creating his positivity in the human sciences. Lastly, we can understand why psychoanalysis and ethnology should have been constituted in confrontation, in a fundamental correlation: since *Totem and taboo*, the establishment of a common field for these two, the possibility of a discourse that could move from one to the other without discontinuity, the double articulation of the history of individuals upon the unconscious of culture, and of the historicity of those cultures upon the unconscious of individuals, has opened up, without doubt, the most general problems that can be posed with regard to man.

One can imagine what prestige and importance ethnology could possess if, instead of defining itself in the first place – as it has done until now – as the study of societies without history, it were deliberately to seek its object in the area of the unconscious processes that characterize the system of a given culture; in this way it would bring the relation of historicity, which is constitutive of all ethnology in general, into play

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within the dimension in which psychoanalysis has always been deployed. In so doing it would not assimilate the mechanisms and forms of a society to the pressure and repression of collective hallucinations, thus discovering – though on a larger scale – what analysis can discover at the level of the individual; it would define as a system of cultural unconscious the totality of formal structures which render mythical discourse significant, give their coherence and necessity to the rules that regulate needs, and provide the norms of life with a foundation other than that to be found in nature, or in pure biological functions. One can imagine the similar importance that a psychoanalysis would have if it were to share the dimension of an ethnology, not by the establishment of a 'cultural psychology', not by the sociological explanation of phenomena manifested at the level of individuals, but by the discovery that the unconscious also possesses, or rather that it is in itself, a certain formal structure. By this means, ethnology and psychoanalysis would succeed, not in superimposing themselves on one another, nor even perhaps in coming together, but in intersecting like two lines differently oriented: one proceeding from the apparent elision of the signified in a neurosis to the lacuna in the signifying system through which the neurosis found expression; the other proceeding from the analogy between the multiple things signified (in mythologies, for example) to the unity of a structure whose formal transformations would yield up the diversity existing in the actual stories. It would thus not be at the level of the relations between the individual and society, as has often been believed, that psychoanalysis and ethnology could be articulated one upon the other; it is not because the individual is a part of his group, it is not because a culture is reflected and expressed in a more or less deviant manner in the individual, that these two forms of knowledge are neighbours. In fact, they have only one point in common, but it is an essential and inevitable one: the one at which they intersect at right angles; for the signifying chain by which the unique experience of the individual is constituted is perpendicular to the formal system on the basis of which the significations of a culture are constituted: at any given instant, the structure proper to individual experience finds a certain number of possible choices (and of excluded possibilities) in the systems of the society; inversely, at each of their points of choice the social structures encounter a certain number of possible individuals (and others who are not) – just as the linear structure of language always produces a possible choice between several words or several phonemes at any given moment (but excludes all others).

Whereupon there is formed the theme of a pure theory of language which would provide the ethnology and the psychoanalysis that were conceived with their formal model. There would thus be a discipline that could cover in a single movement both the dimension of ethnology that relates the human sciences to the positivities in which they are framed and the dimension of psychoanalysis that relates the knowledge of man to the finitude that gives it its foundation. In linguistics, one would have a science perfectly founded in the order of positivities exterior to man (since it is a question of pure language), which, after traversing the whole space of the human sciences, would encounter the question of finitude (since it is through language, and within it, that thought is able to think: so that it is in itself a positivity with the value of a fundamental). Above ethnology and psychoanalysis, or, more exactly, interwoven with them, a third 'counter-science' would appear to traverse, animate, and disturb the whole constituted field of the human sciences; and by overflowing it both on the side of positivities and on that of finitude, it would form the most general contestation of that field. Like the two other counter-sciences, it would make visible, in a discursive mode, the frontier-forms of the human sciences; like them, it would situate its experience in those enlightened and dangerous regions where the knowledge of man acts out, in the form of the unconscious and of historicity, its relation with what renders them possible. In 'exposing' it, these three counter-sciences threaten the very thing that made it possible for man to be known. Thus we see the destiny of man being spun before our very eyes, but being spun backwards; it is being led back, by those strange bobbins, to the forms of its birth, to the homeland that made it possible. And is that not one way of bringing about its end? For linguistics no more speak of man himself than do psychoanalysis and ethnology.

It may be said that, in playing this role, linguistics is doing no more than resuming the functions that had once been those of biology or of economics, when, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an attempt was made to unify the human sciences under concepts borrowed from biology or economics. But linguistics may have a much more fundamental role. And for several reasons. First, because it permits – or in any case strives to render possible – the structuration of contents themselves; it is therefore not a theoretical reworking of knowledge acquired elsewhere, the interpretation of an already accomplished reading of phenomena; it does not offer a 'linguistic version' of the facts observed in the human sciences, it is rather the principle of a primary decipherment:

(language)



to a gaze forearmed by linguistics, things attain to existence only in so far as they are able to form the elements of a signifying system. Linguistic analysis is more a perception than an explanation: that is, it is constitutive of its very object. Moreover, we find that by means of this emergence of structure (as an invariable relation within a totality of elements) the relation of the human sciences to mathematics has been opened up once more, and in a wholly new dimension; it is no longer a matter of knowing whether one can quantify results, or whether human behaviour is susceptible of being introduced into the field of a measurable probability; the question that arises is that of knowing whether it is possible without a play on words to employ the notion of structure, or at least whether it is the same structure that is referred to in mathematics and in the human sciences: a question that is central if one wishes to know the possibilities and rights, the conditions and limitations, of a justified formalization; it will be seen that the relation of the sciences of man to the axis of the formal and *a priori* disciplines – a relation that had not been essential till then, and as long as the attempt was made to identify it with the right to measure – returns to life and perhaps becomes fundamental now that within the space of the human sciences there emerges their relation both to the empirical positivity of language and to the analytic of finitude; the three axes which define the volume proper to the sciences of man thus become visible, and almost simultaneously so, in the questions they pose. Lastly, as a result of the importance of linguistics and of its application to the knowledge of man, the question of the being of language, which, as we have seen, is so intimately linked with the fundamental problems of our culture, reappears in all its enigmatic insistence. With the continually extended use of linguistic categories, it is a question of growing importance, since we must henceforth ask ourselves what language must be in order to structure in this way what is nevertheless not in itself either word or discourse, and in order to articulate itself on the pure forms of knowledge. By a much longer and much more unexpected path, we are led back to the place that Nietzsche and Mallarmé signposted when the first asked: Who speaks?, and the second saw his glittering answer in the Word itself. The question as to what language is in its being is once more of the greatest urgency.

At this point, where the question of language arises again with such heavy over-determination, and where it seems to lay siege on every side to the figure of man (that figure which had once taken the place of Classical Discourse), contemporary culture is struggling to create an

important part of its present, and perhaps of its future. On the one hand, suddenly very near to all these empirical domains, questions arise which before had seemed very distant from them: these questions concern a general formalization of thought and knowledge; and at a time when they were still thought to be dedicated solely to the relation between logic and mathematics, they suddenly open up the possibility, and the task, of purifying the old empirical reason by constituting formal languages, and of applying a second critique of pure reason on the basis of new forms of the mathematical *a priori*. However, at the other extremity of our culture, the question of language is entrusted to that form of speech which has no doubt never ceased to pose it, but which is now, for the first time, posing it to itself. That literature in our day is fascinated by the being of language is neither the sign of an imminent end nor proof of a radicalization: it is a phenomenon whose necessity has its roots in a vast configuration in which the whole structure of our thought and our knowledge is traced. But if the question of formal languages gives prominence to the possibility or impossibility of structuring positive contents, a literature dedicated to language gives prominence, in all their empirical vivacity, to the fundamental forms of finitude. From within language experienced and traversed as language, in the play of its possibilities extended to their furthest point, what emerges is that man has 'come to an end', and that, by reaching the summit of all possible speech, he arrives not at the very heart of himself but at the brink of that which limits him; in that region where death prowls, where thought is extinguished, where the promise of the origin interminably recedes. It was inevitable that this new mode of being of literature should have been revealed in works like those of Artaud or Roussel – and by men like them; in Artaud's work, language, having been rejected as discourse and re-apprehended in the plastic violence of the shock, is referred back to the cry, to the tortured body, to the materiality of thought, to the flesh; in Roussel's work, language, having been reduced to powder by a systematically fabricated chance, recounts interminably the repetition of death and the enigma of divided origins. And as if this experiencing of the forms of finitude in language were insupportable, or inadequate (perhaps its very inadequacy was insupportable), it is within madness that it manifested itself – the figure of finitude thus positing itself in language (as that which unveils itself within it), but also before it, preceding it, as that formless, mute, unsignifying region where language can find its freedom. And it is indeed in this space thus revealed that literature, first with surrealism (though still in a very

hand

much disguised form), then, more and more purely, with Kafka, Bataille, and Blanchot, posited itself as experience: as experience of death (and in the element of death), of unthinkable thought (and in its inaccessible presence), of repetition (of original innocence, always there at the nearest and yet always the most distant limit of language); as experience of finitude (trapped in the opening and the tyranny of that finitude).

It is clear that this 'return' of language is not a sudden interruption in our culture; it is not the irruptive discovery of some long-buried evidence; it does not indicate a folding back of thought upon itself, in the movement by which it emancipates itself from all content, or a narcissism occurring within a literature freeing itself at last from what it has to say in order to speak henceforth only about the fact that it is language stripped naked. It is, in fact, the strict unfolding of Western culture in accordance with the necessity it imposed upon itself at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It would be false to see in this general indication of our experience, which may be termed 'formalism', the sign of a drying up, of a rarefaction of thought losing its capacity for re-apprehending the plenitude of contents; it would be no less false to place it from the outset upon the horizon of some new thought or new knowledge. It is within the very tight-knit, very coherent outlines of the modern *episteme* that this contemporary experience found its possibility; it is even that *episteme* which, by its logic, gave rise to such an experience, constituted it through and through, and made it impossible for it not to exist. What occurred at the time of Ricardo, Cuvier, and Bopp, the form of knowledge that was established with the appearance of economics, biology, and philology, the thought of finitude laid down by the Kantian critique as philosophy's task – all that still forms the immediate space of our reflection. We think in that area.

And yet the impression of fulfilment and of end, the muffled feeling that carries and animates our thought, and perhaps lulls it to sleep with the facility of its promises, and makes us believe that something new is about to begin, something we glimpse only as a thin line of light low on the horizon – that feeling and that impression are perhaps not ill founded. It will be said that they exist, that they have never ceased to be formulated over and over again since the early nineteenth century; it will be said that Hölderlin, Hegel, Feuerbach, and Marx all felt this certainty that in them a thought and perhaps a culture were coming to a close, and that from the depths of a distance, which was perhaps not invincible, another was approaching – in the dim light of dawn, in the brilliance of noon, or in

the dissension of the falling day. But this close, this perilous ~~immense~~ whose promise we fear today, whose danger we welcome, is probably not of the same order. Then, the task enjoined upon thought by that annunciation was to establish for man a stable sojourn upon this earth from which the gods had turned away or vanished. In our day, and once again Nietzsche indicated the turning-point from a long way off, it is not so much the absence or the death of God that is affirmed as the end of man (that narrow, imperceptible displacement, that recession in the form of identity, which are the reason why man's finitude has become his end); it becomes apparent, then, that the death of God and the last man are engaged in a contest with more than one round: is it not the last man who announces that he has killed God, thus situating his language, his thought, his laughter in the space of that already dead God, yet positing himself also as he who has killed God and whose existence includes the freedom and the decision of that murder? Thus, the last man is at the same time older and yet younger than the death of God; since he has killed God, it is he himself who must answer for his own finitude; but since it is in the death of God that he speaks, thinks, and exists, his murder itself is doomed to die; new gods, the same gods, are already swelling the future Ocean; man will disappear. Rather than the death of God – or, rather, in the wake of that death and in a profound correlation with it – what Nietzsche's thought heralds is the end of his murderer; it is the explosion of man's face in laughter, and the return of masks; it is the scattering of the profound stream of time by which he felt himself carried along and whose pressure he suspected in the very being of things; it is the identity of the Return of the Same with the absolute dispersion of man. Throughout the nineteenth century, the end of philosophy and the promise of an approaching culture were no doubt one and the same thing as the thought of finitude and the appearance of man in the field of knowledge; in our day, the fact that philosophy is still – and again – in the process of coming to an end, and the fact that in it perhaps, though even more outside and against it, in literature as well as in formal reflection, the question of language is being posed, prove no doubt that man is in the process of disappearing.

For the entire modern *episteme* – that which was formed towards the end of the eighteenth century and still serves as the positive ground of our knowledge, that which constituted man's particular mode of being and the possibility of knowing him empirically – that entire *episteme* was bound up with the disappearance of Discourse and its featureless reign, with the shift of language towards objectivity, and with its reappearance

in multiple form. If this same language is now emerging with greater and greater insistence in a unity that we ought to think but cannot as yet do so, is this not the sign that the whole of this configuration is now about to topple, and that man is in the process of perishing as the being of language continues to shine ever brighter upon our horizon? Since man was constituted at a time when language was doomed to dispersion, will he not be dispersed when language regains its unity? And if that were true, would it not be an error – a profound error, since it could hide from us what should now be thought – to interpret our actual experience as an application of the forms of language to the human order? Ought we not rather to give up thinking of man, or, to be more strict, to think of this disappearance of man – and the ground of possibility of all the sciences of man – as closely as possible in correlation with our concern with language? Ought we not to admit that, since language is here once more, man will return to that serene non-existence in which he was formerly maintained by the imperious unity of Discourse? Man had been a figure occurring between two modes of language; or, rather, he was constituted only when language, having been situated within representation and, as it were, dissolved in it, freed itself from that situation at the cost of its own fragmentation: man composed his own figure in the interstices of that fragmented language. Of course, these are not affirmations; they are at most questions to which it is not possible to reply; they must be left in suspense, where they pose themselves, only with the knowledge that the possibility of posing them may well open the way to a future thought.

## VI IN CONCLUSION

One thing in any case is certain: man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge. Taking a relatively short chronological sample within a restricted geographical area – European culture since the sixteenth century – one can be certain that man is a recent invention within it. It is not around him and his secrets that knowledge prowled for so long in the darkness. In fact, among all the mutations that have affected the knowledge of things and their order, the knowledge of identities, differences, characters, equivalences, words – in short, in the midst of all the episodes of that profound history of the *Same* – only one, that which began a century and a half ago and is now perhaps drawing to a close, has made it possible for the figure of man to appear.

And that appearance was not the liberation of an old anxiety, the transition into luminous consciousness of an age-old concern, the entry into objectivity of something that had long remained trapped within beliefs and philosophies: it was the effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge. As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.

If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility – without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises – were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.