Michel Foucault
1926–1984

Michel Foucault was born in Poitiers, France, and was educated in Paris at the École Normale Supérieure and the University of Paris, Sorbonne, where he took degrees in philosophy (1948), psychology (1950), and psychiatry (1952). For the next several years, he worked in psychiatric hospitals and taught psychopathology at the École Normale and elsewhere. In 1961 he published Madness and Civilization, which was accepted as his Ph.D. dissertation. In this book, Foucault argues that the source of madness should be sought not in the pathology of the individual but in the history of definitions of reason and in social divisions that follow these stipulations.

Following publication of this book, Foucault served in several prestigious academic posts, which culminated in his election to the Collège de France in 1970, where he served as the chair of History of Systems of Thought until his death. During the 1960s, he wrote extensively about the complex interconnections between the historical development of knowledge, its formulation in discourse and the effects of knowledge upon social practices. In the 1970s, Foucault shifted his attention to prisoners, the treatment of prisoners, and the social history of imprisonment. He was actively involved in the prisoners' rights movement in France and published his study of incarceration, Discipline and Punish, in 1975.

Foucault's last major project focuses on the history of sexuality; it studies the ways in which social institutions exercise power over sexual identity and attitudes. Foucault's approach to historiography and his reconceptions of the relationships among language, knowledge, and social organization have made him a central figure in twentieth-century philosophy. Moreover, his work on the effects of discourse raises serious questions for any future definition of rhetoric.

In "The Order of Discourse" (1971; excerpted here), Foucault remarks that the tendency of Western philosophy since the demise of the Sophists has been to deny discourse its own reality and to think of discourse as the dress of thought or the conveyer of preexisting meaning. Foucault calls this tendency the "will to truth." The desire to locate truth in something other than discourse itself has, says Foucault, spawned several mistaken beliefs. One is that the author or speaker is the source of discourse and that the speaker's task is "to animate the empty forms of language." Another is that nature is the source of discourse, which merely names things in the world. Disciplines and institutions founded on such beliefs subscribe to the will to truth and reinforce the idea that the rules of discourse are subsidiary to the expression of thought. Discourse, they say, facilitates the exchange of knowledge but does not create it.

Foucault's project in "The Order of Discourse" and the earlier Archaeology of Knowledge (1969; excerpted here) is to question the will to truth and to "restore to discourse its character as an event." To do so, he reverses the order of the relationship between discourse and what is traditionally taken to be its source: That is, he treats author, meaning, and knowledge as a function of discourse, not as its source.
He therefore examines discourse as a practice, a form of action, and not as a reflection of the world.

Foucault's theory of discourse describes the relationship between language and knowledge; the functions of disciplines, institution, and other discourse communities; the ways that particular statements come to have true value; the constraints on the production of discourse about objects of knowledge; the effects of discursive practices on social action; and the uses of discourse to exercise power. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is Foucault's most extensive exposition of this theory. Here, Foucault attempts to describe the methods and assumptions that guided his earlier books and to sketch a theory of discourse and knowledge that will guide his further work. He begins by discussing historiography and the dangers of easy assumptions about the continuity of the development of ideas. He then looks at how knowledge emerges from discourse.

What, Foucault asks, connects statements about an object of knowledge? He rejects the answer that it is the object itself: "It is not enough for us to open our eyes, to pay attention, or to be aware, for new objects suddenly to light up and emerge out of the ground. . . . [T]he object does not await in limbo the order that will free it and enable it to become embodied in a visible and prolix objectivity; it does not preexist itself." Knowledge is created not by the act of observing, Foucault says, but through "relations . . . between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioral patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterization; and these relations are not present in the object." This is not to deny the existence of phenomena but to say that what we know or them is a function of the needs or desires of society and institutions and of available methods (which may be different in different communities) of coming to know something.

When discourse about knowledge is produced, Foucault asks (echoing Friedrich Nietzsche), who is speaking? What institutional role, legal status, social privilege, or educational or other certification determines who may claim the right to speak authoritatively? Only after we have established the perspective of the discourse community that authorizes such speakers and settings, Foucault says, is it possible to look at the forms of reasoning that may have been used in the statements. To do otherwise would be "to see discourse as a phenomenon of expression—the verbal translation of a previously established synthesis." The authority of the speaker, the authorizing powers, and the mode of expression are mutually defining, and all are part of the larger discursive formation that makes it possible to speak of certain objects at all. "Thus conceived, discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject," says Foucault, "but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined."

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1 See p. 1439 in this book.
3 See p. 1444 in this book.
4 See p. 1444 in this book.
Though Foucault seems eager to avoid traditional rhetorical categories, he notes that an analysis of discourse must examine the apparatus of conventions that disciplines and other discourse communities use for defining, comparing, and proving concepts. Such analysis must also look at standards of reasonableness and judgment, at standards of reference to common knowledge and to the history of the community, and at communal rules for the construction of texts.

Foucault also examines the "strategies" of discourse, by which he means the functions of discourse in different periods or communities. Part of the description of discursive practices, for Foucault, must include the effects of discourse in society and the means by which those effects are brought to bear, through teaching, in the formation of laws, or in the creation of disciplines. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault admits that describing the effects of discourse is the most difficult aspect of discursive formations, and in later books he takes up the idea under the rubric of "power," through which he questions the relation of discourse to objects of observation, judgment, analysis, legal control, physical control, naming, management, regulation, and modification.

Foucault concludes that "there is no knowledge without a particular discursive practice and any discursive practice may be defined by the knowledge that it forms." There is no transcendental continuity to knowledge, in misty origins, in experience, or in the speaker. Knowledge is the function of a material discourse in a social order. Foucault's project, as he defines it, is an attempt to reveal discursive practices in their complexity and density: to show that to speak is to do something—something other than to express what one thinks; to translate what one knows, and something other than to play with the structures of a language (*langue*); to show that to add a statement to a pre-existing series of statements is to perform a complicated and costly gesture, which involves conditions (and not only a situation, a context, and motives), and rules (not the logical and linguistic rule of construction); to show that a change in the order of discourse does not presuppose "new ideas," a little invention and creativity, a different mentality, but transformations in a practice, perhaps also in neighboring practices, and in their common articulation.

Though Foucault avoids talking about rhetoric, preferring *discourse* as his comprehensive term, his theory addresses a number of ideas that are central to modern rhetoric. He makes a powerful argument that discourse (for which we may read *rhetoric*) is epistemic; he forcefully states that discourse is a form of social action; and he enriches and complicates the notion of context with a network of archives, disciplines, institutions, and social practices that control the production of discourse. Finally, he demonstrates the "microphysics of power" that resides in the knowledge that is disseminated in discourse and embodied in laws, regulations, texts, and in the very architecture of hospitals, schools, and prisons, showing how

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6Foucault, p. 209.
seemingly diverse discourses come together in formations that affect social practices and social controls. "It is in discourse," he says in The History of Sexuality, "that power and knowledge are joined together."

Selected Bibliography


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MICHEL FOUCAULT

I435
From *The Archaeology of Knowledge*

**Part II**

**The Discursive Regularities**

**CHAPTER 3**

**THE FORMATION OF OBJECTS**

We must now list the various directions that lie open to us, and see whether this notion of "rules of formation"—of which little more than a rough sketch has so far been provided—can be given real content. Let us look first at the formation of objects. And in order to facilitate our analysis, let us take as an example the discourse of psychopathology from the nineteenth century onwards—a chronological break that is easy enough to accept in a first approach to the subject. There are enough signs to indicate it, but let us take just two of these: the establishment at the beginning of the century of a new mode of exclusion and confinement of the madman in a psychiatric hospital; and the possibility of tracing certain present-day objects back to Esquirol, Heinroth, or Pinel (paranoia can be traced back to monomania, the intelligence quotient to the initial notion of imbecility, general paralysis to chronic encephalitis, character neurosis to nondelirious madness); whereas if we try to trace the development of psychopathology beyond the nineteenth century, we soon lose our way, the path becomes confused, and the projection of Du Laurens or even Van Swieten on the pathology of Kraepelin or Bleuler provides no more than chance coincidences. The objects with which psychopathology has dealt since this break in time are very numerous, mostly very new, but also very precarious, subject to change and, in some cases, to rapid disappearance: in addition to motor disturbances, hallucinations, and speech disorders (which were already regarded as manifestations of madness, although they were recognized, delimited, described, and analyzed in a different way), objects appeared that belonged to hitherto unused registers: minor behavioral disorders, sexual aberrations and disturbances, the phenomena of suggestion and hypnosis, lesions of the central nervous system, deficiencies of intellectual or motor adaptation, criminality. And on the basis of each of these registers a variety of objects were named, circumscribed, analyzed, then rectified, redefined, challenged, erased. Is it possible to lay down the rule to which their appearance was sub-

Gleaned from Peter Burke, ed., *Critical Essays on Michel Foucault* (Broomfield, Vt., 1992), which are facsimiles of reviews that appeared in the *New York Review, TLS*, and other journals.


Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith.

In the preceding chapters, Foucault rejects the usual ways of talking about the contexts that are called upon to explain the meaning of statements, tradition, discipline, author, and genre, for example. He will try instead, he says, to describe statements, their environments, and the conditions of existence for statements in a "discursive formation." He refers to these conditions of existence (which he has not yet discussed) as "rules of formation." [Ed.]
ject? Is it possible to discover according to which nondeductive system these objects could be juxtaposed and placed in succession to form the fragmented field—howing at certain points great gaps, at others a plethora of information—of psychopathology? What has ruled their existence as objects of discourse?

a. First we must map the first surfaces of their emergence: show where these individual differences, which, according to the degrees of rationalization, conceptual codes, and types of theory, will be accorded the status of disease, alienation, anomaly, dementia, neurosis or psyche-is, degeneration, etc., may emerge, and then be designated and analyzed. These surfaces of emergence are not the same for different societies, at different periods, and in different forms of discourse. In the case of nineteenth-century psychopathology, they were probably constituted by the family, the immediate social group, the work situation, the religious community (which are all normative, which are all susceptible to deviation, which all have a margin of tolerance and a threshold beyond which exclusion is demanded, which all have a mode of designation and a mode of rejecting madness, which all transfer to medicine if not the responsibility for treatment and cure, at least the burden of explanation); although organized according to a specific mode, these surfaces of emergence were not new in the nineteenth century. On the other hand, it was no doubt at this period that new surfaces of appearance began to function: art with its own normativity, sexuality (its deviations in relation to customary prohibitions become for the first time an object of observation, description, and analysis for psychiatric discourse), penalty (whereas in previous periods madness was carefully distinguished from criminal conduct and was regarded as an excuse, criminality itself becomes—and subsequent to the celebrated “homicidal monomaniacs”—a form of deviance more or less related to madness). In these fields of initial differentiation, in the distances, the discontinuities, and the thresholds that appear within it, psychiatric discourse finds a way of limiting its domain, of defining what it is talking about, of giving it the status of an object—and therefore of making it manifest, nameable, and describable.

b. We must also describe the authorities of delimitation: in the nineteenth century, medicine (as an institution possessing its own rules, as a group of individuals constituting the medical profession, as a body of knowledge and practice, as an authority recognized by public opinion, the law, and government) became the major authority in society that delimited, designated, named, and established madness as an object; but it was not alone in this: the law and penal law in particular (with the definitions of excuse, nonresponsibility, extenuating circumstances, and with the application of such notions as the crime passionel, heredity, danger to society), the religious authority (in so far as it set itself up as the authority that divided the mystical from the pathological, the spiritual from the corporeal, the supernatural from the abnormal, and in so far as it practiced the direction of conscience with a view to understanding individuals rather than carrying out a casuistical classification of actions and circumstances), literary and art criticism (which in the nineteenth century treated the work less and less as an object of taste that had to be judged, and more and more as a language that had to be interpreted and in which the author’s tricks of expression had to be recognized).

c. Lastly, we must analyze the grids of specification: these are the systems according to which the different “kinds of madness” are divided, contrasted, related, regrouped, classified, derived from one another as objects of psychiatric discourse (in the nineteenth century, these grids of differentiation were: the soul, as a group of hierarchized, related, and more or less interpretable faculties; the body, as a three-dimensional volume of organs linked together by networks of dependence and communication; the life and history of individuals, as a linear succession of phases, a tangle of traces, a group of potential reactivations, cyclical repetitions; the interplays of neuropsychological correlations as systems of reciprocal projections, and as a field of circular causality).

Such a description is still in itself inadequate. And for two reasons. These planes of emergence,
The authorities of delimitation, or forms of specification do not provide objects, fully formed and armed, that the discourse of psychopathology has then merely to list, classify, name, select, and cover with a network of words and sentences: it is not the families—with their norms, their prohibitions, their sensitivity thresholds—that decide who is mad, and present the "patients" to the psychiatrists for analysis and judgement; it is not the legal system itself that hands over certain criminals to psychiatry, that sees paranoia beyond a particular murder, or a neurosis behind a sexual offense. It would be quite wrong to see discourse as a place where previously established objects are laid one after another like words on a page. But the above enumeration is inadequate for a second reason. It has located, one after another, several planes of differentiation in which the objects of discourse may appear. But what relations exist between them? Why this enumeration rather than another? What defined and closed group does one imagine one is circumscribing in this way? And how can one speak of a "system of formation" if one knows only a series of different, heterogeneous determinations, lacking attributable links and relations?

In fact, these two series of questions refer back to the same point. In order to locate that point, let us reexamine the previous example. In the sphere with which psychopathology dealt in the nineteenth century, one sees the very early appearance (as early as Esquirol) of a whole series of objects belonging to the category of delinquency: homicide (and suicide), crimes passio­nels, sexual offenses, certain forms of theft, vagrancy—and then, through them, heredity, the neurogenic environment, aggressive or self-punishing behavior, perversions, criminal impulses, suggestibility, etc. It would be inadequate to say that one was dealing here with the consequences of a discovery: of the sudden discovery by a psychiatrist of a resemblance between criminal and pathological behavior, a discovery of the presence in certain delinquents of the classical signs of alienation, or mental derangement. Such facts lie beyond the grasp of contemporary research: indeed, the problem is how to decide what made them possible, and how these "discoveries" could lead to others that took them up, rectified them, modified them, or even disproved them. Similarly, it would be irrelevant to attribute the appearance of these new objects to the norms of nineteenth-century bourgeois society, to a reinforced police and penal framework, to the establishment of a new code of criminal justice, to the introduction and use of extenuating circumstances, to the increase in crime. No doubt, all these processes were at work; but they could not of themselves form objects for psychiatric discourse; to pursue the description at this level one would fall short of what one was seeking.

If, in a particular period in the history of our society, the delinquent was psychologized and pathologized, if criminal behavior could give rise to a whole series of objects of knowledge, this was because a group of particular relations was adopted for use in psychiatric discourse. The relation between planes of specification like penal categories and degrees of diminished responsibility, and planes of psychological characterization (faculties, aptitudes, degrees of development or involution, different ways of reacting to the environment, character types, whether acquired, innate, or hereditary). The relation between the authority of medical decision and the authority of judicial decision (a really complex relation since medical decision recognizes absolutely the authority of the judiciary to define crime, to deter­mine the circumstances in which it is committed, and the punishment that it deserves; but reserves the right to analyze its origin and to determine the degree of responsibility involved). The relation between the filter formed by judicial interrogation, police information, investigation, and the whole machinery of judicial information, and the filter formed by the medical questionnaire, clinical examinations, the search for antecedents, and biographical accounts. The relation between the family, sexual and penal norms of the behavior of individuals, and the table of pathological symptoms and diseases of which they are the signs. The relation between therapeutic confinement in hospital (with its own thresholds, its criteria of cure, its way of distinguishing the normal from the pathological) and punitive confinement in prison (with its system of punishment and ped­agogy, its criteria of good conduct, improvement, and freedom). These are the relations that, oper-
ating in psychiatric discourse, have made possible the formation of a whole group of various objects.

Let us generalize: in the nineteenth century, psychiatric discourse is characterized not by privileged objects, but by the way in which it forms objects that are in fact highly dispersed. This formation is made possible by a group of relations established between authorities of emergence, delimitation, and specification. One might say, then, that a discursive formation is defined (as far as its objects are concerned, at least) if one can establish such a group; if one can show how any particular object of discourse finds in it its place and law of emergence; if one can show that it may give birth simultaneously or successively to mutually exclusive objects, without having to modify itself.

Hence a certain number of remarks and consequences.

1. The conditions necessary for the appearance of an object of discourse, the historical conditions required if one is to "say anything" about it, and if several people are to say different things about it, the conditions necessary if it is to exist in relation to other objects, if it is to establish with them relations of resemblance, proximity, distance, difference, transformation—as we can see, these conditions are many and imposing. Which means that one cannot speak of anything at any time; it is not easy to say something new; it is not enough for us to open our eyes, to pay attention, or to be aware, for new objects suddenly to light up and emerge out of the ground. But this difficulty is not only a negative one; it must not be attached to some obstacle whose power appears to be, exclusively, to blind, to hinder, to prevent discovery, to conceal the purity of the evidence or the dumb obstinacy of the things themselves; the object does not await in limbo the order that will free it and enable it to become embodied in a visible and prolix objectivity; it does not preexist itself, held back by some obstacle at the first edges of light. It exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations.

2. These relations are established between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioral patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterization; and these relations are not present in the object; it is not they that are deployed when the object is being analyzed; they do not indicate the web, the immanent rationality, that ideal nerve that reappears totally or in part when one conceives of the object in the truth of its concept. They do not define its internal constitution, but what enables it to appear, to juxtapose itself with other objects, to situate itself in relation to them, to define its difference, its irreducibility, and even perhaps its heterogeneity, in short, to be placed in a field of exteriority.

3. These relations must be distinguished first from what we might call "primary" relations, and which, independently of all discourse or all object of discourse, may be described between institutions, techniques, social forms, etc. After all, we know very well that relations existed between the bourgeois family and the functioning of judicial authorities and categories in the nineteenth century that can be analyzed in their own right. They cannot always be superposed upon the relations that go to form objects: the relations of dependence that may be assigned to this primary level are not necessarily expressed in the formation of relations that makes discursive objects possible. But we must also distinguish the secondary relations that are formulated in discourse itself: what, for example, the psychiatrists of the nineteenth century could say about the relations between the family and criminality does not reproduce, as we know, the interplay of real dependencies; but neither does it reproduce the interplay of relations that make possible and sustain the objects of psychiatric discourse. Thus a space unfolds articulated with possible discourses: a system of real or primary relations, a system of reflexive or secondary relations, and a system of relations that might properly be called discursive. The problem is to reveal the specificity of these discursive relations, and their interplay with the other two kinds.

4. Discursive relations are not, as we can see, internal to discourse: they do not connect concepts or words with one another; they do not establish a deductive or rhetorical structure between propositions or sentences. Yet they are not
relations exterior to discourse, relations that might limit it, or impose certain forms upon it, or force it, in certain circumstances, to state certain things. They are, in a sense, at the limit of discourse: they offer it objects of which it can speak, or rather (for this image of offering presupposes that objects are formed independently of discourse), they determine the group of relations that discourse must establish in order to speak of this or that object, in order to deal with them, name them, analyze them, classify them, explain them, etc. These relations characterize not the language (langue) used by discourse, nor the circumstances in which it is deployed, but discourse itself as a practice.

We can now complete the analysis and see to what extent it fulfills, and to what extent it modifies, the initial project.

Taking those group figures which, in an insistent but confused way, presented themselves as psychology, economics, grammar, medicine, we asked on what kind of unity they could be based: were they simply a reconstruction after the event, based on particular works, successive theories, notions and themes some of which had been abandoned, others maintained by tradition, and again others fated to fall into oblivion only to be revived at a later date? Were they simply a series of linked enterprises?

We sought the unity of discourse in the objects themselves, in their distribution, in the interplay of their differences, in their proximity or distance—in short, in what is given to the speaking subject; and, in the end, we are sent back to a setting-up of relations that characterizes discursive practice itself; and what we discover is neither a configuration, nor a form, but a group of rules that are immanent in a practice, and define it in its specificity. We also used, as a point of reference, a unity like psychopathology: if we had wanted to provide it with a date of birth and precise limits, it would no doubt have been necessary to discover when the word was first used, to what kind of analysis it could be applied, and how it achieved its separation from neurology on the one hand and psychology on the other. What has emerged is a unity of another type, which does not appear to have the same dates, or the same surface, or the same articulations, but which may take account of a group of objects for which the term psychopathology was merely a reflexive, secondary, classificatory rubric. Psychopathology finally emerged as a discipline in a constant state of renewal, subject to constant discoveries, criticisms, and corrected errors; the system of formation that we have defined remains stable. But let there be no misunderstanding: it is not the objects that remain constant, nor the domain that they form; it is not even their point of emergence or their mode of characterization; but the relation between the surfaces on which they appear, on which they can be delimited, on which they can be analyzed and specified.

In the descriptions for which I have attempted to provide a theory, there can be no question of interpreting discourse with a view to writing a history of the referent. In the example chosen, we are not trying to find out who was mad at a particular period, or in what his madness consisted, or whether his disturbances were identical with those known to us today. We are not asking ourselves whether witches were unrecognized and persecuted madmen and madwomen, or whether, at a different period, a mystical or aesthetic experience was not unduly medicalized. We are not trying to reconstitute what madness itself might be, in the form in which it first presented itself to some primitive, fundamental, deaf, scarcely articulated experience, and in the form in which it was later organized (translated, deformed, travestied, perhaps even repressed) by discourses, and the oblique, often twisted play of their operations. Such a history of the referent is no doubt possible; and I have no wish at the outset to exclude any effort to uncover and free these "pre-discursive" experiences from the tyranny of the text. But what we are concerned with here is not to neutralize discourse, to make it the sign of something else, and to pierce through its density in order to reach what remains silently anterior to it, but on the contrary to maintain it in its consistency, to make it emerge in its own complexity. What, in short, we wish to do is to dispense with

This is written against an explicit theme of my book Madness and Civilization, and one that recurs particularly in the Preface. [Au.]
“things.” To “deprestify” them. To conjure up their rich, heavy, immediate plenitude, which we usually regard as the primitive law of a discourse that has become divorced from it through error, oblivion, illusion, ignorance, or the inertia of beliefs and traditions, or even the perhaps unconscious desire not to see and not to speak. To substitute for the enigmatic treasure of “things” anterior to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse. To define these objects without reference to the ground, the foundation of things, but by relating them to the body of rules that enable them to form as objects of a discourse and thus constitute the conditions of their historical appearance. To write a history of discursive objects that does not plunge them into the common depth of a primal soil, but deploys the nexus of regularities that govern their dispersion.

However, to suppress the stage of “things themselves” is not necessarily to return to the linguistic analysis of meaning. When one describes the formation of the objects of a discourse, one tries to locate the relations that characterize a discursive practice, one determines neither a lexical organization, nor the scannings of a semantic field: one does not question the meaning given at a particular period to such words as “melancholia” or “madness without delirium,” nor the opposition of content between “psychosis” and “neurosis.” Not, I repeat, that such analyses are regarded as illegitimate or impossible; but they are not relevant when we are trying to discover, for example, how criminality could become an object of medical expertise, or sexual deviation a possible object of psychiatric discourse. The analysis of lexical contents defines either the elements of meaning at the disposal of speaking subjects in a given period, or the semantic structure that appears on the surface of a discourse that has already been spoken; it does not concern discursive practice as a place in which a tangled plurality—at once superposed and incomplete—of objects is formed and deformed, appears and disappears.

The sagacity of the commentators is not mistaken: from the kind of analysis that I have undertaken, words are as deliberately absent as things themselves; any description of a vocabulary is as lacking as any reference to the living plenitude of experience. We shall not return to the state anterior to discourse—in which nothing has yet been said, and in which things are only just beginning to emerge out of the grey light; and we shall not pass beyond discourse in order to rediscover the forms that it has created and left behind it; we shall remain, or try to remain, at the level of discourse itself. Since it is sometimes necessary to dot the “i”s of even the most obvious absences, I will say that in all these searches, in which I have still progressed so little, I would like to show that “discourses,” in the form in which they can be heard or read, are not as one might expect, a mere intersection of things and words: an obscure web of things, and a manifest, visible, colored chain of words; I would like to show that discourse is not a slender surface of contact, or confrontation, between a reality and a language (langue), the intrusion of a lexicon and an experience; I would like to show with precise examples that in analyzing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. These rules define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects. “Words and things” is the entirely serious title of a problem; it is the ironic title of a work that modifies its own form, displaces its own data, and reveals, at the end of the day, a quite different task. A task that consists of not—of no longer—treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this more that renders them irreducible to the language (langue) and to speech. It is this “more” that we must reveal and describe.

1That is, critics of Foucault’s earlier books. [Ed.]
CHAPTER 4
THE FORMATION OF ENUNCIATIVE MODALITIES

Qualitative descriptions, biographical accounts, the location, interpretation, and cross-checking of signs, reasonings by analogy, deduction, statistical calculations, experimental verifications, and many other forms of statement are to be found in the discourse of nineteenth-century doctors. What is it that links them together? What necessity binds them together? Why these and not others? Before attempting an answer to such questions, we must first discover the law operating behind all these diverse statements, and the place from which they come.

a. First question: who is speaking? Who, among the totality of speaking individuals, is accorded the right to use this sort of language (language)? Who is qualified to do so? Who derives from it his own special quality, his prestige, and from whom, in return, does he receive if not the assurance, at least the presumption that what he says is true? What is the status of the individuals who—alone—have the right, sanctioned by law or tradition, juridically defined or spontaneously accepted, to proffer such a discourse? The status of doctor involves criteria of competence and knowledge; institutions, systems, pedagogic norms; legal conditions that give the right—though not without laying down certain limitations—to practice and to extend one's knowledge. It also involves a system of differentiation and relations (the division of attributions, hierarchical subordination, functional complementarity, the request for and the provision and exchange of information) with other individuals or other groups that also possess their own status (with the state and its representatives, with the judiciary, with different professional bodies, with religious groups and, at times, with priests). It also involves a number of characteristics that define its functioning in relation to society as a whole (the role that is attributed to the doctor according to whether he is consulted by a private person or summoned, more or less under compulsion, by society, according to whether he practices a profession or carries out a function; the right to intervene or make decisions that are accorded him in these different cases; what is required of him as the supervisor, guardian, and guarantor of the health of a population, a group, a family, an individual; the payment that he receives from the community or from individuals; the form of contract, explicit or implicit, that he negotiates either with the group in which he practices, or with the authority that entrusts him with a task, or with the patient who requests advice, treatment, or cure). This status of the doctor is generally a rather special one in all forms of society and civilization: he is hardly ever an undifferentiated or interchangeable person. Medical statements cannot come from anybody; their value, efficacy, even their therapeutic powers, and, generally speaking, their existence as medical statements cannot be dissociated from the statutorily defined person who has the right to make them, and to claim for them the power to overcome suffering and death. But we also know that this status in western civilization was profoundly modified at the end of the eighteenth century when the health of the population became one of the economic norms required by industrial societies.

b. We must also describe the institutional sites from which the doctor makes his discourse, and from which this discourse derives its legitimate source and point of application (its specific objects and instruments of verification). In our societies, these sites are: the hospital, a place of constant, coded, systematic observation, run by a differentiated and hierarchized medical staff, thus constituting a quantifiable field of frequencies; private practice, which offers a field of less systematic, less complete, and far less numerous observations, but which sometimes facilitates observations that are more far-reaching in their effects, with a better knowledge of the background and environment; the laboratory, an autonomous place, long distinct from the hospital, where certain truths of a general kind, concerning the human body, life, disease, lesions, etc., which provides certain elements of the diagnosis, certain signs of the developing condition, certain criteria of cure, and which makes therapeutic experiment possible; lastly, what might be called the "library" or documentary field, which includes not only the books and treatises tradition-
aily recognized as valid, but also all the observations and case histories published and transmitted, and the mass of statistical information (concerning the social environment, climate, epidemics, mortality rates, the incidence of diseases, the centers of contagion, occupational diseases) that can be supplied to the doctor by public bodies, by other doctors, by sociologists, and by geographers. In this respect, too, these various “sites” of medical discourse were profoundly modified in the nineteenth century: the importance of the document continues to increase (proportionately diminishing the authority of the book or tradition); the hospital, which had been merely a subsidiary site for discourse on diseases, and which took second place in importance and value in private practice (in which diseases left in their natural environment were, in the eighteenth century, to reveal themselves in their vegetal truth), then becomes the site of systematic, homogeneous observations, large-scale confrontations, the establishment of frequencies and probabilities, the annihilation of individual variants, in short, the site of the appearance of disease, not as a particular species, deploying its essential features beneath the doctor’s gaze, but as an average process, with its significant guidelines, boundaries, and potential development. Similarly, it was in the nineteenth century that daily medical practice integrated the laboratory as the site of a discourse that has the same experimental norms as physics, chemistry, or biology.

The positions of the subject are also defined by the situation that it is possible for him to occupy in relation to the various domains or groups of objects: according to a certain grid of explicit or implicit interrogations, he is the questioning subject and, according to a certain program of information, he is the listening subject; according to a table of characteristic features, he is the seeing subject, and, according to a descriptive type, the observing subject; he is situated at an optimal perceptual distance whose boundaries delimit the wheat of relevant information; he uses instrumental intermediaries that modify the scale of the information, shift the subject in relation to the average or immediate perceptual level, ensure his movement from a superficial to a deep level, make him circulate in the interior space of the body — from manifest symptoms to the organs, from the organs to the tissues, and finally from the tissues to the cells. To these perceptual situations should be added the positions that the subject can occupy in the information networks (in theoretical teaching or in hospital training; in the system of oral communication or of written document: as emitter and receiver of observations, case histories, statistical data, general theoretical propositions, projects, and decisions). The various situations that the subject of medical discourse may occupy were redefined at the beginning of the nineteenth century with the organization of a quite different perceptual field (arranged in depth, manifested by successive recourse to instruments, deployed by surgical techniques or methods of autopsy, centered upon lesions), and with the establishment of new systems of registration, notation, description, classification, integration in numerical series and in statistics, with the introduction of new forms of teaching, the circulation of information, relations with other theoretical domains (sciences or philosophy) and with other institutions (whether administrative, political, or economic).

If, in clinical discourse, the doctor is in turn the sovereign, direct questioner, the observing eye, the touching finger, the organ that deciphers signs, the point at which previously formulated descriptions are integrated, the laboratory technician, it is because a whole group of relations is involved. Relations between the hospital space as a place of assistance, of purified, systematic observation, and of partially proved, partially experimental therapeutics, and a whole group of perceptual codes of the human body—as it is defined by morbid anatomy; relations between the field of immediate observations and the domain of acquired information; relations between the doctor’s therapeutic role, his pedagogic role, his role as an intermediary in the diffusion of medical knowledge, and his role as a responsible representative of public health in the social space. Understood as a renewal of points of view, contents, the forms and even the style of description, the use of inductive or probabilistic reasoning, types of attribution of causality, in short, as a renewal of the modalities of enunciation, clinical
medicine must not be regarded as the result of a
new technique of observation—that of autopsy,
which was practiced long before the advent of the
nineteenth century; nor as the result of the search
for pathogenic causes in the depths of the organ-
ism.—Morgagni was engaged in such a search in
the middle of the eighteenth century; nor as the
effect of that new institution, the teaching hospi-
tal—such institutions had already been in exist-
tence for some decades in Austria and Italy; nor
as the result of the introduction of the concept of
tissue in Bichat's Traité des membranes. But as
the establishment of a relation, in medical dis-
course, between a number of distinct elements,
some of which concerned the status of doctors,
others the institutional and technical site from
which they spoke, others their position as sub-
jects perceiving, observing, describing, teaching,
etc. It can be said that this relation between dif-
ferent elements (some of which are new, while
others were already in existence) is effected by
clinical discourse: it is this, as a practice, that
establishes between them all a system of relations
that is not “really” given or constituted a priori;
and if there is a unity, if the modalities of enunci-
ation that it uses, or to which it gives place, are
not simply juxtaposed by a series of historical
contingencies, it is because it makes constant use
of this group of relations.

One further remark. Having noted the dispar-
ity of the types of enunciation in clinical dis-
course, I have not tried to reduce it by uncover-
ing the formal structures, categories, modes of
logical succession, types of reasoning and induc-
tion, forms of analysis and synthesis that may
have operated in a discourse; I did not wish to re-
veal the rational organization that may provide
statements like those of medicine with their ele-
ment of intrinsic necessity. Nor did I wish to re-
duce to a single founding act, or to a founding
consciousness the general horizon of rationality
against which the progress of medicine gradually
emerged, its efforts to model itself upon the exact
sciences, the contraction of its methods of observ-
ation, the slow, difficult expulsion of the images
or fantasies that inhabit it, the purification of its
ystem of reasoning. Lastly, I have not tried to
describe the empirical genesis, nor the various
component elements of the medical mentality:
how this shift of interest on the part of the doc-
tors came about, by what theoretical or experi-
mental model they were influenced, what philos-
ophy or moral thematics defined the climate of
their reflection, to what questions, to what de-
mands, they had to reply, what efforts were re-
quired of them to free themselves from tradi-
tional prejudices, by what ways they were led
towards a unification and coherence that were
never achieved, never reached, by their knowl-
dge. In short, I do not refer the various enuncia-
tive modalities to the unity of the subject—
whether it concerns the subject regarded as the
pure founding authority of rationality, or the sub-
ject regarded as an empirical function of synthe-
thesis. Neither the “knowing” (le “connaitre”), nor
the “knowledge” (les “connaissances”).

In the proposed analysis, instead of referring
back to the synthesis or the unifying function of a
subject, the various enunciative modalities mani-
fest his dispersion. To the various statuses, the
various sites, the various positions that he can oc-
cupy or be given when making a discourse. To
the discontinuity of the planes from which he
speaks. And if these planes are linked by a sys-
tem of relations, this system is not established by
the synthetic activity of a consciousness identical
with itself, dumb and anterior to all speech, but
by the specificity of a discursive practice. I shall
abandon any attempt, therefore, to see discourse
as a phenomenon of expression—the verbal
translation of a previously established synthesis:
instead, I shall look for a field of regularity for
various positions of subjectivity. Thus conceived,
discourse is not the majestically unfolding mani-
festation of a thinking, knowing, speaking sub-
ject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the
dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity
with himself may be determined. It is a space of
exteriority in which a network of distinct sites is
deployed. I showed earlier that it was neither by
“words” nor by “things” that the regulation of the
objects proper to a discursive formation should
be defined; similarly, it must now be recognized
that it is neither by recourse to a transcendental

*In this respect, the term “regard médical” used in my
Naisance de la clinique [The Birth of the Clinic] was not a
very happy one. [Av.]
subject nor by recourse to a psychological subjectivity that the regulation of its enunciations should be defined.

Part III
The Statement and the Archive
CHAPTER I
DEFINING THE STATEMENT

I suppose that by now we have accepted the risk; that we are now willing, in order to articulate the great surface of discourse, to posit the existence of those somewhat strange, somewhat distant figures that I have called discursive formations; that we have put to one side, not in a definitive way, but for a time and out of methodological rigor, the traditional unities of the book and the œuvre; that we have ceased to accept as a principle of unity the laws of constructing discourse (with the formal organization that results), or the situation of the speaking subject (with the context and the psychological nucleus that characterize it); that we no longer relate discourse to the primary ground of experience, nor to the a priori authority of knowledge; but that we seek the rules of its formation in discourse itself. I suppose that we have agreed to undertake these long inquiries into the system of emergence of objects, the system of the appearance and distribution of enunciative modes, the system of the placing and dispersion of concepts, the system of the deployment of strategic choices. I suppose that we are willing to construct such abstract, problematic unities, instead of welcoming those that presented themselves as being more or less perceptually familiar, if not as self-evident realities.

But what, in fact, have I been speaking about so far? What has been the object of my inquiry? And what did I intend to describe? "Statements"—both in that discontinuity that frees them from all the forms in which one was ready to allow them to be caught, and in the general, unlimited, apparently formless field of discourse. But I refrained from providing a preliminary definition of the statement. Nor did I try to construct one as I proceeded in order to justify the naiveté of my starting point. Moreover—and this no doubt is the reason for so much unconcern—I wonder whether I have not changed direction on the way; whether I have not replaced my first quest with another; whether, while analyzing "objects" or "concepts," let alone "strategies," I was in fact still speaking of statements; whether the four groups of rules by which I characterized a discursive formation really did define groups of statements. Lastly, instead of gradually reducing the rather fluctuating meaning of the word "discourse," I believe that I have in fact added to its meanings: treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements; and have I not allowed this same word "discourse," which should have served as a boundary around the term "statement," to vary as I shifted my analysis or its point of application, as the statement itself faded from view?

This, then, is the task that now confronts me: to take up the definition of the statement at its very root. And to see whether that definition really was present in my earlier descriptions; to see whether I really was dealing with the statement in my analysis of discursive formations.

On several occasions I have used the term "statement," either to speak of a population of statements (as if I were dealing with individuals or isolated events), or in order to distinguish it from the groups that I called "discourses" (as the part is distinguished from the whole). At first sight, the statement appears as an ultimate, undecomposable element that can be isolated and introduced into a set of relations with other similar elements. A point without a face, but a point that can be located in planes of division and in specific forms of groupings. A seed that appears on the surface of a tissue of which it is the constituent element. The atom of discourse.

And the problem soon arises: if the statement really is the elementary unit of discourse, what does it consist of? What are its distinctive features? What boundaries must one accord to it? Is this unity identical with that to which logicians have given the term "proposition," and that which grammarians call a "sentence," or that which "analysts" try to map by the term "speech act"? What place does it occupy among all those unities that the investigation of language (langage) has
already revealed? (Even though the theory of these unities is so often incomplete, on account of the difficulty of the problems that they present, and the difficulty in many cases of delimiting them with any degree of rigor.)

I do not think that the necessary and sufficient condition of a statement is the presence of a defined propositional structure, or that one can speak of a statement only when there is a proposition. In fact, one can have two perfectly distinct statements, referring to quite different discursive groupings, when one finds only one proposition, possessing only one value, obeying only one group of laws for its construction, and involving the same possibilities of use. “No one heard” and “It is true that no one heard” are indistinguishable from a logical point of view, and cannot be regarded as two different propositions. But in so many statements, these two formations are not equivalent or interchangeable. They cannot occupy the same place on the plane of discourse, nor can they belong to exactly the same group of statements. If one finds the formulation “No one heard” in the first line of a novel, we know, until a new order emerge, that it is an observation made either by the author, or by a character (aloud or in the form of an interior monologue); if one finds the second formulation, “It is true that no one heard,” one can only be in a group of statements constituting an interior monologue, a silent discussion with oneself, or a fragment of dialogue, a group of questions and answers. In each case, there is the same propositional structure, but there are distinct enunciative characteristics. There may, on the other hand, be complex and doubled propositional forms, or, on the contrary fragmentary, incomplete propositions, when one is quite obviously dealing with a simple, complete, autonomous statement (even if it is part of a group of other statements): the example “The present king of France is bald” is well known (it can be analyzed from a logical point of view only if one accepts, in the form of a single statement, two distinct propositions, each of which may be true or false on its own account), or again there is a proposition like “I am lying,” which can be true only in relation to an assertion on a lower level. The criteria by which one can define the identity of a proposition, distinguish several of them beneath the unity of a formulation, characterize its autonomy or its completion are not valid when one comes to describe the particular unity of a statement.

And what of the sentence? Should we not accept an equivalence between sentence and statement? Wherever there is a grammatically isolable sentence, one can recognize the existence of an independent statement; but, on the other hand, one cannot speak of statement when, beneath the sentence itself, one reaches the level of its constituents. It would be pointless to object, against such an equivalence, that some statements may be composed, outside the canonical form of subject-copula-predicate, of a simple nominal syntagma (“That man!”) or an adverb (“Absolutely”), or a personal pronoun (“You!”). For the grammarians themselves recognize such formulations as independent sentences, even if those formulations have been obtained through a series of transformations on the basis of the subject-predicate schema. Moreover: they recognize as “acceptable” sentences groups of linguistic elements that have not been correctly constructed, providing they are interpretable; on the other hand, they accord the status of grammatical sentences to interpretable groups on condition however that they are correctly formed. With such a broad and, in a sense, so lax a definition of the sentence, it is difficult to see how one is to recognize sentences that are not statements, or statements that are not sentences.

Yet the equivalence is far from being a total one; and it is relatively easy to cite statements that do not correspond to the linguistic structure of sentences. When one finds in a Latin grammar a series of words arranged in a column: amo, amas, amat, one is dealing with a sentence, but with the statement of the different personal inflections of the present indicative of the verb amare. One may find this example debatable; one may say that it is a mere artifice of presentation, that this statement is an elliptical, abbreviated sentence, spatialized in a relatively unusual mode, that should be read as the sentence “The present indicative of the verb amare is amo for the first person,” etc. Other examples, in any case, are less ambiguous: a classificatory table of the botanical species is made up of statements,
not sentences (Linnaeus’s *Genera Plantarum* is a whole book of statements, in which one can recognize only a small number of sentences); a genealogical tree, an accounts book, the calculations of a trade balance are statements; where are the sentences? One can go further: an equation of the nth degree, or the algebraic formula of the law of refraction must be regarded as statements: and although they possess a highly rigorous grammaticality (since they are made up of symbols whose meaning is determined by rules of usage, and whole succession is governed by laws of construction), this grammaticality cannot be judged by the same criteria that, in a natural language (*langue*), make it possible to define an acceptable, or interpretable sentence. Lastly, a graph, a growth curve, an age pyramid, a distribution cloud are all statements: any sentences that may accompany them are merely interpretation or commentary; they are in no way an equivalent: this is proved by the fact that, in a great many cases, only an infinite number of sentences could equal all the elements that are explicitly formulated in this sort of statement. It would not appear to be possible, therefore, to define a statement by the grammatical characteristics of the sentence.

One last possibility remains: at first sight, the most likely of all. Can one not say that there is a statement wherever one can recognize and isolate an act of formulation—something like the speech act referred to by English analysts? This term does not, of course, refer to the material act of speaking (aloud or to oneself) or of writing (by hand or typewriter); nor does it refer to the intention of the individual who is speaking (the fact that he wants to convince someone else, to be obeyed, to discover the solution to a problem, or to communicate information); nor does it refer to the possible result of what he has said (whether he has convinced someone or aroused his suspicion; whether he was listened to and whether his orders were carried out; whether his prayer was heard); what one is referring to is the operation that has been carried out by the formula itself, in its emergence: promise, order, decree, contract, agreement, observation. The speech act is not what took place just prior to the moment when the statement was made (in the author’s thought or intentions); it is not what might have happened, after the event itself, in its wake, and the consequences that it gave rise to; it is what occurred by the very fact that a statement was made—and precisely this statement (and no other) in specific circumstances. Presumably, therefore, one individualization of statements refers to the same criteria as the location of acts of formulation: each act is embodied in a statement and each statement contains one of those acts. They exist through one another in an exact reciprocal relationship.

Yet such a correlation does not stand up to examination. For one thing, more than a statement is often required to effect a speech act: an oath, a prayer, a contract, a promise, or a demonstration usually require a certain number of distinct formulas or separate sentences: it would be difficult to challenge the right of each of these formulas and sentences to be regarded as a statement on the pretext that they are all imbued with one and the same speech act. In that case, it might be said that the act itself does not remain the same throughout the series of statements; that in a prayer there are as many limited, successive, and juxtaposed acts of prayer as demands formulated by distinct statements; and that in a promise there are as many engagements as sequences that can be individualized into separate statements. But one cannot be satisfied with this answer: first because the act of formulation would no longer serve to define the statement, but, on the contrary, the act of formulation would be defined by the statement—which raises problems, and requires criteria of individualization. Moreover, certain speech acts can be regarded as complete in their particular unity only if several statements have been made, each in its proper place. These acts are not constituted, therefore, by the series or sum of these statements, by their necessary juxtaposition; they cannot be regarded as being present whole and entire in the least of them, and as renewing themselves with each one. So one cannot establish a bi-univocal relation between the group of statements and that of speech acts either.

When one wishes to individualize statement...
one cannot therefore accept unreservedly any of the models borrowed from grammar, logic, or "analysis." In all three cases, one realizes that the criteria proposed are too numerous and too heavy, that they limit the extent of the statement, and that although the statement sometimes takes on the forms described and adjusts itself to them exactly, it does not always do so: one finds statements lacking in legitimate propositional structure; one finds statements where one cannot recognize a sentence; one finds more statements than one can isolate speech acts. As if the statement were more tenuous, less charged with determinations, less strongly structured, more omnipresent too, than all these figures; as if it had fewer features, and ones less difficult to group together; but as if, by that very fact, it rejected all possibility of describing anything. And this is all the more so, in that it is difficult to see at what level it should be situated, and by what method it should be approached: for all the analyses mentioned above, there is never more than a support, or accidental substance; in logical analysis, it is what is left when the propositional structure has been extracted and defined; for grammatical analysis, it is the series of linguistic elements in which one may or may not recognize the form of a sentence; for the analysis of speech acts, it appears as the visible body in which they manifest themselves. In relation to all these descriptive approaches, it plays the role of a residual element, of a mere fact, of irrelevant raw material.

Must we admit in the end that the statement cannot possess a character of its own and that it cannot be adequately defined, in so far as it is, for all analyses of language (langue), the extrinsic material on the basis of which they determine their own object? Must we admit that any series of signs, figures, marks, or traces—whatever their organization or probability may be—is enough to constitute a statement; and that it is the role of grammar to say whether or not it is a sentence, the role of logic to decide whether or not it contains a propositional form, the role of Analysis to determine what speech act it may embody? In which case, we would have to admit that there is a statement whenever a number of signs are juxtaposed—or even, perhaps—when there is a single sign. The threshold of the statement is the threshold of the existence of signs. Yet even here, things are not so simple, and the meaning of a term like "the existence of signs" requires elucidation. What does one mean when one says that there are signs, and that it is enough for there to be signs for there to be a statement? What special status should be given to that verb to be?

For it is obvious that statements do not exist in the same sense in which a language (langue) exists, and, with that language, a collection of signs defined by their contrasting characteristics and their rules of use; a language in fact is never given in itself, in its totality; it could only be so in a secondary way, in the oblique form of a description that would take it as its object; the signs that make up its elements are forms that are imposed upon statements and control them from within. If there were no statements, the language (langue) would not exist; but no statement is indispensable for a language to exist (and one can always posit, in place of any statement, another statement that would in no way modify the language). The language exists only as a system for constructing possible statements; but in another respect, it exists only as a (more or less exhaustive) description obtained from a collection of real statements. Language (langue) and statement are not at the same level of existence; and one cannot say that there are statements in the same way as one says that there are languages (langues). But is it enough, then, that the signs of a language constitute a statement, if they were produced (articulated, drawn, made, traced) in one way or another, if they appeared in a moment of time and in a point in space, if the voice that spoke them or the gesture that formed them gave them the dimensions of a material existence? Can the letters of the alphabet written by me haphazardly on to a sheet of paper, as an example of what is not a statement, constitute the lead characters used for printing books—and one cannot deny their materiality, which has space and volume—can these signs, spread out, visible, manipulable, be reasonably regarded as statements?

When looked at more closely, however, these two examples (the lead characters and the signs that I wrote down on the sheet of paper) are seen to be not quite superposable. This pile of printer's characters, which I can hold in my hand,
or the letters marked on the keyboard of a typewriter are not statements: at most they are tools with which one can write statements. On the other hand, what are the letters that I write down haphazardly on to a sheet of paper, just as they come to mind, and to show that they cannot, in their disordered state, constitute a statement? What figure do they form? Are they not a table of letters chosen in a contingent way, the statement of an alphabetical series governed by other laws than those of chance? Similarly, the table of random numbers that statisticians sometimes use is a series of numerical symbols that are not linked together by any syntactical structure; and yet that series is a statement: that of a group of figures obtained by procedures that eliminate everything that might increase the probability of the succeeding issues. Let us look at the example again: the keyboard of a typewriter is not a statement; but the same series of letters, A, Z, E, R, T, listed in a typewriting manual, is the statement of the alphabetical order adopted by French typewriters. So we are presented with a number of negative consequences: a regular linguistic construction is not required in order to form a statement (this statement may be made up of a series possessing a minimal probability); but neither is it enough to have any material effectuation of linguistic elements, any emergence of signs in time and space, for a statement to appear and to begin to exist. The statement exists therefore neither in the same way as a language (langue) (although it is made up of signs that are definable in their individuality only within a natural or artificial linguistic system), nor in the same way as the objects presented to perception (although it is always endowed with a certain materiality, and can always be situated in accordance with spatio-temporal coordinates).

This is not the place to answer the general question of the statement, but the problem can be clarified: the statement is not the same kind of unit as the sentence, the proposition, or the speech act; it cannot be referred therefore to the same criteria; but neither is it the same kind of unit as a material object, with its limits and independence. In its way of being unique (neither entirely linguistic, nor exclusively material), it is indispensable if we want to say whether or not there is a sentence, proposition, or speech act; and whether the sentence is correct (or acceptable, or interpretable), whether the proposition is legitimate and well constructed, whether the speech act fulfills its requirements, and was in fact carried out. We must not seek in the statement a unit that is either long or short, strongly and weakly structured, but one that is caught up, like the others, in a logical, grammatical, locutory nexus. It is not so much one element among others, a division that can be located at a certain level of analysis, as a function that operates vertically in relation to these various units, and which enables one to say of a series of signs whether or not they are present in it. The statement is not therefore a structure (that is, a group of relations between variable elements, thus authorizing a possible infinite number of concrete models); it is a function of existence that properly belongs to signs and on the basis of which one may then decide, through analysis or intuition, whether or not they "make sense," according to what rule they follow one another or are juxtaposed, of what they are the sign, and what sort of act is carried out by their formulation (oral or written). One should not be surprised, then, if one has failed to find structural criteria of unity for the statement; this is because it is not in itself a unit, but a function that cuts across a domain of structures and possible unities, and which reveals them, with concrete contents, in time and space.

It is this function that we must now describe as such, that is, in its actual practice, its conditions, the rules that govern it, and the field in which it operates.

CHAPTER 2
THE ENUNCIATIVE FUNCTION

It is useless therefore to look for the statement among unitary groups of signs. The statement is neither a syntagma, nor a rule of construction, nor a canonic form of succession and permutation; it is that which enables such groups of signs to exist, and enables these rules or forms to become manifest. But although it enables them to exist, it does so in a special way—a way that must not be confused with the existence of signs as elements of a language (langue), or with the
material existence of those marks that occupy a fragment of space or last for a variable length of time. It is this special mode of existence, characteristic of every series of signs, providing it is stated, that we must now examine.

a. So let us take once again the example of those signs made or drawn in a defined materiality, and grouped in a particular way, which may or may not be arbitrary, but which, in any case, is not grammatical: the keyboard of a typewriter, or a handful of printer's characters. All that is required is that the signs be given, that I copy them on to a sheet of paper (in the same order in which they appear, but without producing a word) for a statement to emerge: the statement of the letters of the alphabet in an order that makes the typing of them easier, and the statement of a random group of letters. What has happened, then, that a statement should have been made? What can the second group possess that is not possessed by the first? Reduplication, the fact that it is a copy? Certainly not, since the keyboards of typewriters all copy a certain model and are not, by that very fact, statements. The intervention of a subject? This answer is inadequate for two reasons: it is not enough that the reiterated of a series be due to the initiative of an individual for it to be transformed, by that very fact, into a statement; and, in any case, the problem does not lie in the cause or origin of the reduplication, but in the special relation between the two identical series. The second series is not a statement because and only because a biunivocal relation can be established between each of its elements in the first series (this relation characterizes either the fact of duplication if it is simply a copy, or the exactitude of the statement if one has in fact crossed the threshold of enunciation; but it does not allow us to define this threshold and the very fact of the statement). A series of signs will become a statement on condition that it possesses "something else" (which may be strangely similar to it, and almost identical as in the example chosen), a specific relation that concerns itself—and not its cause, or its elements.

It may be objected that there is nothing enigmatic about this relation; that, on the contrary, it is a very familiar one, which is constantly being analyzed: that, in fact, it concerns the relation of the signifier (signifiant) to the signified (signifié), of the name to what it designates; the relation of the sentence to its meaning; the relation of the proposition to its referent (référent). But I believe that one can show that the relation of the statement to what it states is not superposable on any of these relations.

The statement, even if reduced to a nominal syntagma ("The boat!"), even if it is reduced to a proper noun ("Peter!"), does not have the same relation with what it states as the name with what it designates or signifies. The name or noun is a linguistic element that may occupy different places in grammatical groups: its meaning is defined by its rules of use (whether these concern individuals who may be validly designated by it, or syntactical structures in which it may correctly participate); a noun is defined by its possibility of recurrence. A statement exists outside any possibility of reappearing; and the relation that it possesses with what it states is not identical with a group of rules of use. It is a very special relation: and if in these conditions an identical formulation reappears, with the same words, substantially the same names—in fact, exactly the same sentence—it is not necessarily the same statement.

Nor should the relation between a statement and what it states be confused with the relation between a proposition and its referent. We know that logicians say that a proposition like "The golden mountain is in California" cannot be verified because it has no referent: its negation is therefore neither more nor less true than its affirmation. Should we say similarly that a statement refers to nothing if the proposition, to which it lends existence, has no referent? Rather the reverse. We should say not that the absence of a referent brings with it the absence of a correlate for the statement, but that it is the correlate of the statement—that to which it refers, not only what is said, but also what it speaks of, its "theme"—which makes it possible to say whether or not the proposition has a referent: it alone decides this in a definitive way. Let us suppose in fact that the formulation "The golden mountain is in California" is found not in a geography book, nor in a travel book, but in a novel, or in some fictional
context or other, one could still accord it a value of truth or error (according to whether the imaginary world to which it refers does or does not authorize such a geological and geographical fantasy). We must know to what the statement refers, what is its space of correlations, if we are to say whether a proposition has or has not a referent. "The present king of France is bald" lacks a referent only if one supposes that the statement refers to the world of contemporary historical information. The relation of the proposition to the referent cannot serve as a model or as a law for the relation of the statement to what it states. The latter relation not only does not belong to the same level as the former, but it is anterior to it.

Nor is it superposable to the relation that may exist between a sentence and its meaning. The gap between these two forms of relation appears clearly in the case of two famous sentences that are meaningless, in spite of their perfectly correct grammatical structure (as in the example: "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously"). In fact, to say that a sentence like this is meaningless presupposes that one has already excluded a number of possibilities—that it describes a dream, that it is part of a poetic text, that it is a coded message, that it is spoken by a drug addict—and that one assumes it to be a certain type of statement that must refer, in a very definite way, to some visible reality. The relation of a sentence with its meaning resides within a specific, well-stabilized enunciative relation. Moreover, even if these sentences are taken at an enunciative level at which they are meaningless, they are not, as statements, deprived of correlations: there are those that enable one to say, for example, that ideas are never either colored or colorless, and therefore that the sentence is meaningless (and these correlations concern a level of reality in which ideas are invisible, and in which colors can be seen, etc.); there are also those correlations that validate the sentence in question as a mention of a type of correct syntactical organization that was also meaningless (and these correlations concern the level of the language [langue], with its laws and properties). A sentence cannot be nonsignificant; it refers to something, by virtue of the fact that it is a statement.

How, then, can we define this relation that characterizes the statement as statement—a relation that seems to be implicitly presupposed by the sentence or the proposition, and which is anterior to it? How can we disentangle it from those relations of meaning or those values of truth, with which it is usually confused? Any statement, as simple a statement as one can imagine, does not have as its correlate an individual or a particular object that is designated by this or that word in the sentence: in the case of a statement like "The golden mountain is in California," the correlate is not the formation, real or imaginary, possible or absurd, that is designated by the nominal syntagma that serves as the subject. But nor is the correlate of the statement a state of things or a relation capable of verifying the proposition (in the example chosen this would be the spatial inclusion of a particular mountain in a particular region). On the other hand, what might be defined as the correlate of the statement is a group of domains in which such object may appear and to which such relations may be assigned: it would, for example, be a domain of material objects possessing a certain number of observable physical properties, relations of perceptible size—or, on the contrary, it would be a domain of fictitious objects, endowed with arbitrary properties (even if they have a certain constancy and a certain coherence), without any authority of experimental or perceptive verification; it would be a domain of spatial and geographical localizations, with coordinates, distances, relations of proximity and of inclusion—or, on the contrary, a domain of symbolic appurtenances and secret kinships; it would be a domain of objects that exist at the same moment and on the same time scale as the statement is formulated, or it would be a domain of objects that belongs to a quite different present—that indicated and constituted by the statement itself, and not that to which the statement also belongs. A statement is not confronted (face to face, as it were) by a correlate—or the absence of a correlate—as a proposition has (or has not) a referent, or as a proper noun designates someone (or no one). It is linked rather to a "referential" that is made up of "things," "facts," "realities," or "beings," but of laws of possibility, rules of existence for the objects that are named, designated, or described.
within it, and for the relations that are affirmed or denied in it. The referential of the statement forms the place, the condition, the field of emergence, the authority to differentiate between individuals or objects, states of things and relations that are brought into play by the statement itself; it defines the possibilities of appearance and delimitation of that which gives meaning to the sentence, a value as truth to the proposition. It is this group that characterizes the enunciative level of the formulation, in contrast to its grammatical and logical levels: through the relation with these various domains of possibility the statement makes of a syntagma, or a series of symbols, a sentence to which one may or may not ascribe a meaning, a proposition that may or may not be accorded a value as truth.

One can see in any case that the description of this enunciative level can be performed neither by a formal analysis, nor by a semantic investigation, nor by verification, but by the analysis of the relations between the statement and the spaces of differentiation, in which the statement itself reveals the differences.

b. A statement also differs from any series of linguistic elements by virtue of the fact that it possesses a particular relation with a subject. We must now define the nature of this relation, and, above all, distinguish it from other relations with which it might be confused.

We must not, in fact, reduce the subject of the statement to the first-person grammatical elements that are present within the sentence. First because the subject of the sentence is not within the linguistic syntagma; secondly because a statement that does not involve a first person nevertheless has a subject; lastly and above all, all statements that have a fixed grammatical form (whether in the first or second person) do not have the same type of relation with the subject of the statement. It is easy to see that this relation is not the same in a statement of the type “Night is falling,” and “Every effect has a cause”; while in the case of a statement of the type “Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure” (“For a long time I used to go to bed early”), the relation to the enunciating subject is not the same if one hears it spoken in the course of a conversation, and if one reads it at the beginning of Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*.

Is not this subject exterior to the sentence quite simply the individual who spoke or wrote those words? As we know, there can be no signs without someone, or at least something, to emit them. For a series of signs to exist, there must—in accordance with the system of causality—be an “author” or a transmitting authority. But this “author” is not identical with the subject of the statement; and the relation of production that he has with the formulation is not superposable to the relation that unites the enunciating subject and what he states. Let us ignore the oversimple case of a group of signs that have been materially fashioned or traced: their production implies an author even though there is neither a statement nor a subject of a statement. One might also mention, by way of showing the dissociation between the transmitter of signs and the subject of a statement, the case of a text read by a third person, or that of an actor speaking his part. But these are extreme cases. Generally speaking, it would seem, at first sight at least, that the subject of the statement is precisely he who has produced the various elements, with the intention of conveying meaning. Yet things are not so simple. In a novel, we know that the author of the formulation is that real individual whose name appears on the title page of the book (we are still faced with the problem of the dialogue, and sentences purporting to express the thoughts of a character; we are still faced with the problem of texts published under a pseudonym: and we know all the difficulties that these duplications raise for practitioners of interpretative analysis when they wish to relate these formulations, *en bloc*, to the author of the text, to what he wanted to say, to what he thought, in short, to that great silent, hidden, uniform discourse on which they build that whole pyramid of different levels); but, even apart from those authorities of formulation that are not identical with the individual/author, the statements of the novel do not have the same subject when they provide, as if from the outside, the historical and spatial setting of the story, when they describe things as they would be seen by an anonymous, invisible, neutral individual who moves magi-
cally among the characters of the novel, or when they provide, as it by an immediate, internal decipherment, the verbal version of what is silently experienced by a character. Although the author is the same in each case, although he attributes them to no one other than himself, although he does not invent a supplementary link between what he is himself and the text that one is reading, these statements do not presuppose the same characteristics for the enunciating subject; they do not imply the same relation between this subject and what is being stated.

It might be said that the often quoted example of the fictional text has no conclusive validity; or rather that it questions the very essence of literature and not the status of the subject of statements in general. According to this view, it is in the nature of literature that the author should appear to be absent, conceal himself within it, delegate his authority, or divide himself up; and one should not draw a general conclusion from this dissociation that the subject of the statement is distinct in everything—in nature, status, function, and identity—from the author of the formulation. Yet this gap is not confined to literature alone. It is absolutely general in so far as the subject of the statement is a particular function but is not necessarily the same from one statement to another; in so far as it is an empty function, that can be filled by virtually any individual when he formulates the statement; and in so far as one and the same individual may occupy in turn, in the same series of statements, different positions, and assume the role of different subjects. Take the example of a mathematical treatise. In the sentence in the preface in which one explains why this treatise was written, in what circumstances, in response to what unsolved problems, or with what pedagogical aim in view, using what methods, after what attempts and failures the position of the enunciative subject can be occupied only by the author, or authors, of the formulation: the conditions of individualization of the subject are in fact very strict, very numerous, and authorize in this case only one possible subject. On the other hand, if in the main body of the treatise, one meets a proposition like “Two quantities equal to a third quantity are equal to each other,” the subject of the statement is the absolutely neutral position, indifferent to time, space, and circumstances, identical in any linguistic system, and in any code of writing or symbolization, that any individual may occupy when affirming such a proposition. Moreover, sentences like “We have already shown that . . .” necessarily involve statements of precise contextual conditions that were not implied by the preceding formulation: the position is then fixed within a domain constituted by a finite group of statements; it is localized in a series of enunciative events that must already have occurred; it is established in a demonstrative time whose earlier stages are never lost, and which do not need therefore to be begun again and repeated identically to be made present once more (a mention is enough to reactivate them in their original validity); it is determined by the prior existence of a number of effective operations that need not have been performed by one and the same individual (he who is speaking now), but which rightfully belong to the enunciating subject, which are at his disposal, and of which he may avail himself when necessary. The subject of such a statement will be defined by these requisites and possibilities taken together; and he will not be described as an individual who has really carried out certain operations, who lives in an unbroken, never forgotten time, who has interiorized, in the horizon of his consciousness, a whole group of true propositions, and who retains, in the living present of his thought, their potential reappearance (this is merely, in the case of individuals, the psychological, “lived” aspect of their position as enunciating subjects).

Similarly, one might describe the specific position of the enunciating subject in sentences like “I call straight any series of points that . . .” or “Let there be a finite series of any elements,” in each case the position of the subject is linked to the existence of an operation that is both determined and present; in each case, the subject of the statement is also the subject of the operation (he who establishes the definition of a straight line is also he who states it; he who posits the existence of a finite series is also, and at the same time, he who states it); and in each case, the
subject links, by means of this operation and the statement in which it is embodied his future statements and operations (as an enunciating subject, he accepts this statement as his own law). There is a difference however: in the first case, what is stated is a convention of language (language)—of that language that the enunciating subject must use, and within which he is defined: the enunciating subject and what is stated are therefore at the same level (whereas for a formal analysis a statement like this one implies the difference of level proper to metalanguage); in the second case, on the other hand, the enunciating subject brings into existence outside himself an object that belongs to a previously defined domain, whose laws of possibility have already been articulated, and whose characteristics precede the enunciation that posits it. We saw above that the position of the enunciating subject is not always identical in the affirmation of a true proposition; we now see that it is also not identical when an operation is carried out within the statement itself.

So the subject of the statement should not be regarded as identical with the author of the formulation—either in substance, or in function. He is not in fact the cause, origin, or starting point of the phenomenon of the written or spoken articulation of a sentence; nor is it that meaningful intention which, silently anticipating words, orders them like the visible body of its intuition; it is not the constant motionless, unchanging focus of a series of operations that are manifested, in turn, on the surface of discourse through the statements. It is a particular, vacant place that may in fact be filled by different individuals; but, instead of being defined once and for all, and maintaining itself as such throughout a text, a book, or an œuvre, this place varies—or rather it is variable enough to be able either to persevere, unchanging, through several sentences, or to alter with each one. It is a dimension that characterizes a whole formulation qua statement. It is one of the characteristics proper to the enunciative function and enables one to describe it. If a proposition, a sentence, a group of signs can be called "statement," it is not therefore because, one day, someone happened to speak them or put them into some concrete form of writing; it is because the position of the subject can be assigned. To describe a formulation qua statement does not consist in analyzing the relations between the author and what he says (or wanted to say, or said without wanting to); but in determining what position can and must be occupied by any individual if he is to be the subject of it.

c. The third characteristic of the enunciative function: it cannot operate without the existence of an associated domain. This makes the statement something other, something more, than a mere collection of signs, which, in order to exist, need only a material base—a writing surface, sound, malleable material, the hollowed incision of a trace. But this also, and above all, distinguishes it from the sentence and the proposition.

Take a group of words or symbols. In order to decide whether they constitute a grammatical unit like the sentence or a logical unit like the proposition, it is necessary, and enough, to determine the rules according to which it was constructed. “Peter arrived yesterday” forms a sentence, but “Yesterday arrived Peter” does not; \( A + B = C + D \) constitutes a proposition, but \( ABC + = D \) does not. Only an examination of the elements and of their distribution, in reference to the system—natural or artificial of the language (langue) enables us to distinguish between what is and what is not a proposition, between what is a sentence and what is merely an accumulation of words. Moreover, this examination is enough to determine what type of grammatical structure the sentence in question belongs (affirmative sentence, in the past tense containing a nominal subject, etc.), or to what type of proposition the series of signs in question belongs (an equivalence between two additions). One can even conceive of a sentence or a proposition that is "self-determining," that requires no other sentence or proposition to serve as a context, no other associated sentences or propositions: that such a sentence or proposition would, in such conditions, be useless and unusable, does not mean that one would not be able to recognize it even in its singularity.

One could no doubt make a number of objections to this. One might say, for example, that a proposition can be established and individualized as such only if one knows the system of axiom.
that it obeys; do not those definitions, those rules, those conventions of writing form an associated field inseparable from the proposition (similarly, the rules of grammar, implicitly at work in the competence of the subject, are necessary if one is to recognize a sentence, and a sentence of a certain type)? It should be noted however that this group—actual or potential—does not belong to the same level as the proposition or the sentence: but that it has a bearing on their possible elements, succession, and distribution. The group is not associated with them; it is presupposed by them. One might also object that many (nontautological) propositions cannot be verified on the basis of their rules of construction alone, and that recourse to the referent is needed if one is to decide whether they are true or false: but true or false, a proposition remains a proposition, and it is not recourse to the referent that decides whether or not it is a proposition. The same goes for sentences; in many cases, they can yield their meaning only in relation to the context (whether they contain “deictic” elements that refer to a concrete situation; or make use of first- or second-person pronouns that designate the speaking subject and his interlocutors; or make use of pronominal elements or connecting particles that refer to earlier or later sentences); but the fact that its meaning cannot be completed does not prevent the sentence from being grammatically complete and autonomous. Certainly, one is not very sure what a group of words like “I’ll tell you that tomorrow” means; in any case, one can neither date this “tomorrow,” nor name the interlocutors, nor guess what is to be said. Nevertheless, it is a perfectly delimited sentence, obeying the rules of construction of the language (langue) in which it is written. Lastly one might object that, without a context, it is sometimes difficult to define the structure of a sentence (I shall never know if he is dead” may be construed: “I shall never know whether or not he is dead” or “I shall never be informed of his death when this event occurs”). But this ambiguity is perfectly definable, simultaneous possibilities can be posited that belong to the structure proper of the sentence. Generally speaking, one can say that a sentence or a proposition—even when isolated, even divorced from the natural context that could throw light on to its meaning, even freed or cut off from all the elements to which, implicitly or not, it refers—always remains a sentence or a proposition and can always be recognized as such.

On the other hand, the enunciative function and this shows that it is not simply a construction of previously existing elements—cannot operate on a sentence or proposition in isolation. It is not enough to say a sentence, it is not even enough to say it in a particular relation to a field of objects or in a particular relation to a subject, for a statement to exist: it must be related to a whole adjacent field. Or rather, since this is not some additional relation that is superimposed on the others, one cannot say a sentence, one cannot transform it into a statement, unless a collateral space is brought into operation. A statement always has borders populated by other statements. These borders are not what is usually meant by “context”—real or verbal—that is, all the situational or linguistic elements, taken together, that motivate a formulation and determine its meaning. They are distinct from such a “context” precisely in so far as they make it possible: the contextual relation between one sentence and those before and after it is not the same in the case of a novel and in that of a treatise in physics; the contextual relation between a formulation and the objective environment is not the same in a conversation and in the account of an experiment. It is against the background of a more general relation between the formulations, against the background of a whole verbal network, that the effect of context may be determined. Nor are these borders identical with the various texts and sentences that the subject may be conscious of when he speaks; again they are more extensive than such a psychological setting; and to a certain extent they determine that setting, for according to the position, status, and role of one formulation among others—according to whether it belongs to the field of literature or as an isolated remark, whether it is part of a narrative or the account of a demonstration—the way in which other statements are present in the mind of the subject will not be the same: neither the same level, nor the same form of linguistic experience, of verbal memory, of reference to what has already been
said, is operating in each case. The psychological halo of a formulation is controlled from afar by the arrangement of the enunciative field.

The associated field that turns a sentence or a series of signs into a statement, and which provides them with a particular context, a specific representative content, forms a complex web. It is made up first of all by the series of other formulations within which the statement appears and forms one element (the network of spoken formulations that make up a conversation, the architecture of a demonstration, bound on the one side by its premises and on the other by its conclusion, the series of affirmations that make up a narrative). The associated field is also made up of all the formulations to which the statement refers (implicitly or not), either by repairing them, modifying them, or adapting them, or by opposing them, or by commenting on them; there can be no statement that in one way or another does not reactivate others (ritual elements in a narrative; previously accepted propositions in a demonstration; conventional sentences in a conversation). The associated field is also made up of all the formulations who subsequent possibility is determined by the statement, and which may follow the statement as its consequence, its natural successor, or its conversational retort (an order does not open up the same enunciative possibilities as the propositions of an axiomatic or the beginning of a narrative). Lastly, the associated field is made up of all the formulations whose status the statement in question shares, among which it takes its place without regard to linear order, with which it will fade away, or with which, on the contrary, it will be valued, preserved, sacralized, and offered, as a possible object, to a future discourse (a statement is not dissociable from the status that it may receive as "literature," or as an unimportant remark that is barely worthy of being forgotten, or as a scientific truth valid for all time, or as prophetic words, etc.). Generally speaking, one can say that a sequence of linguistic elements is a statement only if it is immersed in an enunciative field, in which it then appears as a unique element.

The statement is not the direct projection on to the plane of language (langage) of a particular situation or a group of representations. It is not simply the manipulation by a speaking subject of a number of elements and linguistic rules. At the very outset, from the very root, the statement is divided up into an enunciative field in which it has a place and a status, which arranges for its possible relations with the past, and which opens up for it a possible future. Every statement is specified in this way: there is no statement in general, no free, neutral, independent statement; but a statement always belongs to a series or a whole, always plays a role among other statements, deriving support from them and distinguishing itself from them: it is always part of a network of statements, in which it has a role, however minimal it may be, to play. Whereas grammatical construction needs only elements and rules in order to operate; whereas one might just conceive of a language (langue)—an artificial one, of course whose only purpose is the construction of a single sentence; whereas the alphabet, the rules of construction and transformation of a formal system being given, one can perfectly well define the first proposition of this language (langage), the same cannot be said of the statement. There is no statement that does not presuppose others; there is no statement that is not surrounded by a field of coexistences, effects of series and succession, a distribution of functions and roles. If one can speak of a statement, it is because a sentence (a proposition) figures at a definite point, with a specific position, in an enunciative network that extends beyond it.

Against this background of enunciative coexistence, there stand out, at an autonomous and describable level, the grammatical relations between sentences, the logical relations between propositions, the metalinguistic relations between an object language and one that defines the rules, the rhetorical relations between groups (or elements) of sentences. It is permissible, of course, to analyze all these relations without taking as one's theme the enunciative field itself, that is, the domain of coexistence in which the enunciative function operates. But they can exist and are analyzable only to the extent that these sentences have been "enunciated"; in other words to the extent that they are deployed in an enunciative field that allows them to follow one another, order one another, coexist with one an-
other, and play roles in relation to one another. Far from being the principle of individualization of groups of "signifiers" (the meaningful "atom," the minimum on the basis of which there is meaning), the statement is that which situates these meaningful units in a space in which they breed and multiply.

d. Lastly, for a sequence of linguistic elements to be regarded and analyzed as a statement, it must fulfill a fourth condition: it must have a material existence. Could one speak of a statement if a voice had not articulated it, if a surface did not bear its signs, if it had not become embodied in a sense-perceptible element, and if it had not left some trace—if only for an instant—in someone's memory or in some space? Could one speak of a statement if a voice had not articulated it, if a surface did not bear its signs, if it had not become embodied in a sense-perceptible element, and if it had not left some trace—if only for an instant—in someone's memory or in some space? Could one speak of a statement if a voice had not articulated it, if a surface did not bear its signs, if it had not become embodied in a sense-perceptible element, and if it had not left some trace—if only for an instant—in someone's memory or in some space? Could one speak of a statement if a voice had not articulated it, if a surface did not bear its signs, if it had not become embodied in a sense-perceptible element, and if it had not left some trace—if only for an instant—in someone's memory or in some space?

Of course, it is tempting to say that if a statement is characterized, partly at least, by its material status, and if its identity is susceptible to a modification of that status, the same can be said of sentences and propositions: the materiality of signs is not, in fact, entirely indifferent to grammar or even to logic. We know what theoretical problems are presented to logic by the material constancy of the symbols used (how to define the identity of a symbol through the various substances in which it may be embodied and the variations of form that it can tolerate? How to recognize it and make certain that it is the same, if it must be defined as "a concrete physical form"?); we know too what problems are presented to logic by the very notion of a series of symbols (what do "precede" and "follow" mean? Come "before" and "after"? In what space is such an order situated?). Much better known still are the relations of materiality and the language (langue)—the role of writing and the alphabet, the fact that neither the same syntax, nor the same vocabulary operate in a written text and in a conversation, in a newspaper and in a book, in a letter and on a poster; moreover, there are series of words that form perfectly individualized and acceptable sentences if they feature as newspaper headlines, and which, nevertheless, in the course of a conversation, could never stand as meaningful sentences. Yet the materiality plays a much more important role in the statement: it is not simply a principle of variation, a modification of the criteria of recognition, or a determination of linguistic subgroups. It is constitutive of the statement itself: a statement must have a substance, a support, a place, and a date. And when these requisites change, it too changes identity. At this point, a host of questions arises: Does the same sentence repeated very loudly and very softly form one or more statements? When one learns a text by heart, does each recitation constitute a statement or should one regard it as a repetition of the same statement? A sentence is faithfully translated into a foreign language: two distinct statements or one? And in a collective recitation—a prayer or a lesson—how many statements are produced? How can one establish the identity of the statement through all these various forms, repetitions, and transcriptions?

The problem is no doubt obscured by the fact that there is often a confusion of different levels. To begin with, we must set aside the multiplicity of enunciations. We will say that an enunciation takes place whenever a group of signs is emitted. Each of these articulations has its spatio-temporal individuality. Two people may say the same thing at the same time, but since there are two people there will be two distinct enunciations. The same person may repeat the same sentence several times; this will produce the same number of enunciations distinct in time. The enunciation
is an unrepeateable event; it has a situated and dated uniqueness that is irreducible. Yet this uniqueness allows of a number of constants—grammatical, semantic, logical—by which one can, by neutralizing the moment of enunciation and the coordinates that individualize it, recognize the general form of a sentence, a meaning, a proposition. The time and place of the enunciation, and the material support that it uses, then become, very largely at least, indifferent: and what stands out is a form that is endlessly repeatable, and which may give rise to the most dispersed enunciations. But the statement itself cannot be reduced to this pure event of enunciation, for, despite its materiality, it cannot be repeated: it would not be difficult to say that the same sentence spoken by two people in slightly different circumstances constitutes only one statement. And yet the statement cannot be reduced to a grammatical or logical form because, to a greater degree than that form, and in a different way, it is susceptible to differences of material, substance, time, and place. What, then, is that materiality proper to the statement, and which permits certain special types of repetition? How is it that one can speak of the same statement when there are several distinct enunciations of it, yet must speak of several statements when one can recognize identical forms, structures, rules of construction, and intentions? What, then, is this rule of repeatable materiality that characterizes the statement?

This may not be a perceptible, qualitative materiality, expressed in the form of color, sound, or solidity, and divided up by the same spatio-temporal observation as the perceptual space. Let us take a very simple example: a text reproduced several times, the successive editions of a book, or, better still, the different copies of the same printing, do not give rise to the same number of distinct statements: in all the editions of *Les Fleurs du mal* (variants and rejected versions apart), we find the same set of statements; yet neither the characters, nor the ink, nor the paper, nor even the placing of the text and the positions of the signs, are the same: the whole texture of the materiality has changed. But in this case these "mall" differences are not important enough to alter the identity of the statement and to bring about another: they are all neutralized in the general element—material, of course, but also institutional and economic—of the "book": a book, however many copies or editions are made of it, however many different substances it may use, is a locus and exact equivalence for the statements—for them it is an authority that permits repetition without any change of identity. We see from this first example that the materiality of the statement is not defined by the space occupied or the date of its formulation; but rather by its status as a thing or object. A status that is never definitive, but modifiable, relative, and always susceptible of being questioned: we know for example that, for literary historians, the edition of a book published with the agreement of the author does not have the same status as posthumous editions, that the statements in it have a unique value, that they are not one of the manifestations of one and the same whole, that they are that by relation to which there is and must be repetition. Similarly, between the text of a Constitution, or a will, or a religious revelation, and all the manuscripts or printed copies that reproduce them exactly, with the same writing, in the same characters, and on similar substances, one cannot say that there is an equivalence: on the one hand there are the statements themselves, and on the other their reproduction. The statement cannot be identified with a fragment of matter; but its identity varies with a complex set of material institutions.

For a statement may be the same, whether written on a sheet of paper or published in a book; it may be the same spoken, printed on a poster, or reproduced on a tape recorder; on the other hand, when a novelist speaks a sentence in daily life, then reproduces the same sentence in the manuscript that he is writing, attributing it to one of his characters, or even allowing it to be spoken by that anonymous voice that passes for that of the author, one cannot say that it is the same statement in each case. The rule of materiality that statements necessarily obey is therefore of the order of the institution rather than of the spatio-temporal localization; it defines possibilities of reinscription and transcription (but also thresholds and limits), rather than limited and perishable individualities.

The identity of a statement is subjected to a
second group of conditions and limits; those that are imposed by all the other statements among which it figures, by the domain in which it can be used or applied, by the role and functions that it can perform. The affirmation that the earth is round or that species evolve does not constitute the same statement before and after Copernicus, before and after Darwin; it is not, for such simple formulations, that the meaning of the words has changed; what changed was the relation of these affirmations to other propositions, their conditions of use and reinvestment, the field of experience, of possible verifications, of problems to be resolved, to which they can be referred. The sentence “dreams fulfill desires” may have been repeated throughout the centuries; it is not the same statement in Plato and in Freud. The schemata of use, the rules of application, the constellations in which they can play a part, their strategic potentials constitute for statements a field of stabilization that makes it possible, despite all the differences of enunciation, to repeat them in their identity; but this same field may also, beneath the most manifest semantic, grammatical, or formal identities, define a threshold beyond which there can be no further equivalence, and the appearance of a new statement must be recognized. But it is possible, no doubt, to go further: there are cases in which one may consider that there is only one statement, even though the words, the syntax, and the language (langue) itself are not identical. Such cases are a speech and its simultaneous translation; a scientific text in English and its French version; a notice printed in three columns in three different languages: there are not, in such cases, the same number of statements as there are languages used, but a single group of statements in different linguistic forms. Better still: a given piece of information may be retransmitted with other words, with a simplified syntax, or in an agreed code; if the information content and the uses to which it could be put are the same, one can say that it is the same statement in each case.

Here too, we are concerned not with a criterion of individualization for the statement, but rather with its principle of variation: it is sometimes more diverse than the structure of the sentence (and its identity is then finer, more fragile, more easily modifiable than that of a semantic or grammatical whole), sometimes more constant than that structure (and its identity is then broader, more stable, more susceptible to variations). Moreover, not only can this identity of the statement not be situated once and for all in relation to that of the sentence, but it is itself relative and oscillates according to the use that is made of the statement and the way in which it is handled. When one uses a statement in such a way as to reveal its grammatical structure, its rhetorical configuration, or the connotations that it may carry, it is obvious that one cannot regard it as being identical in its original language (langue) and in a translation. On the other hand, if it is intended as part of a procedure of experimental verification, then text and translation constitute a single enunciative whole. Or again, at a certain scale of macro-history, one may consider that an affirmation like “species evolve” forms the same statement in Darwin and in Simpson; at a finer level, and considering more limited fields of use (“neo-Darwinism” as opposed to the Darwinian system itself), we are presented with two different statements. The constancy of the statement, the preservation of its identity through the unique events of the enunciations, its duplications through the identity of the forms, constitute the function of the field of use in which it is placed.

The statement, then, must not be treated as an event that occurred in a particular time and place, and that the most one can do is recall it—and celebrate it from afar off—in an act of memory. But neither is it an ideal form that can be actualized in any body, at any time, in any circumstances, and in any material conditions. Too repeatable to be entirely identifiable with the spatio-temporal coordinates of its birth (it is more than the place and date of its appearance), too bound up with what surrounds it and supports it to be as free as a pure form (it is more than a law of construction governing a group of elements), it is endowed with a certain modifiable heaviness, a weight relative to the field in which it is placed, a constancy that allows of various uses, a temporal permanence that does not have the inertia of a mere trace or mark, and which does not sleep on its own past. Whereas an enunciation may be begun again or re-evoked, and a
(linguistic or logical) form may be *reactionalized*, the statement may be *repeated*—but always in strict conditions.

This repeatable materiality that characterizes the enunciative function reveals the statement as a specific and paradoxical object, but also as one of those objects that men produce, manipulate, use, transform, exchange, combine, decompose and recompose, and possibly destroy. Instead of being something said once and for all—and lost in the past like the result of a battle, a geological catastrophe, or the death of a king—the statement, as it emerges in its materiality, appears with a status, enters various networks and various fields of use, is subjected to transfers or modifications, is integrated into operations and strategies in which its identity is maintained or effaced. Thus the statement circulates, is used, disappears, allows or prevents the realization of a desire, serves or resists various interests, participates in challenge and struggle, and becomes a theme of appropriation or rivalry.

From *The Order of Discourse*

I wish I could have slipped surreptitiously into this discourse which I must present today, and into the ones I shall have to give here, perhaps for many years to come. I should have preferred to be enveloped by speech, and carried away well beyond all possible beginnings, rather than have to begin it myself. I should have preferred to become aware that a nameless voice was already speaking long before me, so that I should only have needed to join in, to continue the sentence it had started and lodge myself, without really being noticed, in its interstices, as if it had signalled to me by pausing, for an instant, in suspense. Thus there would be no beginning, and instead of being the one from whom discourse proceeded, I should be at the mercy of its chance unfolding, a slender gap, the point of its possible disappearance.

I should have liked there to be a voice behind me which had begun to speak a very long time before, doubling in advance everything I am going to say, a voice which would say: "You must go on, I can't go on, you must go on, I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any until they find me, until they say me, strange pain, strange sin, you must go on, perhaps it's done already, perhaps they have said me already, perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens on my story, that would surprise me, if it opens."'

I think a good many people have a similar desire to be freed from the obligation to begin, a similar desire to be on the other side of discourse from the outset, without having to consider from the outside what might be strange, frightening, and perhaps maleficient about it. To this very common wish, the institution's reply is ironic, since it solemnizes beginnings, surrounds them with a circle of attention and silence, and imposes ritualized forms on them, as if to make them more easily recognizable from a distance.

Desire says: "I should not like to have to enter this risky order of discourse; I should not like to be involved in its peremptoriness and decisiveness; I should like it to be all around me like a calm, deep transparence, infinitely open, where others would fit in with my expectations, and from which truths would emerge one by one; I should only have to let myself be carried, within it and by it, like a happy wreck." The institution replies: "You should not be afraid of beginnings; we are all here in order to show you that discourse belongs to the order of laws, that we have long been looking after its appearances; that a place has been made ready for it, a place which honors it but disarms it; and that if discourse may

Translated by Ian McLeod.

'Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, in *Three Novels*.'

sometimes have some power, nevertheless it is from us and us alone that it gets it."

But perhaps this institution and this desire are nothing but two contrary replies to the same anxiety: anxiety about what discourse is in its material reality as a thing pronounced or written; anxiety about this transitory existence which admittedly is destined to be effaced, but according to a time scale which is not ours; anxiety at feeling beneath this activity (despite its grayness and ordinariness) powers and dangers that are hard to imagine; anxiety at suspecting the subterfuges, vicissitudes, injuries, dominations and enslavements, through so many words even though long usage has worn away their roughness.

What, then, is so perilous in the fact that people speak, and that their discourse proliferates to infinity? Where is the danger in that?

II

Here is the hypothesis which I would like to put forward tonight in order to fix the terrain—or perhaps the very provisional theater—of the work I am doing: that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality.

In a society like ours, the procedures of exclusion are well known. The most obvious and familiar is the prohibition. We know quite well that we do not have the right to say everything, that we cannot speak of just anything in any circumstances whatever, and that not everyone has the right to speak of anything whatever. In the taboo on the object of speech, and the ritual of the circumstances of speech, and the privileged or exclusive right of the speaking subject, we have the play of three types of prohibition which intersect, reinforce, or compensate for each other, forming a complex grid which changes constantly. I will merely note that at the present time the regions where the grid is tightest, where the black squares are most numerous, are those of sexuality and politics; as if discourse far from being that transparent or neutral element in which sexuality is disarmed and politics pacified, is in fact one of the places where sexuality and politics exercise in a privileged way some of their most formidable powers. It does not matter that discourse appears to be of little account, because the prohibitions that surround it very soon reveal its link with desire and with power. There is nothing surprising about that, since, as psychoanalysis has shown, discourse is not simply that which manifests (or hides) desire—it is also the object of desire; and since, as history constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized.

There exists in our society another principle of exclusion, not another prohibition but a division and a rejection. I refer to the opposition between reason and madness. Since the depths of the Middle Ages, the madman has been the one whose discourse cannot have the same currency as others. His word may be considered null and void, having neither truth nor importance, worthless as evidence in law, inadmissible in the authentification of deeds or contracts, incapable even of bringing about the transubstantiation of bread into body at Mass. On the other hand, strange powers not held by any other may be attributed to the madman's speech: the power of uttering a hidden truth, of telling the future, of seeing in all naiveté what the others' wisdom cannot perceive. It is curious to note that for centuries in Europe the speech of the madman was either not heard at all or else taken for the word of truth. It either fell into the void, being rejected as soon as it was proffered, or else people deciphered in it a rationality, naive or crude, which they regarded as more rational than that of the sane. In any event, whether excluded, or secretly invested with reason, the madman's speech, strictly, did not exist. It was through his words that his madness was recognized; they were the place where the division between reason and madness was exercised, but they were never recorded or listened to. No doctor before the end of the eighteenth century had ever thought of finding out what was said, or how and why it was said, in this speech which nonetheless determined the difference. This whole immense discourse of the madman was
taken for mere noise, and he was only symbolically allowed to speak, in the theater, where he would step forward, disarmed and reconciled, because there he played the role of truth in a mask.

You will tell me that all this is finished today or is coming to an end; that the madman's speech is no longer on the other side of the divide: that it is no longer null and void; on the contrary, it puts us on the alert; that we now look for a meaning in it, for the outline or the ruins of some oeuvre; and that we have even gone so far as to come across this speech of madness in what we articulate ourselves, in that slight stumbling by which we lose track of what we are saying. But all this attention to the speech of madness does not prove that the old division is no longer operative. You have only to think of the whole framework of knowledge through which we decipher that speech, and of the whole network of institutions which permit someone—a doctor or a psychoanalyst—to listen to it, and which at the same time permit the patient to bring along his poor words or, in desperation, to withhold them. You have only to think of all this to become suspicious that the division, far from being effaced, is working differently along other lines, through new institutions, and with effects that are not at all the same. And even if the doctor's role were only that of lending an ear to a speech that is free at last, he still does this listening in the context of the same division. He is listening to a discourse which is invested with desire, and which—for its greater exaltation or its greater anguish—thinks it is loaded with terrible powers. If the silence of reason is required for the curing of monsters, it is enough for that silence to be on the alert, and it is in this that the division remains.

It is perhaps risky to consider the opposition between true and false as a third system of exclusion, along with those just mentioned. How could one reasonably compare the constraint of truth with divisions like those, which are arbitrary to start with or which at least are organized around historical contingencies; which are not only modifiable but in perpetual displacement; which are supported by a whole system of institutions which impose them and renew them; and which act in a constraining and sometimes violent way?

Certainly, when viewed from the level of a proposition, on the inside of a discourse, the division between true and false is neither arbitrary nor modifiable nor institutional nor violent. But when we view things on a different scale, when we ask the question of what this will to truth has been and constantly is, across our discourses, this will to truth which has crossed so many centuries of our history; what is, in its very general form the type of division which governs our will to know (notre volonté de savoir), then what we see taking shape is perhaps something like a system of exclusion, a historical, modifiable, and institutionally constraining system.

There is no doubt that this division is historically constituted. For the Greek poets of the sixth century B.C., the true discourse (in the strong and valorized sense of the word), the discourse which inspired respect and terror, and to which one had to submit because it ruled, was the one pronounced by men who spoke as of right and according to the required ritual; the discourse which dispensed justice and gave everyone his share; the discourse which in prophesying the future not only announced what was going to happen but helped to make it happen, carrying men's minds along with it and thus weaving itself into the fabric of destiny. Yet already a century later the highest truth no longer resided in what discourse was or did, but in what it said: a day came when truth was displaced from the ritualized, efficacious, and just act of enunciation, towards the utterance itself, its meaning, its form, its object, its relation to its reference. Between Hesiod and Plato a certain division was established, separating true discourse from false discourse: a new division because henceforth the true discourse is no longer precious and desirable, since it is no longer the one linked to the exercise of power. The sophist is banished.

This historical division probably gave our will to know its general form. However, it has never stopped shifting: sometimes the great mutations in scientific thought can perhaps be read as the consequences of a discovery, but they can also be read as the appearance of new forms in the will to truth. There is doubtless a will to truth in the nineteenth century which differs from the will to know characteristic of Classical culture in the forms it deploys, in the domains of objects to
which it addresses itself, and in the techniques on
which it is based. To go back a little further: at
the turn of the sixteenth century (and particularly
in England), there appeared a will to know
which, anticipating its actual contents, sketched
out schemas of possible, observable, measurable,
classifiable objects; a will to know which im-
posed on the knowing subject, and in some sense
prior to all experience, a certain position, a cer-
tain gaze and a certain function (to see rather than
to read, to verify rather than to make comment-
taries on); a will to know which was prescribed
(but in a more general manner than by any spe-
cific instrument) by the technical level where
knowledges had to be invested in order to be ver-
ifiable and useful. It was just as if, starting from
the great Platonic division, the will to truth had
its own history, which is not that of constrai-
ning truths: the history of the range of objects to be
known, of the functions and positions of the
knowing subject, of the material, technical, and
instrumental investments of knowledge.

This will to truth, like the other systems of ex-
clusion, rests on an institutional support: it is
both reinforced and renewed by whole strata of
practices, such as pedagogy, of course; and the
system of books, publishing, libraries; learned
societies in the past and laboratories now. But it
is also renewed, no doubt more profoundly, by
the way in which knowledge is put to work, val-
orized, distributed, and in a sense attributed, in a
society. Let us recall at this point, and only sym-
bolically, the old Greek principle: though arith-
metic may well be the concern of democratic
cities, because it teaches about the relations of
equality, geometry alone must be taught in oli-
garchies, since it demonstrates the proportions
within inequality.

Finally, I believe that this will to truth — lean-
ing in this way on a support and an institutional
distribution — tends to exert a sort of pressure
and something like a power of constraint (I am
still speaking of our own society) on other dis-
courses. I am thinking of the way in which for
centuries Western literature sought to ground it-
self on the natural, the "vraisemblable," on sin-
cerity, on science as well — in short, on "true” dis-
course. I am thinking likewise of the manner in
which economic practices, codified as precepts or
recipes and ultimately as morality, have sought
since the sixteenth century to ground themselves,
rationalize themselves, and justify themselves in
a theory of wealth and production. I am also
thinking of the way in which a body as prescrip-
tive as the penal system sought its bases or its
justification, at first of course in a theory of jus-
tice, then, since the nineteenth century, in a socio-
logical, psychological, medical, and psychiatric
knowledge: it is as if even the word of the law
could no longer be authorized, in our society, ex-
cept by a discourse of truth.

Of the three great systems of exclusion which
forge discourse — the forbidden speech, the divi-
sion of madness, and the will to truth, I have spe-
oken of the third at greatest length. The fact is that
it is towards this third system that the other two
have been drifting constantly for centuries. The
third system increasingly attempts to assimilate
the others, both in order to modify them and to
provide them with a foundation. The first two are
constantly becoming more fragile and more un-
certain, to the extent that they are now invaded
by the will to truth, which for its part constantly
grows stronger, deeper, and more implacable.

And yet we speak of the will to truth no doubt
least of all. It is as if, for us, the will to truth and
its vicissitudes were masked by truth itself in its
necessary unfolding. The reason is perhaps this:
although since the Greeks “true” discourse is no
longer the discourse that answers to the demands
of desire, or the discourse which exercises
power, what is at stake in the will to truth, in the
will to utter this “true” discourse, if not desire
and power? “True” discourse, freed from desire
and power by the necessity of its form, cannot
recognize the will to truth which pervades it; and
the will to truth, having imposed itself on us for a
very long time, is such that the truth it wants can-
not fail to mask it.

Thus all that appears to our eyes is a truth con-
ceived as a richness, a fecundity, a gentle and in-
sidiously universal force, and in contrast we are
unaware of the will to truth, that prodigious ma-
chinery designed to exclude. All those who, from
time to time in our history, have tried to dodge
this will to truth and to put it into question against
truth, at the very point where truth undertakes to
justify the prohibition and to define madness, all
of them, from Nietzsche to Artaud and Bataille, must now serve as the (no doubt lofty) signs for our daily work.

III

There are, of course, many other procedures for controlling and delimiting discourse. Those of which I have spoken up to now operate in a sense from the exterior. They function as systems of exclusion. They have to do with the part of discourse which puts power and desire at stake.

I believe we can isolate another group: internal procedures, since discourses themselves exercise their own control; procedures which function rather as principles of classification, of ordering, of distribution, as if this time another dimension of discourse had to be mastered: that of events and chance.

In the first place, commentary. I suppose—but without being very certain—that there is scarcely a society without its major narratives, which are recounted, repeated, and varied; formulae, texts, and ritualized sets of discourses which are recited in well-defined circumstances; things said once and preserved because it is suspected that behind them there is a secret or a treasure. In short, we may suspect that there is in all societies, with great consistency, a kind of gradation among discourses: those which are said in the ordinary course of days and exchanges, and which vanish as soon as they have been pronounced; and those which give rise to a certain number of new speech acts which take them up, transform them or speak of them, in short, those discourses which, over and above their formulation, are said indefinitely, remain said, and are to be said again. We know them in our own cultural system: they are religious or juridical texts, but also those texts (curious ones, when we consider their status) which are called "literary"; and to a certain extent, scientific texts.

This differentiation is certainly neither stable, nor constant, nor absolute. There is not, on the one side, the category of fundamental or creative discourses, given for all time, and on the other, the mass of discourses which repeat, gloss, and comment. Plenty of major texts become blurred and disappear, and sometimes commentaries move into the primary position. But though its points of application may change, the function remains; and the principle of a differentiation is continuously put back in play. The radical effacement of this gradation can only ever be play, utopia, or anguish. The Borges-style play of a commentary which is nothing but the solemn and expected reappearance word for word of the text that is commented on; or the play of a criticism that would speak forever of a work which does not exist. The lyrical dream of a discourse which is reborn absolutely new and innocent at every point, and which reappears constantly in all freshness, derived from things, feelings, or thoughts. The anguish of that patient of Janet's for whom the least utterance was gospel truth, concealing inexhaustible treasures of meaning and worthy to be repeated, recommenced, and commented on indefinitely: "When I think," he would say when reading or listening, "when I think of this sentence which like the others will go off into eternity, and which I have perhaps not yet fully understood."

But who can fail to see that this would be to annul one of the terms of the relation each time, and not to do away with the relation itself? It is a relation which is constantly changing with time; which takes multiple and divergent forms in a given epoch. The juridical exegesis is very different from the religious commentary (and this has been the case for a very long time). One and the same literary work can give rise simultaneously to very distinct types of discourse: the Odyssey as a primary text is repealed, in the same period, in the translation by Bérard, and in Joyce's Ulysses.

For the moment I want to do no more than indicate that, in what is broadly called commentary, the hierarchy between primary and secondary text plays two roles which are in solidarity with each other. On the one hand it allows the (endless) construction of new discourses: the dominance of the primary text, its permanence, its status as a discourse which can always be reactualized, the multiple or hidden meaning with

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*See Borges's story, "Pierre Menard's Don Quixote." [Ed.]

which it is credited, the essential reticence and richness which is attributed to it, all this is the basis for an open possibility of speaking. But on the other hand the commentary’s only role, whatever the techniques used, is to say at last what was stenily articulated “beyond” in the text. By a paradox which it always displaces but never escapes, the commentary must say for the first time what had, nonetheless, already been said, and must tirelessly repeat what had, however, never been said. The infinite rippling of commentaries is worked from the inside by the dream of a repetition in disguise; at its horizon there is perhaps nothing but what was at its point of departure—mere recitation. Commentary exercises the chance element of discourse by giving it its due; it allows us to say something other than the text itself, but on condition that it is this text itself which is said, and in a sense completed. The open multiplicity, the element of chance, are transferred, by the principle of commentary, from what might risk being said, on to the number, the form, the mask, and the circumstances of the repetition. The new thing here lies not in what is said but in the event of its return.

I believe there exists another principle of rarification of a discourse, complementary to the first, to a certain extent: the author. Not, of course, in the sense of the speaking individual who pronounced or wrote a text, but in the sense of a principle of grouping of discourses, conceived as the unity and origin of their meanings, as the focus of their coherence. This principle is not everywhere at work, nor in a constant manner: there exist all around us plenty of discourses which circulate without deriving their meaning or their efficacy from an author to whom they could be attributed: everyday remarks, which are effaced immediately; decrees or contracts which require signatories but no author; technical instructions which are transmitted anonymously. But in the domains where it is the rule to attribute things to an author—literature, philosophy, science—it is quite evident that this attribution does not always play the same role. In the order of scientific discourse, it was indispensable, during the Middle Ages, that a text should be attributed to an author, since this was an index of truthfulness. A proposition was considered as drawing even its scientific value from its author. Since the seventeenth century, this function has steadily been eroded in scientific discourse: it now functions only to give a name to a theorem, an effect, an example, a syndrome. On the other hand, in the order of literary discourse, starting from the same epoch, the function of the author has steadily grown stronger: all those tales, poems, dramas, or comedies which were allowed to circulate in the Middle Ages in at least a relative anonymity are now asked (and obliged to say) where they come from, who wrote them. The author is asked to account for the unity of the texts which are placed under his name. He is asked to reveal or at least carry authentication of the hidden meaning which traverses them. He is asked to connect them to his lived experiences, to the real history which saw their birth. The author is what gives the disturbing language of fiction its unitiness, its nodes of coherence, its insertion in the real.

I know that I will be told: “But you are speaking there of the author as he is reinvented after the event by criticism, after he is dead and there is nothing left except for a tangled mass of scribblings; in those circumstances a little order surely has to be introduced into all that, by imagining a project, a coherence, a thematic structure that is demanded of the consciousness or the life of an author who is indeed perhaps a trifle fictitious. But that does not mean he did not exist, this real author, who bursts into the midst of all these worn-out words, bringing to them his genius or his disorder.”

It would of course be absurd to deny the existence of the individual who writes and invents. But I believe that—at least since a certain epoch—the individual who sets out to write a text on the horizon of which a possible oeuvre is prowling, takes upon himself the function of the author: what he writes and what he does not write, what he sketches out, even by way of provisional drafts, as an outline of the oeuvre, and what he lets fall by way of commonplace remarks—this whole play of differences is prescribed by the author-function, as he receives it from his epoch, or as he modifies it in his turn. He may well overturn the traditional image of the author; nevertheless, it is from some new author-position that he will cut out, from everything he
could say and from all that he does say every day at any moment, the still trembling outline of his œuvre.

The commentary-principle limits the chance-element in discourse by the play of an identity which would take the form of repetition and sameness. The author-principle limits this same element of chance by the play of an identity which has the form of individuality and the self.

We must also recognize another principle of limitation in what is called, not sciences but “disciplines”: a principle which is itself relative and mobile; which permits construction, but within narrow confines.

The organization of disciplines is just as much opposed to the principle of commentary as to that of the author. It is opposed to the principle of the author because a discipline is defined by a domain of objects, a set of methods, a corpus of propositions considered to be true, a play of rules and definitions, of techniques and instruments: all this constitutes a sort of anonymous system at the disposal of anyone who wants to or is able to use it, without their meaning or validity being linked to the one who happened to be their inventor. But the principle of a discipline is also opposed to that of commentary: in a discipline unlike a commentary, what is supposed at the outset is not a meaning which has to be rediscovered, nor an identity which has to be repeated, but the requisites for the construction of new statements. For there to be a discipline, there must be the possibility of formulating new propositions, ad infinitum.

But there is more; there is more, no doubt, in order for there to be less: a discipline is not the sum of all that can be truthfully said about something; it is not even the set of all that can be accepted about the same data in virtue of some principle of coherence or systematicity. Medicine is not constituted by the total of what can be truthfully said about illness; botany cannot be defined by the sum of all the truths concerning plants. There are two reasons for this: first of all, botany and medicine are made up of errors as well as truths, like any other discipline—errors which are not residues or foreign bodies but which have positive functions, a historical efficacy, and a role that is often indissociable from that of the truths. And besides, for a proposition to belong to botany or pathology, it has to fulfill certain conditions, in a sense stricter and more complex than pure and simple truth: but in any case, other conditions. It must address itself to a determinate plane of objects: from the end of the seventeenth century, for example, for a proposition to be “botanical” it had to deal with the visible structure of the plant, the system of its close and distant resemblances or the mechanism of its fluids; it could no longer retain its symbolic value, as was the case in the sixteenth century, nor the set of virtues and properties which were accorded to it in antiquity. But without belonging to a discipline, a proposition must use conceptual or technical instruments of a well-defined type; from the nineteenth century, a proposition was no longer medical—it fell “outside of medicine” and acquired the status of an individual phantasm or popular imagery—if it used notions that were at the same time metaphorical, qualitative, and substantial (like those of engorgement, of overheated liquids or of dried-out solids). In contrast it could and had to make use of notions that were equally metaphorical but based on another model, a functional and physiological one (that of the irritation, inflammation, or degeneration of the tissues). Still further: in order to be part of a discipline, a proposition has to be able to be inscribed on a certain type of theoretical horizon: suffice it to recall that the search for the primitive language, which was a perfectly acceptable theme up to the eighteenth century, was sufficient, in the second half of the nineteenth century, to make any discourse fall into—I hesitate to say error—chimera and reverie, into pure and simple linguistic monstrousy.

Within its own limits, each discipline recognizes true and false propositions; but it pushes back a whole teratology of knowledge beyond its margins. The exterior of a science is both more and less populated than is often believed: there is of course immediate experience, the imaginary themes which endlessly carry and renew immunorial beliefs; but perhaps there are no errors in the strict sense, for error can only arise and be decided inside a definite practice; on the other hand, there are monster. on the prowl whose form changes with the history of knowledge. In short, a proposition must fulfill complex and
heavy requirements to be able to belong to the grouping of a discipline: before it can be called true or false, it must be "in the true," as Canguilhem would say.

People have often wondered how the botanists or biologists of the nineteenth century managed not to see that what Mendel was saying was true. But it was because Mendel was speaking of objects, applying methods, and placing himself on a theoretical horizon which were alien to the biology of his time. Naudin, before him, had of course posited the thesis that hereditary traits are discrete; yet, no matter how new or strange this principle was, it was able to fit into the discourse of biology, at least as an enigma. What Mendel did was to constitute the hereditary trait as an absolutely new biological object, thanks to a kind of filtering which had never been used before: he detached the trait from the species, and from the sex which transmits it; the field in which he observed it being the infinitely open series of the generations, where it appears and disappears according to statistical regularities. This was a new object which called for new conceptual instruments and new theoretical foundations. Mendel spoke the truth, but he was not "in the true" of the biological discourse of his time: it was not according to such rules that biological objects and concepts were formed. It needed a complete change of scale, the deployment of a whole new range of objects in biology for Mendel to enter into the true and for his propositions to appear (in large measure) correct. Mendel was a true monster, which meant that science could not speak of him; whereas about thirty years earlier, at the height of the nineteenth century, Scheiden, for example, who denied plant sexuality, but in accordance with the rules of biological discourse, was merely formulating a disciplined error.

It is always possible that one might speak the truth in the space of a wild exteriority, but one is "in the true" only by obeying the rules of a discursive "policing" which one has to reactivate in each of one's discourses.

The discipline is a principle of control over the production of discourse. The discipline fixes limits for discourse by the action of an identity which takes the form of a permanent re-actuation of the rules.

We are accustomed to see in an author's fecundity, in the multiplicity of the commentaries, and in the development of a discipline so many infinite resources for the creation of discourses. Perhaps so, but they are nonetheless principles of constraint; it is very likely impossible to account for their positive and multiplicative role if we do not take into consideration their restrictive and constraining function.

IV

There is, I believe, a third group of procedures which permit the control of discourses. This time it is not a matter of mastering their powers or averting the unpredictability of their appearance, but of determining the condition of their application, of imposing a certain number of rules on the individuals who hold them, and thus of not permitting everyone to have access to them. There is a rarefaction, this time, of the speaking subjects; none shall enter the order of discourse if he does not satisfy certain requirements or if he is not, from the outset, qualified to do so. To be more precise: not all the regions of discourse are equally open and penetrable; some of them are largely forbidden (they are differentiated and differentiating), while others seem to be almost open to all winds and put at the disposal of every speaking subject, without prior restrictions.

In this regard I should like to recount an anecdote which is so beautiful that one trembles at the thought that it might be true. It gathers into a single figure all the constraints of discourse: those which limit its powers, those which master its aleatory appearances, those which carry out the selection among speaking subjects. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Shogun heard tell that the Europeans' superiority in matters of navigation, commerce, politics, and military skill was due to their knowledge of mathematics. He desired to get hold of so precious a knowledge. As he had been told of an English sailor who possessed the secret of these miraculous discourses, he summoned him to his palace and kept him there. Alone with him, he took lessons. He learned mathematics. He retained power, and lived to a great old age. It was not until the nineteenth century that there were
Japanese mathematicians. But the anecdote does not stop there: it has its European side too. The story has it that this English sailor, Will Adams, was an autodidact, a carpenter who had learned geometry in the course of working in a shipyard. Should we see this story as the expression of one of the great myths of European culture? The universal communication of knowledge and the infinite free exchange of discourses in Europe, against the monopolized and secret knowledge of Oriental tyranny?

This idea, of course, does not stand up to examination. Exchange and communication are positive figures working in ide complex systems of restriction, and probably would not be able to function independently of them. The most superficial and visible of these systems of restriction is constituted by what can be gathered under the name of ritual. Ritual defines the qualification which must be possessed by individuals who speak (and who must occupy such-and-such a position and formulate such-and-such a type of statement, in the play of a dialogue, of interrogation or recitation); it defines the gestures, behavior, circumstances and the whole set of signs which must accompany discourse; finally, it fixes the supposed or imposed efficacity of the words, their effect on those to whom they are addressed, and the limits of their constraining value. Religious, judicial, therapeutic, and in large measure also political discourses can scarcely be dissociated from this deployment of a ritual which determines both the particular properties and the stipulated roles of the speaking subjects.

A somewhat different way of functioning is that of the "societies of discourse," which function to preserve or produce discourses, but in order to make them circulate in a closed space, distributing them only according to strict rules, and without the holders being dispossessed by this distribution. An archaic model for this is provided by the groups of rhapsodists who possessed the knowledge of the poems to be recited or potentially to be varied and transformed. But though the object of this knowledge was after all a ritual recitation, the knowledge was protected, defended and preserved within a definite group by the often very complex exercises of memory which it implied. To pass an apprenticeship in it allowed one to enter both a group and a secret which the act of recitation showed but did not divulge: the roles of speaker and listener were not interchangeable.

There are hardly any such "societies of discourse" now, with their ambiguous play of the secret and its divulgation. But this should not deceive us: even in the order of "true" discourse, even in the order of discourse that is published and free from all ritual, there are still forms of appropriation of secrets, and noninterchangeable roles. It may well be that the act of writing as it is institutionalized today, in the book, the publishing-system and the person of the writer, takes place in a "society of discourse," which though diffuse is certainly constraining. The difference between the writer and any other speaking or writing subject (a difference constantly stressed by the writer himself), the intransitive nature (according to him) of his discourse, the fundamental singularity which he has been ascribing for so long to "writing," the dissymmetry that is asserted between "creation" and any use of the linguistic system all this shows the existence of a certain "society of discourse," and tends moreover to bring back its play of practices. But there are many others still, functioning according to entirely different schemas of exclusivity and disclosure: e.g., technical or scientific secrets, or the forms of diffusion and circulation of medical discourse or those who have appropriated the discourse of politics or economics.

At first glance, the "doctrines" (religious, political, philosophical) seem to constitute the reverse of a "society of discourse," in which the number of speaking individuals tended to be limited even if it was not fixed; between those individuals, the discourse could circulate and be transmitted. Doctrine, on the contrary, tends to be diffused, and it is by the holding in common of one and the same discursive ensemble that individuals (as many as one cares to imagine) define their reciprocal allegiance. In appearance, the only prerequisite is the recognition of the same truths and the acceptance of a certain rule of (more or less flexible) conformity with the validated discourse. If doctrines were nothing more than this, they would not be so very different from scientific disciplines, and the discursive control would apply only to the form or the content of the statement, not to the speaking subject.
But doctrinal allegiance puts in question both the statement and the speaking subject, the one by the other. It puts the speaking subject in question through and on the basis of the statement, as is proved by the procedures of exclusion and the mechanisms of rejection which come into action when a speaking subject has formulated one or several unassimilable statements; heresy and orthodoxy do not derive from a fanatical exaggeration of the doctrinal mechanisms, but rather belong fundamentally to them. And conversely the doctrine puts the statements in question on the basis of the speaking subjects, to the extent that the doctrine always stands as the sign, manifestation, and instrument of a prior adherence to a class, a social status, a race, a nationality, an interest, a revolt, a resistance or an acceptance. Doctrine binds individual to certain types of enunciation and consequently forbids them all others; but it uses, in return, certain types of enunciation to bind individuals amongst themselves, and to differentiate them by that very fact from all others. Doctrine brings about a double subjection: of the speaking subjects to discourses, and of discourses to the (at least virtual) group of speaking individual.

On a much broader scale, we are obliged to recognize large cleavages in what might be called the social appropriation of discourses. Although education may well be, by right, the instrument thanks to which any individual in a society like ours can have access to any kind of discourse whatever, this does not prevent it from following, as is well known, in its distribution, in what it allows and what it prevents, the lines marked out by social distances, oppositions, and struggles. Any system of education is a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the knowledges and powers which they carry.

I am well aware that it is very abstract to separate speech-rituals, societies of discourse, doctrinal groups, and social appropriations, as I have just done. Most of the time, they are linked to each other and constitute kinds of great edifices which ensure the distribution of speaking subjects into the different types of discourse and the appropriation of discourses to certain categories of subject. Let us say, in a word, that those are the major procedures of subjection used by discourse. What, after all, is an education system, other than a ritualization of speech, a qualification and a fixing of the roles for speaking subjects, the constitution of a doctrinal group, however diffuse, a distribution and an appropriation of discourse with its powers and knowledges? What is "écriture" (the writing of the "writers") other than a similar system of subjection, which perhaps takes slightly different forms, but forms whose main rhythms are analogous? Does not the judicial system, does not the institutional system of medicine likewise constitute, in some of their aspects at least, similar systems of subjection of and by discourse?

V

I wonder whether a certain number of themes in philosophy have not come to correspond to these activities of limitation and exclusion and perhaps also to reinforce them.

They correspond to them first of all by proposing an ideal truth as the law of discourse and an immanent rationality as the principle of their unfolding, and they reintroduce an ethic of knowledge, which promises to give the truth only to the desire for truth itself and only to the power of thinking it.

Then they reinforce the limitations and exclusions by a denial of the specific reality of discourse in general.

Ever since the sophists’ tricks and influence were excluded and since their paradoxes have been more or less safely muzzled, it seems that Western thought has taken care to ensure that discourse should occupy the smallest possible space between thought and speech. Western thought seems to have made sure that the act of discoursing should appear to be no more than a certain bridging (apport) between thinking and speaking—a thought dressed in its signs and made visible by means of words, or conversely the very structures of language put into action and producing a meaning-effect.

This very ancient elision of the reality of discourse in philosophical thought has taken many forms in the course of history. We have seen it again quite recently in the guise of several familiar themes.

Perhaps the idea of the founding subject is a

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way of eliding the reality of discourse. The founding subject indeed, is given the task of directly animating the empty forms of language with his aims; it is he who, in moving through the density and inertia of empty things grasps by intuition the meaning lying deposited within them; it is likewise the founding subject who finds horizons of meaning beyond time which history will henceforth only have to elucidate and where propositions, sciences, and deductive ensembles will find their ultimate grounding. In his relation to meaning, the founding subject has at his disposal signs, marks, traces, letters. But he does not need to pass via the singular instance of discourse in order to manifest them.

The opposing theme, that of originating experience, plays an analogous role. It supposes that at the very basis of experience, even before it could be grasped in the form of a cogito, there were prior significations—in a sense, already said—wandering around in the world, arranging it all around us and opening it up from the outset to a sort of primitive recognition. Thus a pronomial complicity with the world is supposed to be the foundation of our possibility of speaking of it, in it, or indicating it and naming it, or judging it and ultimately of knowing it in the form of truth. If there is discourse, then, what can it legitimately be other than a discreet reading? Things are already murmuring meanings which our language has only to pick up; and this language, right from its most rudimentary project, was already speaking to us of a being of which it is like the skeleton.

The idea of universal mediation is yet another way, I believe, of eliding the reality of discourse, and despite appearances to the contrary. For it would seem at first glance that by rediscovering everywhere the movement of a logos which elevates particularities to the status of concepts and allows immediate consciousness to unfurl in the end the whole rationality of the world, one puts discourse itself at the center of one’s speculation. But this logos, in fact, is only a discourse that has already been held, or rather it is things themselves, and events, which imperceptibly turn themselves into discourse as they unfold the secret of their own essence. Thus discourse is little more than the gleaming of a truth in the process of being born to its own gaze; and when everything finally can take the form of discourse, when everything can be said and when discourse can be spoken about everything, it is because all things, having manifested and exchanged their meaning, can go back into the silent interiority of their consciousness of self.

Thus in a philosophy of the founding subject, in a philosophy of originary experience, and in a philosophy of universal mediation alike, discourse is no more than a play, of writing in the first case, of reading in the second, and of exchange in the third, and this exchange, this reading, this writing never put anything at stake except signs. In this way, discourse is unnull in its reality and put at the disposal of the signifier.

What civilization has ever appeared to be more respectful of discourse than ours? Where has it ever been more honored, or better honored? Where has it ever been, seemingly, more radically liberated from its constraints, and universalized? Yet it seems to me that beneath this apparent veneration of discourse, under this apparent logophilia, a certain fear is hidden. It is just as if prohibitions, barriers, thresholds, and limits had been set up in order to master, at least partly, the great proliferation of discourse, in order to remove from its richness the most dangerous part, and in order to organize its disorder according to figures which dodge what is most uncontrollable about it. It is as if we had tried to efface all trace of its irruption into the activity of thought and language. No doubt there is in our society, and, I imagine, in all others, but following a different outline and different rhythms, a profound logophobia, a sort of mute terror against these events, against this mass of things said, against the surging-up of all these statements, against all that could be violent, discontinuous pugnacious, disorderly as well, and perilous about them—against this great incessant and disordered buzzing of discourse.

And if we want to—I would not say, efface this fear, but analyze it in its conditions, its action, and its effects. We must, I believe, resolve to take three decisions which our thinking today tends to resist and which correspond to the three groups of functions which I have just mentioned. We must call into question our will to truth, restore to discourse its character as an event, and finally throw off the sovereignty of the signifier.

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