

# CULTURAL HISTORY AFTER FOUCAULT

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## Foucault's Technologies of the Self and the Cultural History of Identity

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Let me begin with an autobiographical reminiscence, one that concerns, appropriately, theory and its relation to practice. While I was writing my dissertation as a history graduate student at Columbia University, I also attended classes at the Columbia Psychoanalytic Institute. Although my status was that of a so-called special candidate, someone who was learning psychoanalytic theory solely for the purpose of applying it to scholarly research, the instruction I received was geared to the needs of the regular candidates, who were being trained to conduct psychoanalysis with patients. I have a vivid memory of the day in the basic theory course when we discussed Freud's transition from his topographical model, in which he divided the mind into conscious, preconscious and unconscious spaces, to his structural model, in which he postulated the relatively stable and persistent organizational entities of ego, id and superego. The shift occurred around 1920, by which time Freud had been spinning out psychoanalytic theory for over two decades. But, according to my teacher, Freud never went back to his earlier work to recast it in terms of the ego-id-superego triad; nor did he ever repudiate that earlier work, couched though it was in now-outmoded categories. Rather, within his corpus, the topographical and structural models simply coexisted.

After the requisite, joking reference to Freud's anal retentiveness, the teacher noted that this overlap posed not real problem to the practicing analyst; indeed it represented a resource. The analyst should, we were told, keep both models in free-floating and evenly hovering attention (that tool of the trade) and, when listening to a patient, interpret the material according to whichever model its own particular content evoked. Thus the teacher said that he personally relied more on the structural model in his daily practice, but that there were circumstances in which he was glad to have the topographical model in his repertory, too, for it sometimes allowed him to make better sense of what the patient was telling him.

I cannot remember what my reaction to this methodological pronouncement was at the time, although I suspect I was surprised that anyone would admit unapologetically to such an informal, ad hoc deployment of theory. Over the years, however, as I became a practicing historian, I have from time to time

thought back to this episode in my education and have realized that my relationship to theory is now remarkably similar to the one the analyst described. While I always come to my material with the questions that *I* have asked of it (rather than its seeking me out in my office and dumping its problems in my lap), I come equipped with a small company of theories that I regard as smart, astute, insightful by dint of the interpretive work that they have been able to do in other settings as well as their heuristic value in helping to pose interesting historical questions to begin with. I then pick and choose among my theoretical repertory as the material seems to dictate. Thus for example in my current project, which concerns the competing conceptions of self and the politics of selfhood in France in the century following the 1789 Revolution, I have drawn from time to time both on Foucault's concept of technologies of the self and on Habermas' account of the reciprocal creation of the bourgeois public and private spheres and its bearing on the nearly simultaneous constitution of the sciences of political economy and psychology (Habermas, *Structural Transformation*). It does not trouble me that, on the meta-level of their evaluations of the Enlightenment, Habermas and Foucault disagree. I am not after all treating either as a total theory capable of illuminating everything but treating both as local theories with specific competences.

Hence the question to which our June 1997 conference in Amsterdam was devoted strikes me as either well-posed or not so well-posed depending upon where the accent is placed – or, more specifically, how the deliberately (and provocatively) ambiguous phrase “after Foucault” is understood. For a group of literary and cultural historians to discuss how, why, and where they have found Foucault useful or of little value, to map out, as it were the terrain of competence of Foucauldian theory as it appears from our vantage point in the late 1990s (and I am here paraphrasing, very loosely, the letter inviting me to this conference), seems like an eminently sound and sensible idea. On the other hand, to entertain the proposition that (and I am here quoting from the poster for our conference) “however much [we] have gained from Foucault [we] are now moving further by overcoming our Foucauldian heritage,” seems like an odd and uncongenial exercise. The first formulation posits “after Foucault” as a temporal position in need of further definition and acknowledges the likelihood that the work of Foucault will continue to exert a fertile influence on historical and literary scholarship. The second formulation also posits “after Foucault” as a temporal position in need of further definition, but it assumes that Foucault's influence has dried up and poses as a question only what new wellspring of theory will come to take its place.

What is the basis of the slippage between these two statements of purpose, each linked to a particular interpretation of the rubric “after Foucault”? The first appears to correspond to the term “cultural history,” featured in the title of the conference, and the second to the term “cultural studies,” featured in the

smaller print on the poster. Cultural history and cultural studies usually stand in quite different relationships to Foucault.

As I have pointed out before (Goldstein, "Introduction," 15), cultural historians can and do draw important inspiration from Foucault *without* accepting the strong claim of certain Foucauldians that the academic disciplines, as they are practiced in the late twentieth century, are unself-consciously enmeshed in and therefore irredeemably tainted by structures of power, that they are, in other words, basically no different from those nineteenth-century bodies of enlightened scientific knowledge that Foucault so brilliantly analyzed in *Surveiller et punir* and that he called the disciplines. To be sure, Foucault himself sometimes lent support to that strong claim – for example, when in the late 1970s, at the end of his reply to the historian of medicine Jacques Léonard, he spoke of the possibility of a future collaboration between historians and philosophers that would be not the standard anodyne "interdisciplinary encounter" but "a work in common of people who seek to 'de-discipline' themselves" (Foucault, "Poussière et nuage" 39). This watchword of "de-disciplinization," largely ignored by cultural historians, has been taken up by the practitioners of cultural studies, who invented a new field in the hope of freeing themselves from the distasteful baggage of the older disciplinary formations and who sought in Foucault a theory that could undergird a new form of intellectual endeavor that would serve as a dissent from power. It is, I would suggest, only if one expected so much from Foucault to begin with, that one might now want to leave him behind as an empty husk. Cultural history, whose ties to Foucault were always less binding, has by contrast not exhausted what Foucault has to offer.

Determining the precise relationship of a "disciplinary" cultural history to a "de-disciplinary" cultural studies is, of course, a thorny problem, and I do not wish to imply that a facile dividing line between the two can be drawn. In thinking about the problem, I looked at the essay by Michael Steinberg in a recent collection devoted to the theme of disciplinarity and dissent. Steinberg numbers himself among the cultural historians and, as it turned out, I sympathized with his position on this matter. "Should the farmer and the cowhand be friends?" Steinberg asks, recalling the song from the 1942 Rogers and Hammerstein musical *Oklahoma*. Is there, in other words, any possibility for a truce and even a collaboration between the worker in the disciplinary vineyards and the post-disciplinary cowhand bent on subversion and disruption? Steinberg wants to give a positive answer to that question for several, overlapping reasons: he rejects as inapplicable to himself the caricature of disciplinary historians offered by cultural studies – that is, "antiquarians and/or ideologues who hide a vicious form of presentism, instrumental reason and indeed neo-colonialism under their antiquarian innocence"; he finds that the definition of cultural studies advanced by certain of its practitioners aptly characterizes what most cultural historians think they, too, are doing – for example, an "examination of

the symbolic orders in which intrasubjective meanings and social practices are constituted and contested"; and finally he does not want to relinquish his identity as a historian because he cannot let go of a certain disciplinary allegiance that he describes as "hold[ing] myself responsible to the existence and exigencies of an object-world that is morally, materially, linguistically and culturally constituted," the positing of which "has nothing to do with the claim of its empirical epistemological availability" (105). That is, without adhering to some naive positivist concept of "objectivity," Steinberg wants to retain the belief in "something out there" that must guide historians' investigations, holding them to standards of care and scrupulosity in their handling of sources, even though they have long since given up the idea that they can straightforwardly reconstruct the past or that there is a single way of "getting it right" (103, 105, 11).

I am not sure that I follow every part of Steinberg's dense argument or that I would embrace the "syncretism of cultural history and cultural studies" for which he eventually pleads and that he depicts as "the understanding of modern subjectivities as instantiations of multiple consciousness," in which "multiplicity does not contradict coherence" (Ibid., 127). But I completely sympathize with his sense of being caught in an unpleasant dilemma between dissent and disciplinarity, wanting – and indeed believing himself able – to practice a history that is unsettling in its effects and at the same time responsible in its methods to something stubborn and resistant, not infinitely malleable, that emerges when one consults in abundance the written and other remains of the past. Or, at least, that is how I read the underlying drift of Steinberg's essay because that is what I want to do. In fact, I went into intellectual and cultural history after having concentrated primarily in English literature in college precisely because I wanted to encounter that external resistance, because I felt that, cheered on by approving literature professors, I had become too adroit as an analyst of texts and could bend a text into saying almost anything. I needed recourse to factors outside the text in order to supply more stringent rules for the game, to serve as a check on my pyrotechnical and, I suspected, increasingly solipsistic feats of reading.

## I. The Brief

With this methodological introduction *cum* autobiographical confession as background, let me turn to the substance of this essay, which is to argue for the continued usefulness to cultural history of one of Foucault's concepts, that of technologies of the self. My current work on the constitution of selfhood in nineteenth-century France<sup>1</sup> will provide me with my initial examples, but my

<sup>1</sup> That research will appear as a book tentatively titled *The Post-Revolutionary Self: Competing Psychologies in Nineteenth-Century France* to be published by Harvard University Press. Several portions of the project are already in print or in press: "Foucault and the Post-Revolutionary

remarks, as I will show in the penultimate section of the essay, have a more extended reference. I began my project on selfhood nearly a decade ago, before the now ubiquitous interest in "identity" had swept the humanities and social sciences. But that interest in identity is also well-served (though not, of course, completely satisfied) by the Foucauldian concept.

The current vogue of identity scholarship is noteworthy for, among other things, the fact that it has few theoretical moorings, with most scholars using the keyword in an intuitive, commonsensical manner. In this, it is quite different from an earlier vogue of identity scholarship, the one inspired by Erik Erikson in the United States in the 1960s. Whatever one might think of Erikson's concept of identity (and it is surely imprinted with the American liberal optimism of its era), it was at least *relatively* explicit, grounded in a neo-Freudian developmental schema in which the psychosocial stages beginning in infancy culminated in an adolescent crisis which, if successfully weathered, resulted in the individual's autonomous forging of his or her identity. The very paucity of theoretical conceptions informing today's fascination with identity would seem to argue strongly for pursuing and elaborating Foucault's concept of technologies of the self. Though no more value-neutral than Erikson's, this concept has the advantage of being more finely historically attuned, capable of adjustment according to the different intellectual, institutional, social and political environments in which selfhood is embedded at different historical moments.

In making my argument, I will of necessity be going over ground that I covered in my earlier essay, "Foucault and the Post-Revolutionary Self." But the point, as well as the endpoint, of the two contributions differ. In the first, I wanted to show that Foucault's theories might be applied, without stress or strain, to the "ordinary" practice of history. My strategy was to establish that, at least with respect to one historical phenomenon – the dissemination of the philosophy of Victor Cousin in nineteenth-century France – Foucauldian categories could quite elegantly subsume the bevy of empirical detail turned up by my research in archival and printed primary sources. That essay ended by focusing on an aspect of Foucault's theory that my data belied and that struck me as revealing attitudes more culturally specific to France than its author realized. I thus concluded by cautioning historians to be sensitive to the potentially misleading inflections that Foucault's French context might introduce into his theories. In the present contribution I review what I said before about applicability of the Foucauldian concept of the technology of the self to the trajectory of Victor Cousin's philosophy. But I go beyond the earlier essay and make a stronger case for the continued vitality of Foucauldian theory ("after Foucault") by rifling through some recent historiography and mounting a retrospective argument for the application of that concept to other scholars' work.

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Self," "Saying 'I,'" "The Advent of Psychological Modernism in France," and "Eclectic Subjectivity and the Impossibility of Female Beauty."

## II. Technologies of the Self

Foucault first articulated the concept of a technology of the self in "Subjectivity and Truth," the 1980–81 lecture course at the Collège de France in which he sketched out the plan for what would later become Volumes 2 and 3 of his *History of Sexuality*. "I have begun an inquiry," he wrote in the obligatory end-of-the-year summary,

into the modes of self-knowledge that have been put into use and their history: How has the subject been established at different moments and in different institutional contexts as an object of knowledge that is possible, desirable, or even indispensable? How has the experience that one can have of oneself, as well as the knowledge that one can form from that experience, been organized by certain schemas? How have these schemas been defined, valorized, recommended, imposed?

He went on to say that he would take as the "guiding thread" of this inquiry something he called "technologies of the self." By this he meant "the procedures, which have doubtless existed in all civilizations, that are proposed or prescribed to individuals in order to fix, maintain or transform their identities with particular ends in view" and which operate by means either of "a mastery of the self by the self or a knowledge of the self by the self" (*Résumé des cours* 133–34).

The 1980–81 lectures were, of course, far from the first time that Foucault had addressed the constitution of the subject; that topic, or something closely approximating it, had already loomed large in *Discipline and Punish* and in the introductory volume of the *History of Sexuality*; and hence understanding the concept of technologies of the self requires that we articulate it with respect to that earlier work. As Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow have pointed out, *Discipline and Punish* and vol. 1 of *The History of Sexuality* represent a perspectival division of labor, the first offering a genealogy of the modern individual as object, the second a genealogy of the modern individual as subject (Dreyfus and Rabinow 126 and chapter titles on 143, 168). Thus, in a stunning denouement in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault announced that the disciplinary examination and the data-filled dossiers that it amassed made possible "the everyday individuality of everybody," which he glossed as "the constitution of the individual as a describable, analyzable *object*" (190–91, my italics). In *The History of Sexuality*, by contrast, he depicted confession in its religious and scientific guises as "an immense labor to which the West has submitted generations in order to produce [...] men's subjection: their constitution as *subjects* in both senses of the word" (60, my italics). Both books depicted the individual as an effect of power, brought into being either by the observations and written notations of the disciplinary expert or by the provocations and definitive interpretations of the confessional expert. Yet if, in Foucault's play on words, subjection (*assujettissement* in the French) to sexual confession produces a subject, the disciplinary examination, he tells us, "functions as a procedure of *objectivation* and subjection" (*Disci-*

*pline and Punish*, 192, my italics). As I have argued elsewhere, the distinction between these two constitutions is to some degree defensible, but ultimately individual-as-object and individual-as-subject effectively interpenetrate one another ("Foucault and the Post-Revolutionary Self" 108–10). Foucault implicitly acknowledged this himself when, by the early 1980s, he had homogenized his vocabulary and adopted the term "subject" to refer to *both* those individuals produced by disciplinary procedures and those produced by confessional ones ("The Subject and Power" 208).

In *The Use of Pleasure*, where Foucault highlights the problem of the subject and attempts a schematic integration of the approaches to it dispersed throughout his earlier work, the plot thickens. Foucault now viewed the historical specificity of human experience at any given moment as constructed along three axes: "the sciences (*savoirs*) that refer to it; the systems of power that regulate its practice; the forms within which individuals are able, are obliged, to recognize themselves as subjects..." (4). Analysis of the first two, *savoir* and *pouvoir*, had comprised the bulk of his earlier work; analysis of the forms of subjectivity would occupy him in his current project. Unfortunately for my concerns here, Foucault never spelled out the implications of this tripartite mapping. In particular, he never indicated what, if anything, the regimens of power/knowledge (the first two axes) had to do with the various historical experiences of subjectivity (the third axis). His vocabulary in *The Use of Pleasure* sometimes echoed the arresting double entendre on "subject" that had figured in his earlier work. He spoke of the "mode of subjection" to the moral code as an aspect of the formation of the subject (27), thus suggesting that subjects still remained for him power-effects. But he now also employed a new term, "subjectivation," which by dint of its novelty in his prose, suggested that Foucault might no longer simply equate subject-making with subjection. In fact, in *The Use of Pleasure* "subjectivation" functions as the governing rubric in Foucault's system of classification: the "mode of subjection" to the moral code is subsumed under it as one of its possible types (32).

Foucault left, however, most of the freight carried by the term "subjectivation" unpacked. He indicated that subjectivation was subject-making in the reflexive mode; that its special domain was the relationship that the self establishes to the self; that its privileged *modus operandi* was the so-called technology of the self. But the tantalizing possibility that the term contained a hint of human agency that Foucault's earlier work had categorically rejected remained just that — a tantalizing possibility.

Hence for purposes of this essay, let me adopt a provisional resolution to the problem of the third axis. I will assume that a technology of the self is necessarily linked, be it weakly or strongly, to a regimen of power/knowledge. Without such a linkage, it is difficult for me to conceive how such a technology could become sufficiently generalized among a given population as to acquire



historical significance; nor can I readily imagine a *subjectivation* in a Foucauldian universe that is not in some measure also an *assujettissement*. Foucault implicitly acknowledges this linkage in the 1981 passage I quoted above when he speaks of technologies of the self as schemas for the organization of self-knowledge that are, in a particular setting, “valorized, recommended, *imposed*.” And he implicitly acknowledges the linkage once again in the just-cited passage from *The Use of Pleasure*, where he offers as his initial depiction of the third axis “the forms within which individuals are able, *are obliged*, to recognize themselves as subjects.”

Once the three axes are aligned in this fashion, the concept of a technology of the self seems to refer to the subject’s own, intimate elaboration of a subjectivity that was in the first instance founded or constituted through interpersonal mechanisms of power/knowledge necessarily involving an element of coercion. Subjectivation then refers to the individual’s conviction – ultimately an illusory conviction – that he or she is acting autonomously and is engaged in a “purely” reflexive act of self-fashioning on the basis of values freely assented to. Through its linkage to a power/knowledge regimen, the concept of the technology of the self thus shares in the great advantage of Foucauldian historical logic: it bridges theory and practice, completely and forcefully elides sophisticated intellectual systems and routinized social practices (Goldstein, “Foucault among the Sociologists,” 177–84).

### III. The Example of Cousinianism

My research on competing psychologies in France after the Revolution has drawn my attention to a practice that might well be called a hegemonic technology of the self in nineteenth-century France. That research began with the premise that, by destroying the guilds and other corporate bodies that had served as the matrix of individual life under the Old Regime, the Revolution reproblemated the self. In keeping with the Enlightenment credo that reliable, scientific knowledge about human beings was attainable, the post-Revolutionary solution to that reproblemation was to seek to define and stabilize the self by developing a science of psychology. In fact not one such “objective” science but three emerged and competed during the period, roughly, 1780–1850: *Idéologie*, the latter-day version of the sensationalism of Locke and Condillac, with its tabula rasa mind impressed by sensations originating in the outside world and entering through the sense receptors; phrenology, with its cranial bumps revealing in any given individual the relative size of the different brain organs, each controlling an intellectual or affective trait; and the philosophical psychology of Victor Cousin. The contestation among the three never took place solely at the level of ideas because, in the hyper-politicized environment created by the incomplete resolution of the Revolutionary upheavals, each psychology rapidly

acquired a strong political coloration and, moreover, because proponents of all three made strenuous efforts to institutionalize their theory in the state-run educational system established during the Revolution. I obviously cannot go into the details of this competition here. Suffice it say that Cousinianism, which postulated a priori a unified, holistic self, emerged as the winner and that the most tangible mark of its victory was educational monopoly.

A derivative thinker but an academic entrepreneur of real genius, Cousin had "psychology" – meaning, of course, his own brand of psychology – officially declared the first substantive part of the philosophy taught in the state school system. Not only did he gain full control over philosophy instruction at the university level but, even more important, he installed his philosophical psychology in the curriculum of every lycée in France, where it remained with few fundamental alterations from 1832 until nearly the end of the century. To staff the multitude of lycées with competent philosophy teachers, he trained a "regiment" (as they were called at the time) of loyal disciples and arranged for their expeditious job placement.

Cousin succeeded in this endeavor not only because of his consummate skills in administrative maneuvering but also because his psychology had the advantage of being closely allied with an acceptably middle-of-the-road political ideology: the constitutional monarchism of the *juste milieu*, which rose to power with the July Monarchy (1830–48) and stood for a cautious and conservative liberalism, the dominance of the bourgeoisie, and a determination to avoid renewed revolution at all costs. Indeed the Cousinian fetishism of the unified self, or *moi*, was intimately tied to these political goals, especially the last one. Cousin believed that sensationalism had vitiated the self both by rooting it ultimately in human biology and by building it up through an accumulation of discrete, passively received sensations that could never be melded into an integral whole. In his view, the widespread eighteenth-century acceptance of sensationalism, and of the flimsy, tenuous self that came along with it, held no small measure of blame for the radical excesses of the Revolution; a whole generation of Frenchmen had grown up without a moral backbone or sense of ultimate responsibility for their actions, with no internal brakes preventing them from yielding to revolutionary fantasies. Cousin thus assigned to the a priori self an urgent remedial role, which in turn led to its absolute pedagogical centrality and hence to the sudden popularization of the word *moi* among lycée graduates. As one of his disciples wrote in the article "Moi" in a contemporary encyclopedia that found its way into many bourgeois households:

This word [*moi*], which in the past belonged only to the domain of grammar and which was nothing more than the most notable of pronouns, has become, after the word "God," the substantive noun *par excellence* (Matter, 259).

Let me indicate how Cousin's psychology functioned in nineteenth-century France as both a technology of the self and as a regimen of power/knowledge

and how these two, linked Foucauldian concepts can help us understand the mechanisms of self-making in that historical context.

Cousinianism was a technology of the self because it emphasized and aimed at imparting skill in introspection. According to the personal myth that Cousin propagated, it was during a heroic phase of introspection that he had as a young man refuted sensationalism, observing his own inner spaces and satisfying himself that they contained not only the residues of sensation but also a pure spontaneous activity, a will which he named the *moi*. Autobiography was subsequently translated into pedagogy, so that making direct contact with one's volitional force through introspection became a major lesson of the philosophy classroom in the nineteenth-century lycée. Thus a Cousinian pedagogical manual of 1838 enumerated the difficulties the teacher might encounter in his efforts to lead his charges to grasp the "interior reality" (*fait intérieur*), and the national administrative decree of 1832 establishing the new philosophy curriculum even stipulated that students be able to "describe the phenomenon of the will" (Gatien-Arnould, *Cours*, 81 note 1; "Procès-verbaux"). As Cousin characterized his introspective method it had, in the self's arduous attainment of knowledge of itself, all the requisite marks of a Foucauldian technology of the self. Here are some relevant passages from his famous 1828 lectures:

What is psychological analysis? It is the slow, patient, and meticulous observation, with the aid of consciousness, of phenomena hidden in the depths of human nature. These phenomena are complicated, fleeting, obscure, rendered almost imperceptible by their very closeness. The consciousness which applies itself to them is an instrument of extreme delicacy (*Introduction*, Lesson 2, p. 6).

There is, Gentlemen, a psychological art, for reflection is, so to speak, against nature, and this art is not learned in a day. One does not fold back upon oneself easily without long practice, sustained habit, and a laborious apprenticeship (*Ibid.*, Lesson 5, p. 35).

In addition to providing a technology of the self, Cousinian psychology functioned in nineteenth-century France as a regimen of power/knowledge in Foucault's sense. It was, in the first place, officially prescribed as a form of pedagogy throughout the state system of secondary education and also given maximum impact by its strategic location in that part of the lycée curriculum regarded as its summit or crown: the *classe de philosophie* of the third and last year. Second, as an emanation of bureaucratic power – and in keeping with the meaning that Foucault gave to "power" – Cousinian pedagogy both constrained its recipients and created them. In the interest of socio-political stability, it exacted their assent to a set of allegedly fixed, immutable principles about "the true, the beautiful and the good"<sup>2</sup> – metaphysical principles that the students were said to appre-

<sup>2</sup> Cousin's lectures on that subject, first delivered in 1817 and later published under the title *Du vrai, du beau et du bien*, became the official French philosophy textbook for much of the nineteenth century. See Zeldin 2: 409.

hend as the direct consequence of their introspection (since psychology formed the "vestibule" to ontology) and which were, furthermore, homologous to the structure of consciousness (since will corresponded to mankind, sensation to nature, and reason to God). But at the same time, Cousinian pedagogy conferred on them a literal gift of selfhood: the knowledge that each was the possessor of a *moi* – a source of will and willed activity in the world that could be known and talked about.

Third and finally, by conferring this gift only on the elite segment of the population which attended the lycées – that is, the male bourgeoisie – Cousinian psychology implicated itself still more deeply in power relations. Cousin made quite clear that everyone had a *moi* in principle, but he tempered this stance of psychological democracy by his unquestioned assumption that in the majority of people the *moi* would remain more or less fused in a "primitive synthesis" of the elements of consciousness, rather than becoming detached, scrutinized and appropriated through reflection. He even went so far as to specify that the degree to which these elements of consciousness became disaggregated formed the sole basis of the difference among people (*Introduction*, Lesson 5, pp. 39–40). Thus, like instruction in Greek and Latin, but more intimately tied to an individual's interior landscape, instruction in eclectic psychology became a marker, a criterion for distinguishing socially dominant from marginal groups. Bourgeois males learned psychology, but workers did not and women did not. The significance of these exclusions was underscored by their longevity. For example, even after the Third Republic founded lycées for girls in the 1880s, women still did not learn psychology. Republican educators omitted it from the female philosophy curriculum in all but the most watered down form at the very same moment that they were retaining it full strength in the newly overhauled philosophy curriculum of the boys' lycées (Goldstein, "Saying 'I'" 331–33).

In saying that Cousinian psychology supplied the nineteenth-century male bourgeoisie with a technology of the self, I do not wish to imply that it single-handedly gave them what, in ordinary parlance, is referred to as a sense of self. Clearly the bourgeois sense of self was the result of a host of social practices that constituted members of that class as persons worthy of deference, as men to be reckoned with. What Cousinian psychology gave them uniquely was a language that enabled them to conceptualize the particular stuff of their "selves" in a way that could never have been accomplished simply through the unmediated experience of having money and possessions or being treated with respect. That language, which pinpointed the active, volitional and utterly unified character of the self, received concrete support from the introspective method. The specificity and limitations of Cousinian introspection, and hence of the kind of self it supported, need to be emphasized. Cousinian introspection was *not* used to lavish attention on feelings or to validate their nuances (tellingly, Cousinianism

did not, for all its loquaciousness, conduce to autobiographical writing of the confessional sort) but was used instead to gain factual certainty that one had an active principle of assertion stirring within and hence was equipped if not destined to be a doer in society. Nor did Cousinian introspection encounter an unruly self that needed to be mastered by itself in an Augustinian-style struggle: the self's essential harmony with the metaphysical structure of the universe had been posited in advance; its constraints were in-built; it had, in a word, already received the go-ahead signal.

And, I would submit, it is the Foucauldian concept of the technology of the self that helps the historian to perceive the role played by Cousinianism in forming bourgeois identity. Cousinianism is not a new topic for historians; but it has been generally treated as a narrowly academic phenomenon, a chapter in the history of French philosophy and especially the professionalization of that philosophy.<sup>3</sup> It is by asking new questions of this old material – questions honed with a Foucauldian sensibility – that the material can be made to yield new results and to shed light on the politics of selfhood and the socio-political parameters of self-fashioning at a critical juncture in history: that of the triumph of the bourgeoisie.

#### IV. Other Technologies of the Self: A Historiographical Sample

It is evident, too, that phrenology, a loser in the three-way competition of psychologies in France, furnished its own, quite different technology of the self. One would have one's cranium read by a phrenological aficionado, or do the job oneself with the aid of an illustrated manual, and thereby learn one's dominant intellectual and affective traits, be they positive (e. g., benevolence, conscientiousness, ability to perceive form) or negative (e. g., destructiveness, secretiveness). Then, depending upon one's real-life opportunities, one could deliberately train one's positive brain organs – the theory held that education would increase their physiological magnitude – with a particular occupation in view. The purpose of self-knowledge in the phrenological framework was thus to select rationally one's niche in the division of labor and thereby to maximize one's chances of economic success and ascension of the social ladder. If the dominant metaphor of Cousinianism was depth, or the privileged introspection into dark and hidden places that would provide assurance of one's voluntaristic dynamism, the dominant metaphor of phrenology was superficiality, a visual assessment of

<sup>3</sup> I say this, of course, not to disparage the Cousin historiography but only to indicate that it has been written with a different scholarly agenda in mind. For important examples, see Bolgar, Doris S. Goldstein, and, most recently, the monograph of Patrice Vermeren. A different and equally important approach to Cousin, one that aptly sees him as the "guru" of a Romantic youth culture, is ch. 3 in Alan B. Spitzer's book.

cranial contours accessible to everyone that would aid in the management of a career. Nineteenth-century Frenchmen could readily translate themselves into phrenological terms. To cite just one example that I recently came across, here is a medical doctor arguing in a pamphlet in 1828 that he and his colleagues ought to be accorded more esteem in society: "Let us dare say that medicine requires the strongest of abilities and, to use the language that the admirable writings of Monsieur Gall [the founder of phrenology] have made comprehensible to all, that there is no profession that simultaneously occupies a larger number of brain regions" (Salle 46-7).

But, despite promising signs in the 1830s, phrenology never received in France the blessings of the official establishment that were bestowed on Cousinian psychology; it never became a part of the regimen of power/knowledge and was never generalized on a large scale as a technology of the self. But it did apparently achieve that status in Britain, even though, in the absence of a strong centralized bureaucracy, regimens of power/knowledge across the Channel typically worked through more informal structures. As an excellent 1984 book by the historian of science Roger Cooter has shown, phrenology was, in a two-stage process, widely adopted by members of both the middle and working classes of nineteenth-century Britain. It reached the former through the vehicle of savant societies and served them as a mode of self-assertion against the gentlemanly elite who made up the professional cadres at the beginning of the century. It then reached the latter by means of mechanics' institutes and furnished them with an ideology of self-help, of individual rather than collective solutions, that engineered their consent to bourgeois dominance. (Cooter, esp. chs. 2, 5, 8) While Cooter never employs the Foucauldian category of technology of the self, it is clear that the category readily applies to the story he recounts and that it would, moreover, provide a way to exploit that story to theorize about the constitution of class identity.

Let me cite an example from much farther afield. In ancient Greece and Rome and in medieval and early modern Europe an art of memory, quite foreign to us today, was widely practiced by educated people (Yates, *Art of Memory*). Following this art, one improved one's mental retrieval system by imagining one's mind as a vast storehouse whose particular architectural features became the setting for various bits of data, themselves sometimes embodied to render them more striking and hence more memorable. The fine 1990 work of the literary historian Mary Carruthers on memory in medieval culture does not make use of the Foucauldian category of a technology of the self any more than Cooter does. But for someone familiar with that category, it indicates how the art of memory could serve as the scaffolding for a particular technology of the medieval self.

According to Carruthers, medieval culture enjoined a mode of ethically responsible reading that included: (1) marking key passages in the margins; (2)

writing them down in the personal notebook called a florilegium and committing them to memory; (3) ruminating on a text in the literal sense of a cow chewing its cud – a metaphor enacted in the monastic custom of reading during meals – and thereby “making it one’s own.” In this morally serious activity, the reader was not asked to interpret the text from an objective, scientific standpoint or to attempt to seize the author’s intention but was instead encouraged to view the text in a manner he or she found personally meaningful. The reader thus re-authored the text; there was no clear demarcation between “my experience” and “what I read in a book” (*Book of Memory*, 162–69, 174).

From this approved mode of reading Carruthers derives the medieval conception of a self as that entity founded on the memory of significant, flagged passages in texts. The medieval self, she writes, is a “subject-who-remembers” – and remembers not his or her own first-hand experience of the world but rather those texts on which he or she had placed a personal stamp and had systematically committed to memory. Carruthers offers as an example of such a self an anecdote told by Abelard about Héloïse. The unhappy young woman justifies her decision to enter a convent to the many people urging her not to submit to so harsh a penance by reciting through her tears the lament of Cornelia in Lucan’s poem *Pharsalia*. From a modern, individualistic standpoint, the use of someone else’s words to express so personal a decision seems inappropriate. But the medieval self is not given to radically personal expression; it is rather a character constructed of memorized and personally imprinted bits and pieces of text found in the public domain (*Ibid.*, 179–82). The medieval mode of reading, which gave rise to this specific and singular form of selfhood, therefore qualifies as a technology of the self.

It is, to return to the distinction I established earlier in my discussion of the problem of the third axis, a technology of the self more weakly tied to a regimen of power/knowledge than is, for example, Cousinian philosophical psychology, which would seem to occupy the strong end of that spectrum. The latitude of interpretation of texts allowed the medieval reader would certainly loosen the tie. But, on the other hand, the injunction to memorize and the specification of the florilegium as a requisite mode of writing prior to memorization would contribute the properly Foucauldian elements of “technological” constraint. Indeed, Carruthers’ description of this medieval reading practice and its written auxiliaries is decidedly similar to Foucault’s own description of a classical Greek practice that he labeled a technology of the self – the keeping of notebooks called *hypomnemata* that “constituted a material memory of things read, heard, or thought, thus offering these as an accumulated treasure for rereading and later meditation” (Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” 364).

Yet another example of a technology of the self that has not been labeled as such can be found in Roger Chartier’s astute analysis of Old Regime French court society and its rituals of courtesy. Following the lead of Norbert Elias,

Chartier views the court as the institutionalized interpersonal environment that, throughout Europe, underpinned the absolute monarchical state. In order to monopolize power in his own hands, this argument runs, the absolute sovereign had to produce and continually reproduce rivalry between power-seeking elites; he thus designed and used the court, most famously the one at Versailles, to achieve that end (Chartier, "Social Figuration and Habitus"). As a stylized locus of intense rivalry, the French court, in Chartier's view, fostered a particular set of psychological traits. These were both recommended and anatomized in a treatise of the Spanish Jesuit Gracián on "the art of prudence," which became something of a classic when it was published in French translation in 1684 under the significantly altered title, *L'homme de cour*. Chartier contends that the courtesy described by Gracián and exacted at court was no superficial behavioral pattern but was rather, for the court's habitués, the organizing principle of a total personality ("Trajectoires" 315–16)

Couched in military vocabulary and portraying a world starkly divided between allies and enemies, Gracián's text delineated a personal identity tailored as much to its entourage as to its possessor. In Chartier's formulation, "the construction of each individual's identity [was] situated at the intersection between the self-representation that he propose[d] and the credence accorded or refused to that representation" (Ibid. 315). Since what counted was not the inner authenticity of this identity but rather its exterior, social validation, identity resided first and foremost in the capacity to influence others. Such fundamental other-directedness did not, however, entirely denude the self of an interior dimension. Indeed a certain training in interiority was explicitly enjoined as the first stage of the courtier's identity formation.

"The passions are the breaches (*brèches*) of the spirit," said Gracián's French translator, employing the military vocabulary that ran through the treatise (quoted by Chartier, *ibid.* 319). Hence, in the hostile world of the court, an appropriately prudent and defensive self would shore up those "breaches" or, in other words, keep its passions hidden. But to carry out such a project of concealment effectively, the self had first to know its passions. "The first step," said Gracián, "is to become aware that one is passionate. It is by that means that one enters the lists with full power over oneself." Or, later, "To be master of oneself, one must reflect on oneself" (quoted by Chartier, *ibid.* 317, 321).

Self-control, self-containment, and mastery of the passions were the hallmarks of the courteous man, but these exercises in interiority had an ultimately active aim. Only by controlling his passions could a courtier practice the much-recommended arts of ruse and dissimulation. Only by studiously masking his true emotions and intentions could he rationally calculate his conduct so as to induce people to feel and act as he wished them to feel and act. Self-mastery was, according to Gracián, the key to manipulating others, and manipulating



others was the key to the “polite” warfare, the jockeying for place and power, that was the stuff of life at court (Ibid. 319–21).

Many times reprinted, the French translation of Gracián was thus a widely accessible how-to book, a codification of a particular technology of the self – though Chartier does not invoke that concept – that enabled its readers to mold themselves to the requirements of a royal court under a system of political absolutism. But Chartier makes even broader claims for the psychological mechanisms detailed by Gracián. Uniquely among European nations, he suggests, Old Regime France experienced a *curialisation* of its culture – that is, an adoption of the modalities of the royal court, including even its cooking and its sports, by members of other social strata (Ibid. 328–30). On the psychological plane, this *curialisation* entailed a generalization of the basic rule of court-based courtesy: the self-censorship of spontaneous impulses. (Chartier does not specify whether self-mastery was, outside the court, routinely harnessed to the typical courtly effort to manipulate others for competitive advantage.) The generalization of some form of the courtly technology of the self was achieved in different ways for different classes. Bent on upward social mobility, the bourgeoisie imitated their aristocratic betters on their own initiative. The children of the lower orders had courtesy inculcated in them in the schools run in many cities and towns by charitable religious orders, where the writings of Jean-Baptiste de La Salle served as a pedagogical and plebeian version of Gracián (Ibid., 331–32).

## V. By Way of Conclusion

This essay has examined four dissimilar and chronologically dispersed sets of practices that qualify as Foucauldian technologies of the self: introspective apprehension of a spontaneous activity of will; reading cranial bumps to make informed educational and occupational decisions; a bricolage of memorized passages from literary texts that guides emotional response; and strict control of the passions aimed at dissimulation and a calculated manipulation of others. As it emerges from this brief inquiry, the methodological advantage of the Foucauldian designation “technology of the self” is threefold. In the first place, this designation provides theoretical anchoring to the current vogue of identity scholarship and does so in a way that includes within the purview of identity formation practices that do not seem immediately relevant to it and might otherwise escape the researcher’s net – for example, the medieval art of memory or nineteenth-century cranial inspection. Like all good concepts, in other words, Foucault’s technologies of the self enables us to discern less than obvious affinities among particulars, to form groupings where none existed before.

Second, by dint of its link to a regimen of power/knowledge, a technology of the self collapses the distinction between theory and practice. It is by definition

a combined theory-and-practice, one whose widespread use is ensured by an institutional connection. Thus at least three of the four examples I have discussed has its corresponding institution. In the early modern and modern French examples, institutions of the state not surprisingly preponderate: the centralized system of secondary education was responsible for disseminating the Cousinian *moi*, the court of the absolute monarch for producing and reproducing the courteous, rigorously self-controlled self in tactical pursuit of insincerity. In the case of phrenological self-analysis in Britain, the work of dissemination fell not to the British state, classically laissez-faire during the nineteenth century, but to voluntary associations: the savant societies and mechanics' institutes. (Caruthers, a literary historian, is not explicit about the institutional locus of training in the ethically responsible mode of medieval reading. But she tells us enough to suggest that the practice was associated with the Catholic Church and perhaps more specifically with its monasteries.) The institutional connections of a technology of the self provide a guarantee of its historical significance. Rather than being isolated or idiosyncratic, a practice deserving of that label was certainly familiar to and taken seriously by a consequential number of people.<sup>4</sup>

The final advantage of the technology of the self concerns what might be called the rhetorical force of that Foucauldian category. As an application of knowledge, a "technology" (and Foucault no doubt chose the term advisedly) is capable of being set out for potential users in the form of an instructional manual; indeed each of the four practices I have discussed here actually appeared in something resembling that form. From the vantage point of present-day readers, this "how-to" format serves powerfully as a point of imaginative entry into a different and historically specific experience of being a self. It helps to persuade us that our own "selves," too, are historically mutable entities and hence that our way of experiencing and thinking about the world could be different from what it is. Defamiliarization occupied a salient place in all of Foucault's work (Goldstein, "Foucault among the Sociologists," 170-74, 183). But his last work, which gave rise to the concept of a technology of the self, was especially strongly marked by the quest for alternative ways of thinking about the world, a quest that Foucault described as both "the true historian's search for truth," (referring to the work of his colleague Paul Veyne) and as the

<sup>4</sup> In my insistence on the importance for the intellectual and cultural historian of the nexus between ideas and institutions, I am in agreement with the essay in this collection by Ian Maclean, "The Process of Intellectual Change: A Post-Foucauldian Analysis." But Maclean and I differ quite sharply in our assessments of Foucault's performance in this area. Focusing on the early works *Les mots et les choses* (1966) and *L'Archéologie du savoir* (1969), Maclean faults Foucault for his inattention to institutions. Focusing on the works from the mid-1970s on, which rely on the concept of power/knowledge, I by contrast praise Foucault for a theoretical tour de force that renders institutions thoroughly integral to ideas.

purpose of “philosophy today” (referring to his own undertaking). In the same 1984 text in which he coined the term “subjectivation,” he wrote:

After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower’s straying afield of himself? [...] [W]hat is philosophy today – philosophical activity, I mean – if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known? (*Use of Pleasure* 8–9)

To use the category of a “technology of the self” is thus to participate in the Foucauldian project of prying oneself and one’s readers loose of rigid certitudes, of inserting human beings into truly contingent, historical time – in short, of putting possibility into play.

# 3

## Foucault's Rhetorical Consciousness and the Possibilities of Acting upon a Regime of Truth

FRANS-WILLEM KORSTEN

### I. Language and Action

In the light of Foucault's objects of study it seems a bit absurd to delimit his own work to discursive texts. If we study Foucault, we should ask what the scope of his "body" of texts is, and whether this does not include the way in which he arranged his life in a practical sense. He was trained as a philosopher, for instance, but also earned a license in clinical psychology, and in his twenties actually worked in a clinic for some time (Eribon). Generally we do not feel the need to interpret such biographical information, at least not in the way we interpret Foucault's texts. Still, Foucault's work in the clinic hints at what shall be the central issue of this paper: how — instead of analyzing a regime of truth — we can act directly in and upon it. In this respect, I shall argue that in terms of theory we find ourselves after Foucault. In terms of practice we may wonder if Foucault is not a spectre in front of us.

The issue I want to address can be traced on another plane as well. There is a tension between the form or style of Foucault's texts and the sometimes crude, but always concrete institutional practices that are the object of his studies. This tension can be seen, semiotically, as a sign for the rhetorical chargedness of Foucault's object of study. Language is foregrounded through his style, as something you cannot get around, over, or under. Indeed, Foucault's work has contributed enormously to the idea that style or form and content are not to be considered as separate, but as a linked couple. While admitting, however, that form and content are two sides of a coin, I find it relevant to ask whether writing eloquently about crude, concrete practices is not in effect diverting our attention from concreteness. To put it in other words, the awareness that language is a matter of practice can remain a relatively isolated practice of awareness. In my rhetorical focus on language, I recognize that language has its own materiality. Yet, it may also produce material effects on other planes. This difference has implications for the scope of what is called critical theory, which is greatly indebted to Foucault's work.

If one wants to be critical, one should not be just critically aware. The idea is to change something. The possibilities of action in this respect become a

delicate subject when I confront critical rhetorical theory with an object of its analyses that has changed our daily lives considerably and very concretely: the sciences. The sentiment has rightly been discarded that the humanities are about spiritual matters and the sciences about material ones. In fact, the last decades have produced a variety of studies that explore the intricate relation between the two, among them David Locke's *Science as Writing* (1–22), and Stephen Jay Gould's *Mismeasure of Man*, *Wonderful Life*, and *Full House*, which are good examples of showing the relation in practice. In this respect, George Levine's title for the volume that started a Science and Literature series is a telling sign: *One Culture*. I admit that in some ways one can speak of one culture, but the frame of my thoughts in this paper is provided by the worries expressed by philosopher of science Evelyn Fox Keller. Keller expresses a "growing preoccupation with the material consequences of science, nowhere more dramatically in evidence than in the successes of nuclear physics and molecular biology" (*Secrets* 9). Keller herself has demonstrated in *Refiguring Life* how the research and discourse on genes in the course of this century was evidently culturally charged, specifically how it was gender-biased. Meanwhile that research has been productive. Its effects may reflect our – "one" – culture. It has also confronted us with basic, hitherto non-existing questions, which are the result of new material phenomena such as gene-manipulation. Foucault's ideas about language and criticism can still provide a useful frame, here. Such a frame is at the same time too limited for the current lop-sided relation between critical rhetorical studies and the sciences.

After Foucault, the rhetorical analyst who studies the relation between language and science can choose between two major possibilities. S/he can choose to reconstruct rhetorical interaction in the past, as John Neubauer already sketched in 1983. Or s/he can critically assess present rhetorical interactions. In both fields important contributions have been made. A third possibility relates more to Foucault's practical clinical work, however trivial that may seem due to the short time that Foucault worked professionally in this field. This third possibility amounts to an attempt to strategically influence the actual use of social and scientific language and, accordingly, to influence their engineering force. The three approaches may be intertwined, their directions are distinct. Rhetoric – largely confined to politics in classical theory – has been studied since Foucault in areas far beyond the boundaries of politics. This may have led to the diffuse idea that rhetoric is always somehow political. My contention is that the critical relevance of a rhetorical theory requires more focus. In relation to the sciences this critical relevance depends upon the concrete political operation of a text within a certain field. In this respect one should not follow scientists, as the subtitle of Bruno Latour's famous *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* has it. The issue is to confront scientists, or think with them in their field. Recent works of Evelyn Fox Keller provide a possible paradigm.

## II. Rhetorical Consciousness

The possibilities of rhetorical criticism with regard to the sciences were marked in this century especially by Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and Michel Foucault's "The Discourse on Language" (*L'ordre du discours*). The first contended that scientific changes depend for an important part on the scientific community. Whether reality or truth exist are questions that matter, but in practice the answers to these questions need the sanction of a community of experts. This entails that any scientific result must exact, or aim at, a communal sanction. Accordingly, as Paul Hoyningen-Huene showed in an excellent study with respect to Kuhn, rhetoric becomes an intrinsic quality of scientific language. Foucault, as is well known, contended that any organized community operates ideologically; some forms of knowledge are preferred as opposed to others, some forms are simply taboo. Besides, in his view, language is not just a medium of influence, or a rhetorical vehicle, it is one prime organizer of the conceptual frame within which one can think, do research, and do other things (for overviews of what came after Foucault in this respect, see Terry Eagleton, Murray Krieger, or Jonathan Culler). The different post-Foucauldian approaches can be gathered under or connected to the heading critical rhetorical theory are ideology critique, postcolonial, feminist, ecological criticism, criticism relating to gender, or more broadly to culture (e. g. Paul de Man, Barbara Johnson, Teresa de Lauretis, Gayatri C. Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Mieke Bal). In all these kinds of criticism, language proved to be a major issue. Therefore, in light of what came after it, Foucault's work provided the first formulation of what I want to call rhetorical consciousness.

It will be useful for the development of my argument to consider the analogy between rhetorical and historical consciousness. Frank Ankersmit argued in *History and Topology* that historical consciousness came into being with the notion of virtù and the harsh everyday reality of Italian political life during the Renaissance. Virtù is a complex notion which entails psychic strength, power, authority, shrewdness, and a feeling for the right moment. Especially the latter feature points to the political underpinnings of the notion. According to Ankersmit, the idea of virtù marked the difference between the modern era and the Middle Ages because it foregrounded the domain of the earthly community with its field of political forces within which a politician could act. Historians could subsequently present this field as somehow organized. Ankersmit considers this political quality of the Renaissance world as the basis of historiography, especially because it allows us to narrativize the world in different ways.

The notion of virtù was taken up prior to Ankersmit by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* and *Between Past and Future* (see Dana Villa), who stated that virtuousness is the crucial notion in assessing the quality of a political action. In her view the virtue and quality of a politician depend not only upon

his or her ability to appear in the political arena, but especially on our assessment of it with hindsight. Although Arendt was not concerned with historical consciousness in relation to *virtù*, her notion incorporated historicity since virtuousness meant for her both the appearance within a field and its assessment with hindsight.

Foucault had argued from early on that the language of the modern sciences has allowed us to reflect upon ourselves as objects of knowledge. Accordingly, this self-reflection found its basis not in philosophy or in political action, but in the action with and the action of a specific scientific language. Following Foucault, I suggest that rhetorical consciousness comes into being with the discursive practices of the social and scientific engineers of the eighteenth century. Since then, it has become possible to define rhetorical consciousness as an awareness of the discursive practices that define subject-positions and the way in which subjects are related to other entities. This viewpoint implies that a change in scientific practices may result in another kind of rhetorical consciousness, or that a change in rhetorical consciousness may affect scientific practice. My question is what the implications of this viewpoint are for rhetorical actors who want to operate critically.

### III. Plurification or Extremity

In practice, criticism has often restricted itself to analyses of what is not allowed, not done, insufficient, unjustified, and so forth. In its focus on exclusion, Foucault's *L'ordre du discours* provides an illustration of this delimitation. Of course, criticism can also focus on what ought to be allowed. Or it can probe the limits of what is allowed. In this respect, it can either provide a plurification of visions or explore the extremes of possible visions. Both modalities stretch the span of ideologically enforced limits.

Ankersmit has sketched how, for instance, historiography has a structurally built in critical component that makes for a plurification of visions. Any historical text contains a proposal to look at a historical constellation in a certain way. Such a proposal, Ankersmit argues, only acquires meaning because it differs from other proposals. As a result there is an inherent negativity, or an inherent criticism: Historical insights are produced by proposals that rejects other proposals. However, this built-in negativity leads to the positive meaning of criticism as sketched above. Any intersubjective insight into the historical past is possible only if we have a number of different interpretations. Ankersmit locates insight, here, at the intersection of different interpretations. In order to enlarge our insight, in order to broaden the field covered by these intersections, difference and diversity count, as well as the measure to which a proposal-differs.

Evelyn Fox Keller provides a good example of such a plurification of visions. In *Refiguring Life*, for instance, she analyzes a series of lectures entitled "What is life"? that Erwin Schrödinger gave in 1943. By that time, Schrödinger was one of the most famous figures in searching for the smallest particle in the inanimate world. In 1943 he extended his attention to another field by asking whether one could not start looking also, technically, for the smallest animate particle, the bios. Whether or not his reflections led to them, we are now familiar with DNA and its genes, with gene-technology and -manipulation. Indeed, it would be tempting to see Schrödingers lectures as a paradigm for intentional action. Schrödinger proposed something, people got to work, and the result was the finding of the genes. Keller presents another interpretation, by focusing on the way in which this smallest particle was depicted, namely as a little "man." She constructs a historical development that starts with what Darwin in 1844 called "Being" and Maxwell, in 1870, "demon." With Schrödinger in 1943 genes had become "soldiers" of "local government stations." All of his cognitive metaphors characterize a being that willfully governs the development of cells. Keller's point is that this image is culturally charged. She contrasts the idea of a willing being with the conception that biological organisms are messages, whereby every molecule, including DNA, can be both sender and receiver. Thus she plurifies the historical vision of what happened. She is not so much interested in what happened after these lectures. Instead she emphasizes a historical continuity which is based on culturally invested core notions that do not remain exactly the same, but that transmute through time. In tracing that transmutation, Keller also differentiates the conception of what a gene is.

It is also possible to propose criticism by means of extreme or radical approaches. Historians, according to Ankersmit, should try to seek the limits of possible interpretations in order to provide maximum plurification. In this sense they should be willing to accept a "maximum risk" (*History and Topology* 84). Likewise, Culler has argued that scholars "should apply as much interpretative pressure as they can, should carry their thinking as far as it can go." As Culler sees it, extreme visions have more chance "of bringing to light connections or implications not previously noticed or reflected on" ("Overinterpretation" 110) — a point also made by Gould. The critical component here is that extremes, per definition, deliberately eschew embodying the consensus that has been established within a community. Building forth on previous analyses, this possibility was also explored by Keller.

In *Secrets of Life* Keller presents interpretations that are theoretically innovative and that shed a new light on scientific practices. Her point of view is strategically directed by feminist choices. In the eyes of the orthodox scientific community, science develops by itself, it progresses from primitive states to more sophisticated ones; questions of gender are not considered to be intrinsically related to this development. Keller chooses the word "secret" to contend the opposite. In



her analysis, "secret" becomes a thread that allows to locate a defining persistent attitude in the history of the modern sciences. Focusing on an article by Robert Boyle from 1744 about the essence of the scientific project, Keller argues convincingly that the sciences have been seen as a male profession from the start. This distribution, or exclusion, coincided with the phenomenon that men wanted to unveil the secrets of a nature metaphorized as feminine. This idea of unveiling has led to a persistent uneasiness to address issues of genesis and sexual generation.

There is no contradiction between the plurifying and extremist critical approaches. They may coincide, as Foucault noticed in *L'ordre du discours*. However, the concrete political scope of these two approaches is limited. The first – being aimed at the construction or reconstruction of historical constellations – is historical. The second – with its sometimes idiosyncratic creative potential, its tendency to seek the extreme per se, and its possibility to see or read reality differently – can be called aesthetical. Both approaches may have political implications, even though they are not taking practical, political, or material application into account. One only needs to look at the tenuous and barely existing relations between extreme critical interpretations and the course of affairs in current, concrete scientific practice. Here, a third type is called for; one that has remained sketchy in Foucault's theory, though, as I have suggested, his practice in the clinic provides a hint. Foucault himself touched on the problem in *Il faut défendre la société*, when he suggested that the civilized organisation of society is not only something to fight for, but that such a civilized form of organization is in fact the transmutation of a struggle. In light of what I am discussing, this implies for the relation between criticism and the sciences that one should try to move beyond the idea of two opposed parties. A transmuted struggle requires that one should operate within a single field.

#### IV. Criticism in Practice

Anyone who is familiar with the sheer amount of well funded, politically and socially supported, scientific research, also knows that critical rhetorical analyses have very little, or no influence on concrete research programs and processes. Keller feels and addresses the unease this may cause. Her work "reflects the growing preoccupation with the material consequences of science" (*Secrets of Life* 9), and it illustrates that critical theory need not be hopelessly failing in the sciences. Its relevance depends upon its ability to change itself from an outsider into a reflective insider. Instead of analyzing the virtuousness of others, it can also choose to start acting itself "virtuously," in the political sense of Ankersmit and Arendt. I mean that critical theorists should try to enter a certain field and try to influence the actual course of affairs.

The hostility between rhetorical criticism and the sciences was at the center of a recent row caused by the physicist Alan D. Sokal, who had put some deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and quantum physics in his processor and cooked it up. The result was a nervous kind of nonsense which was accepted by an important periodical promoting critical theory. Sokal's political agenda is not my concern here, rather the handicapped reactions to him. Stanley Fish, for instance, has argued that the sociology of the sciences has never pretended to move into the field of physics itself (see Dennis Dutton and Patrick Henry). Unfortunately, this implies that critical theorists could not see that the article made no sense in physics, or that psychoanalysis and deconstruction have nothing to offer to the practice and theory of physics. And what when a theory pretends to be critical; a stance Fish clearly supports? Surely criticism wants to be relevant for what happens in specialized fields, otherwise it becomes a matter of decoration at worst and at best an isolated practice that might give one a sense of superiority but that does not change much.

In Keller's *Secrets of Life/Secrets of Death* some chapters provide examples of how a critical theory can act within scientific research. Keller describes these chapters as "more technical" since she focuses on the language used in "actual research agendas" (10). In chapters 6 and 7, for instance, her central question is what makes species survive. Biologists prefer two options in answering this question. Species survive if they are most competitive or most fit. There is nothing wrong with these answers. Competition and the fight for survival are evidently observable. The point is that these answers are presented as the only ones. As such they fit in with social clichés of modern Western culture. One could, therefore criticize these ideas on the basis of strategic or ideological choices. But biologists would probably not pay much attention to such criticism, for the ideas of competition and fitness have proven to be productive. They allowed us to explain many things in the operation of evolution. Keller's choice is more daring. She traces the history and meaning of the notions of "competition" and "fitness" within biology. She then shows where biologists have left opportunities for research unused, have forgotten possibilities that were present in these concepts from the beginning, and, especially, why the current uses of the terms are methodologically unsound. This way she does not fight against them as an opponent, from the outside. The scene of the struggle is transmuted into an internal one.

Keller's movement into a field poses its own demands as to the type of rhetorical analysis and criticism, and the uses it is put to. She was trained as a bio-physicist, then for personal reasons, moved out of that field, got acquainted with feminism, and consequently with psychoanalysis and rhetoric. Only then did she move back into biology. Here, she actually took and takes part in ongoing discussions, and she influences their course. Her position within biology is solid, considering that she edited the biological standard reference book *Keywords*

of *Evolutionary Biology*, in which she also wrote one of the chapters. Thus, instead of analyzing processes from the outside, she has become a constructor of the language that researchers actually use. She has influenced concretely the framework in which biologists tend to think. In other words, she has questioned and tested the rhetorical consciousness that influences the questions researchers pose, and the directions that interest them. The political implications do not stop here. A biology that promotes competition and the fitness of species as inherently natural, has a distinct political force, it can be used rhetorically and politically. A biology that conceptualizes cooperation and the importance of individual sexual reproduction offers distinctly different rhetorical and political possibilities. I am not saying that one should prefer the one option above the other for its political implications. But these implications make it important to note that one option has been preferred in scientific practice.

In order to be so effective, Keller had to operate politically, wit virtù in Arendt's sense. She had to appear, indeed be, an expert in the specialized field she criticized. To remain critical in such circumstances requires a balancing act between assessment and participation, between reflection and engagement. Thus, the implication of what I suggest is partly that we are only able to influence the course of affairs in scientific practice if we belong to one of its fields. More generally, I suggest that any theory which takes the consequences of its critical quality seriously has to consider how and where it can make its mark in practice. In this respect, and rather ironically, Foucault's work in the clinic stands adverse to some of his later work, which often reveals a loose underpinning. In other words, Foucault himself has often ignored the importance of being accepted within a field according to the standards that rule there, as, for instance, Maclean's contribution in this volume shows. I think it is precisely this sloppiness that could with hindsight damage the critical potential of his work. We are after him, in the sense that our methods and tools of critical analysis have evolved since then, or have been put to other uses. But few are those that follow Foucault's example; for he had worked in a clinic before writing about it.

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