which can ignore the familiar surfaces of established intellectual codes and ask new questions... Foucault gives a dramatic quality to the movement of intellectual culture... [His] book must be judged as a contribution to the history and philosophy of scientific thought.

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U.S. $15.00
ISBN 0-679-75335-4

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

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

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

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

Preface

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

But what is it impossible to think, and what kind of impossibility are we faced with here? Each of these strange categories can be assigned a precise meaning and a demonstrable content; some of them do certainly involve fantastic entities — fabulous animals or sirens — but, precisely because it puts them into categories of their own, the Chinese encyclopaedia localizes their powers of contagion; it distinguishes carefully between the very real animals (those that are frenzied or have just broken the water pitcher) and those that reside solely in the realm of imagination. The possibility of dangerous mixtures has been exorcized, heraldry and fable have been relegated to their own exalted peaks: no inconceivable amphibious maidens, no clawed wings, no disgusting, squamous epidermis, none
of those polymorphous and demoniacal faces, no creatures breathing fire. The quality of monstrosity here does not affect any real body, nor does it produce modifications of any kind in the bestiary of the imagination; it does not lurk in the depths of any strange power. It would not even be present at all in this classification had it not iniminated itself into the empty space, the interstitial blanks separating all these entities from one another. It is not the ‘fabulous’ animals that are impossible, since they are designated as such, but the narrowness of the distance separating them from (and juxtaposing them to) the stray dogs, or the animals that from a long way off look like flies. What transgresses the boundaries of all imagination, of all possible thought, is simply that alphabetical series (a, b, c, d) which links each of those categories to all the others.

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

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

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

\[ ^{1} \text{Raymond Roussel, the French novelist. Cf. Michel Foucault’s Raymond Roussel (Paris, 1965). [Translator’s note.]} \]
to find a place of residence for them, to define a common locus beneath them all. Utopias afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold; they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical. Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'. This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the fabula; heterotopias (such as those to be found so often in Borges' desiccated speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences.

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

The uneasiness that makes us laugh when we read Borges is certainly related to the profound distress of those whose language has been destroyed; loss of what is 'common' to place and name. Atopia, aphasia.

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

When we establish a considered classification, we say that a cat and a dog resemble each other less than two greyhounds do, even if both are tame or embalmed, even if both have broken the water pitcher, what is the ground on which we are able to establish the validity of this classification with complete certainty? On what 'table', according to what grid of identities, similitudes, analogies, have we become accustomed to sort out so many different and similar things? What is this coherence which, as is immediately apparent, is neither determined by an a priori and necessary concatenation, not imposed on us by immediately perceptible contents? For it is not a question of linking consequences, but of grouping and isolating, of analysing, of matching and pigeon-holing concrete contents; there is nothing more tentative, nothing more empirical (superficially, at least) than the process of establishing an order among things; nothing that demands a sharer eye or a surer, better-articulated language; nothing that more insistently requires that one allow oneself to be carried along by the proliferation of
qualities and forms. And yet an eye not consciously prepared might well group together certain similar figures and distinguish between others on the basis of such and such a difference: in fact, there is no similitude and no distinction, even for the wholly untrained perception, that is not the result of a precise operation and of the application of a preliminary criterion. A 'system of elements' – a definition of the segments by which the resemblances and differences can be shown, the types of variation by which those segments can be affected, and, lastly, the threshold above which there is a difference and below which there is a similitude – is indispensable for the establishment of even the simplest form of order. Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language; and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself in depth as though already there, waiting in silence for the moment of its expression.

The fundamental codes of a culture – those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices – establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home. At the other extremity of thought, there are the scientific theories or the philosophical interpretations which explain why order exists in general, what universal law it obeys, what principle can account for it, and why this particular order has been established and not some other. But between these two regions, so distant from one another, lies a domain which, even though its role is mainly an intermediary one, is nonetheless fundamental: it is more confused, more obscure, and probably less easy to analyse. It is here that a culture, imperceptibly deviating from the empirical orders prescribed for it by its primary codes, instituting an initial separation from them, causes them to lose their original transparency, relinquishing its immediate and invisible powers, frees itself sufficiently to discover that these orders are perhaps not the only possible ones or the best ones; this culture then finds itself faced with the stark fact that there exists, below the level of its spontaneous orders, things that are in themselves capable of being ordered, that belong to a certain unspoken order; the fact, in short, that order exists. As though emancipating itself to some extent from its linguistic, perceptual, and practical grids, the culture superimposed on them another kind of grid which neutralized them, which by this superimposition both revealed and ex-
what space of order knowledge was constituted; on the basis of what
historical a priori, and in the element of what positivity, ideas could
appear, sciences be established, experience be reflected in philosophies,
ratios be formed, only, perhaps, to dissolve and vanish soon after-
wards. I am not concerned, therefore, to describe the progress of know-
ledge towards an objectivity in which today’s science can finally be recog-
nized; what I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field,
the episteme in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having
reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its
positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing
perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility; in this account,
what should appear are those configurations within the space of know-
ledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science.
Such an enterprise is not so much a history, in the traditional meaning of
that word, as an ‘archaeology’.

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

1 The problems of method raised by such an ‘archaeology’ will be examined in a later
work.

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

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

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

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

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