DANIEL DEFERT LEGATEE OF MICHEL FOUCAULT’S MANUSCRIPTS

Daniel Defert, who shared Foucault’s life for over twenty years, is today in possession of all the notes and manuscripts the philosopher left at the time of his death. Heavy heritage that bears the mark of the Forbidden: Foucault, who would often repeat to the people close to him: “Do not play on me the trick Max Brod played on Kafka”, had indeed made sure to state on his will: “No posthumous publication”. Yet, two important in-progress publications have been carried out since his death in June 1984: the collection Dits et Écrits, which brings together articles, interviews, and conferences given by the author, along with the progressive publication of all the lectures he gave at the Collège de France starting from 1970 and up to his death. Secondly, two substantial projects, that were not self-evident in the first place, and for which Daniel Defert has been associated in many respects. It is about this delicate problem – the question of the intimacy of a memory that must be respected combined with the possible advertisement of the previously unpublished part of a considerable work – that we decided to question him.

Heir of a work?

I had never thought, while I was sharing Foucault’s life, that one day I would receive the heritage of his papers. We had never talked about it, and when he ended up in hospital, it was already too late: this is not the kind of things you talk about in hospital. Foucault was absolutely against the idea of constituting a complete work. I remember Margueritte Yourcenar saying that she was writing her paper on post-war Europe1: in posterity even if her work was not published; this made Foucault uncomfortable, he did not care at all about posterity because he would not be there to exchange with his audience.

Yet, during his lifetime he had thought of working on a collection with me and he wanted to start it after his stay in hospital. Unfortunately, he was never able to do it. Short after, François Ewald imposed the creation of the Centre Michel Foucault: we needed that Centre to collect the texts that were scattered all over the world, texts that nor Foucault nor I had kept. I had traveled with him, so I knew where he had gone and which interviews he had done but the texts were missing. We also wanted to host the recordings of the lectures at the Collège de France: dozens of listeners recorded the lectures (the Collège did not do it), and Foucault was probably the only one not to have a tape of his lectures! The Center was set up at the Bibliothèque de Saulchoir, where Foucault had worked a lot. It was then directed by Michel Albraric, who put a lot of himself in a project which probably required more money than the library had. When Philippe Ariétes was elected at the presidency of the Centre Michel Foucault, he entrusted the “Institut de la Mémoire et de l’Édition Contemporaine” (IMEC) with the collection. This was of benefit not only to Foucault’s archives, made more accessible, but also to the IMEC. According to a recent statistic, the Foucault collection is the most consulted at the IMEC.

Dits et Écrits

Foucault, when he works with Deleuze on the publication of the Complete Works of Nietzsche, is not hostile to collecting even the laundry notes of the philosopher – a very clear allusion to one of Victor Hugo’s publishers2. We have not done that for Dits et Écrits, which only brings together things that have already been published, even in very small booklets: one American text was almost a roneoed publication! But we included everything that had had a public existence. Thus the publication presents all the texts that were published during Foucault’s life, but not necessarily re-read by him (he only re-read the interviews given in France), even texts that were not meant to be broadcast publicly. We went for a chronological presentation, preferable to any thematic presentation which would have focused on the reception of the period, while this publication is meant to last. Most foreign publishers chose a thematic classification – a lot of texts and interviews having already been translated in isolated publications – but I think that such a decision is harmful. Of course, Dits et Écrits is very repetitive: when you read three times the same interview, even if each time Foucault says something slightly different, you do not learn much. But exhaustiveness had to be the aim: we missed three texts only (they are now in the German edition). When there are more than one versions, as is the case for the conference “What is an author?”, we give both versions3. For example in the case of the Third World newspaper editorial called Zone de tempêtes, an editorial written or simply accepted by Foucault, we cannot be sure of anything: that is why we use footnotes4. For the texts written by several authors, such as “Convosqué à la P.J”5, signed by Foucault, A. Landan and J.-Y. Petit in the Nouvel Observateur6, we had the proofs that it had been written by Foucault himself.

Between the two volumes of the Dits et Écrits of the “Quarto” edition, you can clearly see that spoken communication is taking more importance than the written word: Foucault is much more demanded – his trips abroad give rise to numerous interviews. Foucault’s political and intellectual statuses become clear. Some uninformned people pointed out Foucault’s silence during the Algerian War: he was not in France, and no one would have thought of asking him for advice! He was not famous at the time. Of course there is this interview of 1973 in which he declares: “You are referring to things that I did not really write but that I said during interviews. I am not sure I would leave them as such”. We knew well enough that we were running the risk of paralyzing a “work”. But we did not see the point (this always raises objections) of leaving Foucault’s different interventions scattered all over like incoherent events. Yet, we could do it that way, some works go about like this. I took as model Walter Benjamin’s Italian edition that I had found very interesting. I am truly convinced that we are dealing with a “work” that has its own theoretical coherence: I have in mind one of Foucault’s texts where he defends Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Édén Éd

References

2. Refer to the presentation of the text, Dits et Écrits, v. I, p. 817.
5. The first publication of 1994 (Gallimard) is in four volumes; the re-edition in “Quarto” in 2000 brings together all the texts in two volumes.
sacrilegious act: I end up publishing the transcription of the manuscript, that of the lecture of 1970-1971, which had not been recorded on tape. It is a real problem, but I have no trouble living with it. Anyway, I play a role at each stage, since I compare the galley proofs to the manuscripts I have.

The publication of the lectures was complex. It was evoked shortly after Foucault’s death. Bourdieu, who was still at the Collège, had been contacted by an assistant to carry out the publication. Gilbert Burleit had taken all his recordings to the Collège. Something unprecedented happened at the Collège: could the Collège publish some lectures? All the professors met and gave a ruling on the matter: the property of the lectures belongs to its author. Yet we lost grip on the question of the lectures and, if since some some recordings were available, we had it coming to us. There was an publication in Italy that lasted one year and two other ones had been announced in Hong Kong and in Brazil. Still it was urgent to have a publication of reference: we could not guarantee anything serious with such risky publishers. Today the lectures are co-published by François Ewald and Alessandro Fontana which is in fact comes within the competence of a judiciary decision. Foucault’s family wished to stop the pirate publication. Stephen Hessel, once responsible for the problems of intellectual property for the United Nations, was appointed mediator by a judge, and decided that Fontana (the Italian publisher), who I really like, would be co-publisher of the French publication: it stopped the Italian publication which, Fontana acknowledged it himself, contained some mistakes. In our publication the oral recording served us as a basis, as it to say what had been public and which did not fall under the prescription of Foucault’s will: “No posthumous publication”. But we were in possession of the written documents, and, as the readers who have access to the manuscript will notice, Foucault wrote down almost entirely his lectures. This constitutes a guarantee, a security that enables us to build a publication of reference with a critical apparatus.

We all knew that the lectures were of great value and interest: sometimes five to six hundred people attended them, each week and for a period of thirteen years. The teaching of Foucault had always been fascinating to his listeners and had, at the same time, constituted a political event: there was a link between the current political affiches which is probably the only manuscript that was left from Histoire de la sexualité. The book was released when Foucault was already in hospital so that he was not able to destroy the manuscript, or else he would have destroyed it just like the rest: I saw him throwing away his manuscripts, and I never told him not to do so: Foucault would have laughed, and would have destroyed them even faster. I also happen to have a version of L’Archéologie du savoir, he had given me to read, that I kept at my place and found when I moved out. This is a version he wrote in a few weeks and it is very interesting to understand the genesis of Foucault’s writing. While Les Mots et les choses was being printed he started, before everyone else, to review it! He wrote approximately six hundred pages in a few weeks, very personal pages and even a bit phenomenological: “I am half way through my work”, he said. This manuscript might not be that far from the final version (Frédéric Gros [the publisher of L’Herménéutique du sujet] believes it, I am not totally convinced), whereas this final version was written after his enormous work on the British analysts. It is the only case for which we possess the first version of a book. For Histoire de la sexualité, it is the manuscript of the final version. And yet, in general, there were three versions: some sort of immediate version, what he thought about the subject and which constituted what precisely was no longer to be thought. If you thought that a subject did not necessitate any research then you should get rid of it. It so happens that we never talked about the genesis of his books, but he had written to me in one of his letters: “it is almost finished, it no longer has anything to do with what I thought”.

The imperative “think different” is a true form of asceticism, and a permanent method. First there was the version of what was not to be said, thought out a bit spontaneously. Then a period of at least three years was devoted to research and once the research was done it was time for the rewriting. In the intervening period there were surely some plans, but they have been destroyed. Foucault then gave the second manuscript to the editor to have it typed out, and rewrote, on the writing machine, the third version which is to be seen more as a literary cleaning. When the manuscript of Histoire de la sexualité was given in to the Bnf, the two volumes were not yet separated. I do not know if this version, done very late, is really the third version of the book. Initially Le Souci de soi was meant to be the preface to L’Usage des plaisirs but it became so voluminous that Foucault made two books. In

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many chapters you can tell that Foucault hesitates between one or two volumes. I wrote a few pages of analysis that went with the rest to the Bnf, but I did not compare it with the final publication. Yet you will see that the chapters of an important volume, which was afterward redistributed in two, are gathered in this manuscript.

The fourth volume of Histoire de la sexualité, Les Aveux de la chair, falls in the category of the posthumous publications. Dits et Ecrits does not fall in it because we only kept the texts that had been published or that were being published at the time of his death; as for the lectures they had had some sort of an oral advertisement. Les Aveux de la chair is a different problem. It happens that the work has followed the ternary rhythm that I have evoked. The reason is simple: the dactylographer of Gallimard had just arrived; she was not familiarized with Foucault’s handwriting and was not able to type out clearly the second manuscript. Hence, Foucault was not able to take up again a typescript full of errors which demanded to be totally rewritten. He thus worked on the second manuscript, the one he had given to the dactylographer: it resembles Proust’s system, without the quillings glued on the side, but with a system of superposition which would enable a beginner in edition to carry out the work and really distinguish the final lesson from the rest. It is rather tangled up. At one point Michel Foucault’s family had deposited the typed work at the Bibliothèque de Saulchoir6; I was against the idea of such a faulty reading. I remain faithful to a principle Dumézil had entrusted me with: if there is no posthumous publication, why would Ph.D students be the only ones to know anything about it? What is this privilege given to Ph.D students? I have adopted this principle: it is either everybody or nobody. With the heirs we might, one day, make another decision, but for the moment it is nobody. My way of seeing time is very different from Foucault’s: he did not care about posterity, whereas my relationship to posterity is more anxious and fantasized. I say to myself that life continues as long as there is something to do on the work. I still do not know about the future of this text.

The future of the archive?

A web site devoted to Foucault, http://www.michel-foucault-archives.org, is now on line. This site gives access to the IMEC stock list, and also presents the archives of a lecture: the recording, the manuscript, and the transcription (which complies with the publication carried out by Frédéric Gros) of the first lesson of L’Herméneutique du Sujet, which is a lecture that has gone around a lot and has been translated in many countries. The web site is in five languages: French, English, Spanish, Chinese and Arabic, each of these languages having an important Foucault readership. These archives are periodically renewed. For example they are planning to put on line the work of Philippe Chevalier, within the group of research directed by Philippe Artières, which deals with the Christian sources that Foucault used in his last lectures. I have also found a bibliographic file done by Foucault himself for Les Mots et les choses, certainly non-exhaustive (Foucault would always manipulate the archives…), but which will also be found on the site. And finally, there is some talk about presenting some of the clichés of Foucault taken by numerous photographs.

As for the lectures, once they will all be published, the manuscripts will have to be made accessible to the readers to let them verify the edition (which might contain a few mistakes), but also because there exist some handwritten fragments which we have not reproduced yet. And we probably have not found all the sources; Foucault jotted down his notes in a very personal way: one quote per page arranged thematically. But to correlate these references with the book we are publishing is almost impossible. The publishers in charge of the lectures are very often forced to go back to the libraries to have not found all the sources; Foucault jotted down his notes in a very personal way: one quote per page arranged thematically. But to correlate these references with the book we are publishing is almost impossible. The publishers in charge of the lectures are very often forced to go back to the libraries to

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6 Legally, Daniel Defert owns the manuscripts, the copyrights and the moral ownership belong to Denys Foucault and Francine Fruchaud, brother and sister of the philosopher. The editorial decisions are taken by all the parties.

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The IMEC collection

The richness of the documents that are today available for consultation at the IMEC reveals the importance of Foucault’s activity. The thematic classification of the collection boasts all sort of supports: you can find a few typed out sheets with handwritten corrections (as is the case for the text “Les Suivantes”, first published by the Mercure de France in 1965 and taken up again as the opening of Les Aveux de la chair should be published rapidly because the interest for a work diminishes with time. Yet Nietzsche’s previously unpublished work is being published and it is still interesting. It is no longer the same audience, it is a rared audience, and it does not have the same effect. I remember Claude Mauriac telling me that I was going to be very solicited during the first ten years because it is during this time that the PhDs are done. Ten years? Oh no! It will start in ten years! Dits et Ecrits could have been published earlier, but I wanted the publication to be delayed so as to have it out for the tenth anniversary. A bit symbolically: I could not face the idea that it only presented a ten-year interest. The archives that have been deposited must be seen as a work-in-progress.

Interview by Guillaume BELLON

Foucault’s work at the Bibliothèque nationale de France

The manuscript corresponding to the second and third volumes of Histoire de la sexualité (L’usage des plaisirs and Le Souci de soi, published by Gallimard in 1984, are today available in the collection “Tel”) is kept at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, along with the first draft of L’Archéologie du savoir (not yet binded).

Foucault’s previously unpublished complementary thesis is also to be found at the Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne: Kant, Anthropologie (introduction, translation and notes by J. Huyppelie)

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