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## EDITORIAL

To be held within the bounds of the edifice, safe within the comforts of the expected structure. Stoke up the fire, place one's feet on the rug, light the pipe. But the fire is polluting the air, the rug is seal skin, and the tobacco is cancerous.

A meeting of distinguished editors, the topic, an exciting series of fiction works by new writers, the daring decision: the works must be *good* and have a *market*. The great *good*. The great *market*.

The art critic spends an entire column discussing the formalistic merits of an etching.

So IMPULSE has no other choice in the North American climate of mercantile conservatism but to produce itself as change. To slide.

Yesterday's mistakes are a quiet growth over the edifice's senses, as ivy over the Ivory tower.

So we will attempt to be what we haven't been before.

You go to your newsstand, you open your mail and here is the magazine you didn't expect to be this incarnation of a magazine. Which is what we plan to do for the future, to do what you haven't anticipated.

For the time being we will be more difficult to locate. But all you need do is look.

We want to be poetic but still read today's news.

ELDON GARNET

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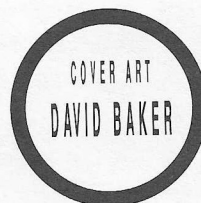
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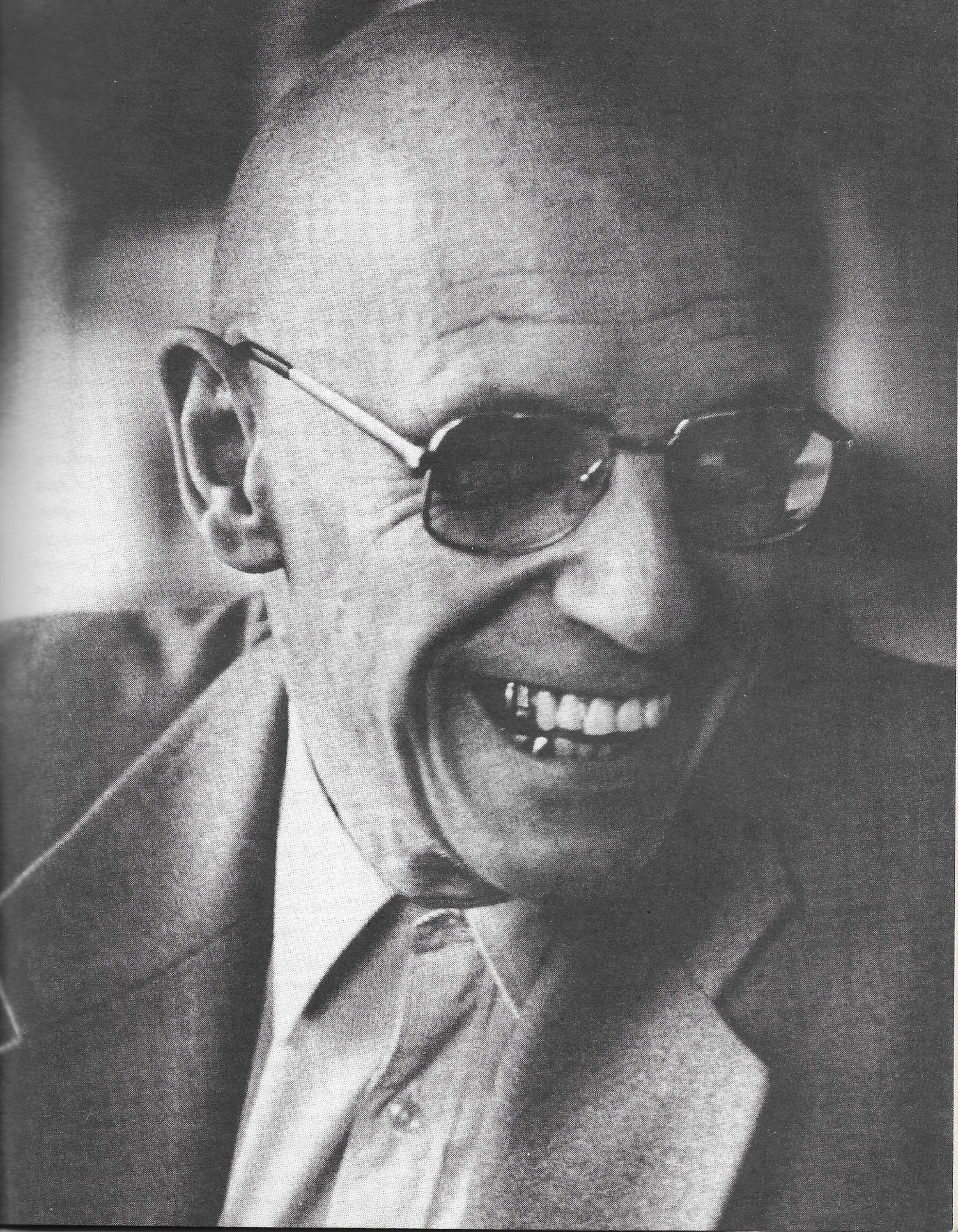


# FOUCAULT

*was interviewed on national French radio in the late seventies by an interviewer somewhat unfamiliar with his work, resulting in an often amusing yet revealing discussion with the famous post-structuralist philosopher and critic.*

Original  
transcription  
by LISA  
WEBSTER.  
Translation  
from original  
French to  
English by  
RONALD B.  
DESOUZA.







Michel Foucault, you are a Professor at the College of France, a philosopher and thinker. You are 48 years old. You are immersed in learning. How does one arrive at learning?

MICHEL FOUCAULT: Arrive... you're born to it, you know. For someone like me, brought up as a provincial petty bourgeois, learning comes with your baby bottle before you even go to primary school.

Knowledge was the rule of existence: you had to be first, you always had to be a bit better in class... So I've never arrived at learning, I've always been splashing about in it. You were lucky. MF: What's luck? When I say I've been splashing about in learning, actually it's

because I would soon be rid of it. Since you can't do that, you look for a different angle, something that isn't part of learning but should be. Someone remarked the other day that May 68 was an insurrection against learning. But on the contrary, it was a rebellion against the kind of "learning" that amounted to a prohibition against knowing certain things. In fact, May 68 was a pulling down of barriers, and the intrusion of a new kind of learning. I felt rather at home in it, myself: I've always been interested in the underside, the "lower depths", as Nietzsche would say. Still, you have a lot of diplomas.

MF: I suppose I do. Do you find it unwieldy, that satchel-full of diplomas? MF: The ones one hasn't deserved, one remembers with pleasure. The unwieldy ones are those one had to work for — after three years of cramming, your style gets cramped, you're stuck with ready-made ways of thinking, that's really tough to get rid of. Do you teach? MF: I lecture in a rather special place, the College of France, where my function is precisely not to teach. The normal teacher starts off with a dose of guilt:

**"For someone like me, brought up as a provincial petty bourgeois, learning comes with your baby bottle before you even go to primary school. Knowledge was the rule of existence: you had to be first, you always had to be a bit better in class..."**

"There are things you should know." Then comes a dose of obligation: "I am going to teach you what you should know." Third comes the checking up stage: exams. A whole series of power relations! At the College of France, though, the audience only comes if they feel like it. Twelve times a year, it's the teacher who gets examined. At any rate, I get terrible stage fright

before my lectures, just as I used to feel at exam time. I feel the public is coming to check up on my work: if they're not interested I get rather dejected! Are there things it's essential to learn? MF: The first thing one should learn, is that learning is something profoundly erotic. In fact it's quite an achievement,

the way teachers manage to make learning unpleasant, depressing, grey, unerotic! We need to understand how that serves the needs of society. Imagine what would happen if people got into as big a frenzy about learning as they do about sex. Crowds shoving and pushing at school doors! It would be a complete social disaster. You have to make learning seem rebarbative if you want to restrict the numbers of people who have access to knowledge. You've claimed one should refrain from thinking in terms of good and evil. How do you feel now about that maxim? MF: All the people who say you shouldn't think in terms of good and evil are thinking in just that way themselves! Nietzsche. MF: Of course. Lucky he set the example! (laughter) Who was keener than Nietzsche on telling us what was good and what was evil? But to want not to think in those terms is really to want to avoid this or that *current* conception of good or evil. To undermine the barriers, to unsettle, to spread uncertainty, to foster osmosis, passages: I think that's what matters. You often hover on the



border of seriousness and levity. Sometimes, it's hard to follow you. MF: It saddens me to be told that. My ambition is to write in such a way as to give my readers a kind of physical pleasure. That almost strikes me as a writer's politeness.

**The book that launched your career was your *History of Madness*. Why madness?**

MF: It so happens that for biographical reasons I was exposed to the true nature of asylums. I heard the voices of the hundreds of thousands of people who got locked up, fell in the hole, and suffered, and spoke out, and bawled. Like anyone else I was overwhelmed by those voices. I was about to say: like anyone except psychiatrists: not that I have anything against them, but to them, howls have become inaudible, because they come filtered through their institutionalized learning.

**Do you still think of the asylum as your universe?**

MF: No, not really. But it was the asylum that first set for me the problem that still haunts me: the problem of power. Knowledge and domination are intimately linked. I saw that most nakedly in the asylum, where the apparently serene and speculative learning of the psychiatrist is absolutely inseparable from an amazingly meticulous system of hierarchical power. That, in effect, is the asylum. One thing that particularly fascinated me was the transition from the vocabulary of *madness* to the vocabulary of *sickness*: it looks like a change in terminology, but it's really a seizure of power. And, in the end, this psychiatric power is all the more powerful when it spreads beyond its birthplace, the asylum: you find psychiatrists in schools, in families, in law courts and jails.... Psychiatry has become a general instrument of subjection and normalization. In your book *Discipline and Punishment* (*Surveiller et Punir*, or literally *Surveillance and Punishment*. The English title misses the idea of surveillance,

central to the book and to this segment of the present conversation) you analyzed the relation between crime and the methods used by society to punish crime. When did the institution of punishment begin?

MF: There is probably no human society that doesn't punish. But what's especially characteristic of our society is *surveillance*. As late as the eighteenth century, a huge number of people effectively escaped the law. The power to punish was discontinuous, full of holes. That's why, when you did catch a criminal, the penalties were awful: all the more so because of the need to "make an example". It seems to me that it is only since the beginning of the nineteenth century that society has sought to extend its power to punish so that, in principle, *nobody could escape*. The actual punishment could then be milder. Nowadays, of course, magistrates still punish, and punish heavily, but if you ask them to justify punishment they talk not about expiation but about correction: they think of themselves as engineers of behaviour.

*Discipline and Punishment* begins in horror, with a long description of the torture to death of the regicide Damien, witnessed by a crowd of happy spectators. Could that happen now, those happy spectators? MF: That's a grave

**"My ambition is to write in such a way as to give my readers a kind of physical pleasure. That almost strikes me as a writer's politeness."**

question. There's not the slightest doubt that if we left punishment up to what's called public opinion, the results would be frightful, frightful. Surely we've progressed since the torture of Damien! MF: Of course. You want me to say that we don't use torture any more. That's true, but only within the penal system. But torture has



merely been displaced to another institution, an institution that dates from precisely the time torture disappeared: the police. You had to have the police as soon as the goal of the system was to punish everyone instead of making a few spectacular examples. But the police, as you know, use increasingly violent means to extract

nowadays is tightly linked to certain forms of power and political control, common to both capitalist and socialist societies. **Old-fashioned punishment seemed to answer to a taste for horror: rubbing salt into wounds... did that stem from ignorance?** MF: On the contrary, it was a very precise ritual, linked to

**"Even making love involves power relations, charged with eroticism. That hasn't been studied much. There's so much pleasure in giving orders: there's also pleasure in taking them. This pleasure of power - well, there's a topic for study."**

another form of political power, exercised in the name of the sovereign in his physical person. You have to think of the great ceremony of public torture as a sort of political ritual, like coronations. In the body of the tortured, in his wounds and his

the truth. **But the West has no monopoly on the use of torture.** MF: The interesting thing is that the mechanism of surveillance has proved to be such a terrific invention that it's spread almost as easily as the steam engine. **Still, you won't stop people from thinking that a crime must be paid for by suffering.** MF: True, but that thirst for vengeance has been transferred to a social institution, and people don't recognize themselves in that institution. **Michel Foucault, do you have children?** MF: No, no, no. I'm not married. **Well if you did have children, and your children were harmed, how would you react? Did you think about that when you wrote?** MF: No doubt my book isn't clear... But it's absolutely wrong to see it as some sort of apology for crime! I don't say you shouldn't punish, I don't advocate giving murderers a crown! **You just want to humanize punishment.** MF: No! What I would like to show is that the way we punish

screams, the physical power of the king was manifest in all its brilliance and ferocity. **But will there ever be a time when every citizen will be free to do what he wants?** MF: No! Individual relationships are also relations of power. If there's a polemical aspect to my writings, it's in my insistence that people have too often ignored those relations of power. In traditional academic philosophy, individual relations are viewed as dialogues: either you understand one another or you don't. On the Marxist analysis, they're essentially determined by relations of production. But it seems to me that our lives are plotted according to relations of power that are just as fundamental as economic or discursive ones. To reveal those relations of power, in my mind at least, is to try and hand them back to those who are involved in them. **You're very trusting: you think people can become better...** MF: Maybe not become better. But people must be able to



increase the quantity of pleasure of which they are capable. **Is that a pessimistic diagnosis?**

MF: You have to be pessimistic, in the sense that you have to paint things black if you want to make future possibilities more vivid. I'm vain enough to think that the fight I'm involved in, against the encroachment of psychiatry in our



lives, is an important one, but my own contribution to this process doesn't strike me as very important. Nothing would change much if I and my books didn't exist. I rather like that feeling — I find it almost physically pleasurable to think of the causes I'm concerned with just passing through me, of thousands of people and books going in the

same direction as me but ultimately flowing way beyond me. **Michel Foucault, I get the**

**impression that you would like to get rid of your great burden of learning. I almost get the feeling you'd like to start over from scratch, elsewhere.**

MF: Funny you should say that, because actually it's quite true. **And what**

**about that "elsewhere": can you define it?**

MF: Not at all! Anyway maybe I won't do it: maybe I'll just keep treading the same ground, fighting the same fight against the normalizations that confine us. Maybe I'm just more normalized than I think I am, or than I'd like to be. **We were speaking of power. Do**

**you like to take orders?**

MF: Even making love involves power relations, charged with eroticism. That hasn't been studied much. There's so much pleasure in giving orders: there's also pleasure in taking them. This pleasure of power — well, there's a topic for study.

**WHAT DO ALL THESE PEOPLE  
HAVE IN COMMON?**

STEVE ERICKSON  
MONA SIMPSON  
MARTIN AMIS  
LINDA HUNT  
ROLAND JOFFE  
JOAN MITCHELL  
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ANGELA CARTER  
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