Drawing on Aristotle's *Poetics* and Peirce's philosophy of science, I argue that scholarship comes closest to contemporary creative art at the point at which it generates doubt in prior knowledge, forcefully. Foucault and Auden exemplify this convergence.

Poetic Fact: On Research Questions as Relations of Force

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For a long time, the story goes, we supported a Victorian regime, and we continue to be dominated by it even today. Thus the image of the imperial prude is emblazoned on our restrained, mute and hypocritical sexuality.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain frankness was still common, it would seem [dit-on]. Sexual practices had little need of secrecy; words were said without undue reticence.

—Foucault, History of Sexuality Volume 1

The opening pages of Foucault's *History of Sexuality Volume 1* are sprinkled with phrases like "it would seem [*dit-on*]" (3), "seem to have [*semblent avoir*]" (4), and "we are told [*nous dit-on encore*]" (5).[1] Such phrases serve as repeated reminders of the author's ironic distance. The mock-poetics of sentences like "But twilight soon fell upon this bright day, followed by the monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie [*À ce plein jour, un rapide crépuscule aurait fait suite, jusqu'aux nuits monotones de la bourgeoisie victorienne*]" (3)[2] underscore the increasing feeling one has over these first few pages that Foucault finds something risible in the common-sense tale he is in the process of recounting, indeed impersonating.

As *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* continues, the play-acting recedes slightly to allow for the appearance of a number of express doubts, including the idea that this passionately critical "discourse on modern sexual repression" resembles nothing so

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much as a form of "preaching. A great sexual sermon" (7). "This is the point," Foucault now writes, "at which I would like to situate the series of historical analyses that will follow" (8). Foucault proceeds over the next forty pages to enumerate the series of "facts" (13)—*"faits"* (*Histoire* 22)—that will serve to substantiate what his "great sexual sermon" metaphor has already foreshadowed. In brief, it is this same Victorian period that "witnessed a veritable discursive explosion" of sexual confession, be it in diary, doctor's surgery, domestic architecture, or even demographic map (17).

The facts Foucault recounts over these pages are compelling, so much so that one invariably forgets to ask why they are not in themselves sufficient. Why does he not just tell us those facts? Do they not render his opening pages superfluous? Why does he bother, with such palpable scorn, to flesh out this "discourse on modern sexual repression" (5) when even from the first page it is apparent how little credence he places in it? Why this preliminary play-acting? To put the strategy down to a certain mandarin scorn on Foucault's part would be to ignore the fact that humanities scholars repeatedly introduce their findings in just such a fashion, in terms of the received opinions those findings will undermine. So do scientists, of all stripes. But why?

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle proffers a reason: "what engages our feelings most powerfully is the elements of the plot—the reversals and recognitions" (75). The best way to see this, and indeed to explicate Foucault's strangely fictive opening to *The History of Sexuality Volume 1,* is to focus on what Aristotle regarded as the most powerful version of such reversals and recognitions: "when the shock of surprise arises from likely circumstances" (91). For Aristotle, more than anyone else, shows Foucault to be a poet, a framer of compelling questions.

Aristotle argues that certain ways of plotting dramatic delusion and dénouement produce emotions that quite literally make people think. Chapter 9 of the *Poetics* formalizes this, through the dense statement that "since the [tragic] mimesis is not only [a mimesis] of a full-grown action but also of [events] terrifying and pitiful, and since the events are especially [so] when they happen unexpectedly and [yet] out of [inner] logic—for that way they will be more wonderful than if [they happened] all by themselves or [as we say] by chance [. . .] therefore plots of that kind must be more compelling" (85).[3] The first thing one needs to know in order to grasp the import of this passage is that Aristotle's focus is squarely on the tragic hero's own perspective. What is essential is that the denouement be unexpected *to him,* unexpected "and [yet] out of [inner] logic," true to the logic of the world he inhabits. According to Aristotle, the most "compelling" section of *Oedipus Rex* is thus the point during the messenger's speech when Oedipus starts to recognize that his situation is really the reverse of what he had thought (87). He did not expect this and yet it is real. The audience's identification with him in that moment of downfall is experienced in terms of pity and fear

because it involves the feeling, and doubtless a ghost of the memory, of that same experience of suddenly realizing one was utterly mistaken.

The second thing to note about the passage is that Aristotle's presentation of tragic emotion involves not just pity and fear, but also wonder. The Greek word *θαυμαστὸν* (*Poetics; Longinus* 62)—given in George Whalley's translation above as "wonderful"—is really, as Whalley himself points out, something more like "productive of wonder" (*Poetics* 84n84); Aristotle's use of the word here underscores the fact that spectators actually experience that specific emotion when undergoing "the pleasure peculiar to tragedy" (97). That wonder accompanies the two emotions more typically associated with Aristotle's theory is significant, for it serves to link that nexus of emotions to the assertions made earlier in the *Poetics* that tragic pleasure is closely related to the opportunities it presents for learning (Halliwell 75). The link arises because "wondering," as Aristotle puts it in the *Rhetoric*, his fuller treatment of these three emotions, "implies the desire of learning" (2183).

Aristotle adds, in that same chapter of the *Rhetoric*, that when it comes to art, even the representation of an unpleasant object can generate wonder in its hearers and viewers (2183). It is worth keeping in mind the horror of the passage from *Oedipus*, which Aristotle singles out as most productive of wonder. It is the point at which Oedipus takes in that to which all these mounting facts point: his wife's true identity. These are the moments just prior to Oedipus's blinding. He should have killed himself too, the Chorus adds, on his return to the stage shortly thereafter (Sophocles 65). The reason such an emotionally-charged identification with calamitous downfall and loss can still lead to a pleasure, that "very great pleasure" that is the pleasure of learning (*Poetics* 57), is that it is not "the object itself which gives delight," but rather the fact that "the spectator draws inferences [. . .] and thus learns something fresh" (*Rhetoric* 2183). In other words, the head-splitting, emotive experience of identifying with Oedipus at the moment he begins to recognize his dramatically reversed fate sets in train not merely pity, fear, and wonder, but also a desire to think through what has stirred up all these emotions in us. This is for a simple but far-reaching reason: "the object of wonder is an object of desire" (*Rhetoric* 2183).

That is a thumbnail sketch of Aristotle's theory of the relation between unexpected reversal, the dawning sense that there is an inner logic behind it, and the desire to know (see Halliwell, *Poetics; Longinus* and Sokolowski). That this is effectively a theory of the research question becomes apparent the moment you compare it with nineteenth-century philosopher of science and semiotician Charles Saunders Peirce's theory of the "unexpected regularity" that pertains to any decent scientific research question ("Logic" 88). For Peirce, the phenomena that cause the "irritation" of "doubt" leading to the demand to know ("Fixation" 9-10) are present in the form of an "unexpected

regularity" ("Logic" 88). Think of Foucault's facts contrary to hypothesis. It is vital that they actually be facts. Mere "irregularity" is not enough, according to Peirce, to impel us into inquiry. It is when phenomena are at once unexpected according to the current state of knowledge and yet clearly law-abiding in some other regard that we have a real question.

It is in this light that I think we can begin to understand the enigma I tabled above: why Foucault chose to devote his first six pages to the most stagy, ironic, and even self-doubting discourse; why he chose not just to open this way but even to cap that opening off with the programmatic assertion that "this is the point at which I should like to situate the series of historical analyses that will follow" (*History* 7). For in this light we can see that Foucault's opening stylistic excesses, far from superfluous, are integral to his work's status as the locus of a profound research question. They serve to remind us that the facts to follow really are unexpected and totally to the contrary of what we tend to think. It is this dramatic reversal that engages the desire to know.

But insofar as this neo-Aristotelian analysis solves a problem, it immediately raises another one, and a huge one at that. What are we to make of the language this strategy has Foucault using, this language of fact, the strangeness I noted in passing above? What is strange about Foucault's reliance upon facts to speak for his project is how thoroughly he seeks elsewhere in his work to undermine the idea that facts might speak for themselves (see "Truth" 60). Here they shout from the hilltop. For Foucault may well dramatize what he begins by calling "the discourse on modern sexual repression" (*History* 6), but only some four pages later he has already started to label it "the repressive hypothesis": "One can raise three serious doubts concerning what I shall term the 'repressive hypothesis' [*l'hypothèse répressive*]" (10).[4] The general review of facts that follows maintains this reliance upon the language of science, so much so that we find ourselves reading, after some forty more pages of contrary facts, that "We must therefore abandon the hypothesis [*Il faut donc sans doute abandonner l'hypothèse*]"(49).[5] This is falsificationism to a tee. Indeed the whole section could have earned a tick from Sir Karl Popper himself. Nor was Popper adverse to dramatizing his opponents' positions. . . . But why is Foucault acting like him? For Foucault may well be dramatizing the flaws in a received opinion, as any attempt to elicit wonder must, but how are we to explain this so un-Foucaultian recourse to a Popperian language of falsification and fact?

Aristotle helps us out again here, for he insists that the plot that occurs "unexpectedly and [yet] out of [inner] logic" relies on an all-encompassing regime of factuality as well. That is to say, a tragic play needs to be plotted in such a fashion that the hero's unraveling is entirely plausible. The messenger needs to have a real motivation for volunteering this particular news at this time, and even more than that, it

needs to be plausible for Oedipus to have killed his father and slept with his mother. Plausibility is everything. Note Aristotle's repeated, even obsessive, references to the need for actions in tragedy to occur according to "likelihood and necessity," a phrase—ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον ἢ τὸ εἰκός (*Poetics; Longinus* 80)—that comes up again and again; it appears three times in one sentence in Chapter 15. Note too Aristotle's extraordinary exclusion of the religious element from his analysis of the well-springs of Greek tragedy (Halliwell 202-38), something just as extraordinary as Foucault's reliance upon the discourse of science.

This is all extraordinary, yet the reason for it is clear: it is only on these thoroughly secular—indeed logical—grounds that spectators can experience, through identification with the hero, the intimation, or reminder, of what it is like to have felt utterly deluded in imagining you had grasped all the facts before your eyes. The reason is, in other words, an emotional one. There is no lived sense of shattered delusion in having failed to account for sheer randomness and/or divine intervention. It will not produce pity, it will not produce fear, nor will it produce wonder. It is crucial—for these emotions to occur—that the hero might have known otherwise, that he might have got it right. That presupposes a factually-bound, monologic universe and it presupposes it not so much for scientific as for dramatic reasons. Or rather, there is no difference between science and drama at this point, the point at which we raise a question.

In other words, I think we should take Foucault at his methodological word here and accept that what he is doing really is scientific. Yet, that does nothing to alter the fact that it is also thoroughly dramatic. That is because scientific falsification—the fact-based problematizing of received opinion—is implicitly a drama of reversal and recognition. It is precisely because research questions take such dramatic form that they compel us, emotionally and intellectually, to seek an answer. That is how they work.

I suggest, in sum, that Foucault had no choice but to resort to the language of fact if he was to raise a doubt. I further suggest that Foucault's domination of the humanities' research agenda globally for the twenty-five years since his death is inseparable from his capacity to raise doubts in this factual manner. A reliance upon a singularly-bound universe of scientific facts was integral to Foucault's science, his art, his politics, and, with all of the above, his legacy.

If you counter that Foucault's falsification of the repressive hypothesis was all just play-acting, I reply that Sophocles was committed to learning too.

Rip the stage away and make the plot of the drama that of the reader's own world. Sophocles does this by setting up an emotional identification with Oedipus at the very moment that the hero's life suddenly appears to the hero himself as illusory, contradicted by the facts. As Jonathan Lear puts it, "there is no important distinction to

be made between our feeling our fear and our feeling Oedipus' fear" (332). The stage that Foucault rips away is even more immediate: it is not the proscenium arch, but rather what we thought was our world. What we are left with are the facts that contradict that world, a mix of emotions prominently including wonder, and a set of increasingly resounding questions: just what is our world, then? And who or what are we?

I suggested, in a passing reference to Peirce's philosophy of science, that Foucault is hardly alone in this scientifico-dramatic practice, for all his mastery of it. After all, what science is free of the dramatic and fact-based reversal of prior orthodoxy? Which is to say, what science fails to ask searing research questions? One might even say, to approach the matter from another direction, that the humanities specializes in just this—the formulation of dramatic research questions *is* its science, the chief thing it does to merit the name (a possible reading of Peirce's "On the Logic of Drawing History from Ancient Documents"). Yet, however that might be, there is another way to understand the idea that Foucault is not alone among moderns in this practice. Aristotle's text is, after all, a poetics. It could be that a similar drama of knowledge is enacted in contemporary poetry as well. For our poetry is replete with structures of reversal and nascent recognition, too. The way these play out in Foucault's texts leads me to suggest that the absence of a formal theatrical apparatus might actually heighten some of the effects Aristotle diagnoses (the intellectual ones, for example). Could we say this of our verse, too? Is it not also given to undermining prior beliefs, dramatically? Does it not also make you think?

The notion that poetic thinking has more to do with raising questions than with stating theses has of course been broached many times since Aristotle, including very recently. For example, Justus Buchler claims in his book *The Main of Light: On the Concept of Poetry* that "all poetry is interrogative in its process of probing and in the radiation of wonder" (114). Buchler's arguments suffer, however, from what Rajeev Patke has recently termed the "division-of-labor thesis" on poetic thinking: the idea that the sort of "assertive judgment" scientists engage in, with its concern for propositional truth, is fundamentally different than the "exhibitive judgment" that poets exercise upon their subject matter and in turn elicit from their readers and critics (202). Patke's term recalls Gerald Graff's incisive critique in his book *Poetic Statement and Critical Dogma* of the "crippling either/or distinction between the propositional and the dramatic" besetting twentieth-century poetics (xiii). Graff's text is cited favourably in a number of places in the October 2010 issue of *Textual Practice,* which was devoted to the topic of "Thinking Poetry." As in Helen Vendler's recent *Poets Thinking* and Simon Jarvis's *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song,* what one finds in the special issue is a broad desire to restore poetry's philosophical credentials, including its relation to scientific and scholarly work. So Peter Middleton draws upon Hegel's notion of the "spec-

ulative proposition," which demands the reading subject's input for its completion, to explicate the poetic strategy Wordsworth and others enact when "abruptly" offering the reader "an uncertain and problematic idea" (Middleton cites the phrase "the imagination of the whole," from *The Prelude*) so as to "enlist the reader's labor to develop meaning gradually through a reading back and forwards" (629). Keston Sutherland's beguiling article on "Wrong Poetry" heads in a similar direction. Sutherland discusses another of Wordsworth's unexpected phrasings in the course of an argument that quotes Adorno on "the power of the unfamiliar thing to make knowledge, or the intellectual, 'wish to be right'" (766), whether by the conservative's way of retreat into "complacency and self-preservation," or "a new beginning, an inaugural trial run of insight" (767). The link between such current theorizing and my Aristotelian characterization of poetry as an interrogation at the point of reversal and wonder will be apparent.

Only I insist that factuality has a part to play in all this as well. Over the following pages I will contend that what contemporary poetry has in common with scholarship is its invocation of problematic facts, facts that serve to raise questions. Aristotle's *Poetics* has guided us to the point where we can begin to make this claim. It shows us that Foucault's is a poetry of facts, facts which raise questions. One only has to consider the continuing salience of John Stuart Mill's common-place distinction between poetry, which serves "to act upon the emotions," and "matter of fact, or science" (1035), to understand the challenge that arises from an Aristotelian reading of Foucault's case. I hasten to add that the characterization of Foucault's positivism should not be confined to *The History of Sexuality Volume 1.* As Michel de Certeau comments in relation to the factuality of Foucault's entire *oeuvre*, "the analysis is not based on the personal ideas of an author but on that which history itself makes visible. It is not Mr. Foucault who is making fun of domains of knowledge and predictions, or previsions; it is history itself that is laughing at them" (195). In that same text, de Certeau makes clear—without marking the contradiction—his appreciation of Foucault's poetic powers. Yet the contradiction is a huge one, and it arises just as surely in relation to Georges Canguilhem's assertion that Foucault was a "poet" (qtd. in Eribon 108). I heighten the challenge of such a poetry of facts over the following pages, where I will argue that W.H. Auden, one of the most celebrated poets of the modern era, submits to a similarly Aristotelian treatment. I make the argument in two stages: first, by suggesting, through a particular example, that Auden's characteristic mode of poetic utterance is not thetic but rather interrogative; second, by suggesting that what drives the interrogation is the way Auden seduces the reader into him or herself providing the facts—make the plot of the drama that of the reader's own world—that will make those questions compelling. The overall tenor of my argument is that Foucault and Auden's cases are typical of those whom we call poets.

The paragraphs to immediately follow will take the form of a thought-experiment. Aristotle wrote in the context of Plato's attack on the central role played by poetry in fifth-century education (Janko x-xii). One of Plato's key arguments is that poetry is a poor source of knowledge; in the *Ion*, Socrates traps the rhapsodist Ion into admitting that one would be better off asking a doctor for medical advice than consulting a passage from Homer (224). The *Poetics* defuses such arguments by implying that poetry does not reside in the truth-claims advanced in any given line but rather in the intellectual and emotional effects those lines have on their audience. The thought-experiment is as follows: what would happen if we were to approach one of W.H. Auden's poems in a similar fashion?

But first, please just read the following lines as you would those of any poem. They comprise the opening stanza of Auden's "Canzone," which was written in 1942:

> When shall we learn, what should be clear as day,
> We cannot choose what we are free to love?
> Although the mouse we banished yesterday
> Is an enraged rhinoceros to-day,
> Our value is more threatened than we know:
> Shabby objections to our present day
> Go snooping round its outskirts; night and day
> Faces, orations, battles, bait our will
> As questionable forms and noises will;
> Whole phyla of resentments every day
> Give status to the wild men of the world
> Who rule the absent-minded and this world. (1-12)

When I suggested that we approach this stanza in the same manner as Aristotle's *Poetics*, I meant that we analyze it with an eye not so much for what the poem articulates as true or false, but rather for the stanza's effects on the reader. To read with an eye to those effects rather than the purported meaning is immediately to see that even though these lines are full of universal statements and there is only one question mark among them, actually, nearly every line raises questions for one who would try to elucidate that meaning. What, for instance, are the "outskirts" of "our present day"? Is this a reference to after-work relaxation, sleep, or even dreams, as the immediate mention of "night and day" might suggest? Or could it be a reference to the strange moments that seem to defeat us every day? Unaccountable emotions? Slips of the tongue? We are told, to cite another instance, that "Faces, orations, battles" bait us as "questionable forms and noises will." Again, the sentence has the form of a statement. But as you try to grasp its meaning, and well before you can, you are forced to deal

with still more questions, such as: is Auden suggesting that we experience these public personae and events not so much for the content they bear but rather in the same bodily fashion as noise, which is to say, in an almost animal fashion?

Look, for another instance of the *effectively* interrogative nature of this poetic discourse, at the counter-intuitive use of the concessive over lines three to five, which lines do not so much make a statement about a threat as rather, and by dint of that very grammatical confusion, leave us dazed and wondering where it is coming from, at least until we can parse the grammar, but probably long after as well. Then there is the question, hanging so strangely over the whole stanza, concerning the relation between the rule of "the wild men of the world"—they "who rule the absented-minded and this world"—and our love. Is Auden suggesting that our susceptibility to dictatorship, the dictators of *ressentiment*, has something to do with love, the fact that it and by extension they come to us from the "outskirts" and beyond our will? And if that is the case, is not the "When shall we learn" of the opening line a genuine question after all, a query as to whether we can ever really deal with the knowledge of love's pre-ordainment? What kind of world would that be?

I do not know, in relation to any of the above.

In other words, what I find so striking about this stanza is the fact that, for all its apparently universal ambit, it is actually experienced as a series of questions. And that is as much as to hypothesize, without furnishing any additional proof at all, that were poets like Auden analyzed in Aristotelian fashion, we would find question marks on almost every single line of their collected works, if not more.

Only we have just seen, from a putatively Ancient Greek reading of *The History of Sexuality Volume 1,* that questions for knowledge rely not just on reversals of prevailing assumptions and orthodoxies, but also on the marshalling of convincing facts to support those manoeuvres, and with such marshalling on the broader assumption, at once scientific and dramatic, that our world is indeed factually bound. Where is that in Auden? Where is it in any modern artist? Actually I do not think this rejoinder problematizes my stance at all. I will put it this way, at least initially: one of the key measures of Foucault's status as an artist is that he gets his readers to supply much of the data in support or in negation of the propositions he advances. (I am angling for just that sort of reading in tabling the above hypothesis as to the invisible question marks all through Auden).

This is how Seamus Heaney describes the experience of reading Auden's earliest work: "Its manifestations were an 'I', or 'we' or 'you' which could arrest, confuse and inspect the reader all at once. He or she seemed to have been set down in the middle of a cold landscape, blindfolded, turned rapidly around, unblindfolded, ordered to march and to

make sense of every ominous thing encountered from there on. The new power turned the reader into an accomplice, unaccountably bound to the poem's presiding voice by an insinuation that they shared a knowledge which might be either shameful or subversive" (117). Heaney's comments remind me of those stagy first few pages of *The History of Sexuality Volume 1,* too, and nowhere more so than at that reference to the "presiding voice," with its insinuations as to our knowledge. Let us think of them in relation to the "Canzone" and contemplate through them what emerges from the above-quoted stanza's so-resolved identity rhymes (day/day, will/will, world/world) to insinuate our absent-mindedness, our susceptibility to resentment, shabby objections, fascism, and love: does any of this amount to an experience of fact? Even if it is granted me that a poetic text like this stanza of "Canzone" is far more interrogative than thetic in its relation to knowledge, how might we possibly detect facts within it, the sort of facts-to-the-contrary that permeate Foucault's "cathartic" histories (Eribon 118)?

Heaney's words are suggestive and will, I believe, lead us to a solution. Note the way he resolves the paradox (how can one be "blindfolded, turned rapidly around, unblindfolded, ordered" by an inert set of letters on a page?) implicit in his very metaphors: as his shift to the language of "accomplice" suggests, ultimately, it is you who chooses to keep reading. For Heaney may well write that "I felt excluded. I had indeed been blindfolded and turned around only to find myself daunted by a landscape that both convinced me and shrugged me off" (119), but it is clear all the same that he was the one doing the turning. It is clear that the person giving the order to keep on at the task is really the reader. Only the reader is just as clearly split in two at this point, for if I feel "excluded," it is because something in the poem has suggested the possibility of a world other than the one that has my "I" in it. Another way of putting this would be to say that the troubling effects which poems like the "Canzone" have on their readers have to do with our perception that something in these impossible reversals of our familiar concepts (for instance, through the collocation of freedom to love and lack of choice) seems supported by the histories we bring to our reading. They clamour to have their say in relation to it.

We are impelled to bring those personal histories to the fore because we are reading contemporary poetry. After all, there is no way to give meaning to lines like "Faces, orations, battles, bait our will / As questionable forms and noises will" without falling back on one's own resources: such is their elusive and even troubling suggestiveness that the only way to get the sense that one has understood these lines is to populate them with examples, whether via a memory of a leader's grating voice, a recollection of a horrible noise (a baiting one, no less . . .), a visualization of a questionable form—an image of great physical ugliness, in my case. I am writing as if this is a conscious

process, but is it not the case that what makes it so exciting, disturbing, unwanted, and even excoriated is that such associations are triggered regardless of one's will? Heidegger stated that "we never come to thoughts. They come to us" (6); that process is super-charged in reading contemporary poetry. The things that are often evoked by it are the very things we cannot will away, including the strange support our histories add to the new possibilities the poem has raised, by dint of its enigmatic—and yet dawningly accurate—reversal of familiar concepts and experiences. That is what happens to give a verse like Auden's its characteristically interrogative power. In reading such poetry *we* supply the facts to drive its interrogations, often against our will.

Rip the stage away and make the plot of the drama that of the reader's own world.

But—I am clearly on dicey ground here, for I am positing an identity between the decidedly intimate sense of how the world is, the thoughts as to what kinds of actual things he might be referring to, the sudden knowledge that comes at such a rush when reading Auden to oneself, and the sort of communally verifiable events Foucault will refer to as *les faits,* in the full knowledge that any other researcher can look up, for instance, the reference to Damiens's execution at the start of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and verify that he has indeed got those facts right and therefore has the license to wield them. I am describing both these types of conviction as experiences of fact. Is that adequate?

I have two answers. The first, to which I hinted towards the end of the previous section, is that what Foucault will refer to as the "facts" of his arguments are often curiously general. Consider, for instance, the generality of the facts about confession over pages 58 to 70 of the *History of Sexuality Volume 1,* which include the fact that "the nineteenth century altered the scope of the confession; it tended no longer to be concerned solely with what the subject wished to hide, but with what was hidden from himself" (66). This is given as fact without further evidence. Clearly, Foucault is relying on the reader to supplement such acute generalizations with the affirmation that yes, what I know of this history, patchy though it may be, supports the general movement of what he is saying. As usual, Foucault provides an extreme example, but is the reader's supplementation not integral to all forms of scholarly proof? We would do well to ponder the curious middle-voicing that pertains to phrases like "I am convinced by his argument" and "I find it convincing."

My second answer begins by asking, "What do you mean by fact?" Surely not "timeless truth"—as if anything could supply that. Peirce offers us an alternative: a fact is a perceived relation of forces. Peirce introduces this definition by assaying the related feeling of "actuality": "when I feel the sheriff's hand on my shoulder I shall begin to have a sense of actuality. Actuality is something *brute*. There is no reason in

it. I instance putting your shoulder against a door and trying to force it open against an unseen, silent, and unknown resistance. We have a two-sided consciousness of effort and resistance" ("Principles" 76). What is at stake here is "a mode of being of one thing which consists in how a second object is," which would be Peirce's broadest definition of fact (76). Only, to name any such actuality a fact, you have to feel yourself to be in a similar relation to it. For fact is "that which consists in forcing its way to recognition as something *other* than the mind's creation" (79); "we feel facts resist our will" (77). That might be because there is a restraining hand quite literally on my shoulder, but it might also be because I cognize that an epigeneticist employed at Cambridge has written that *x* has been repeatedly and repeatably demonstrated in his laboratory, has written this in an article in *Nature*, and the force of that thought convinces me. In both cases, there is a consciousness of "effort and resistance," as is immediately apparent the moment you try the thought-experiment of willing what you believe to be fact away. It will not work, at least not for more than a short day-dream. The grasp remains, and so does that compelling nexus of researcher, laboratory, and publication in *Nature*. There is nothing timeless about a fact. To the contrary, the sense of impingement is a very immediate one.

Peirce's subjectivization of factuality will sound very phenomenological, yet he also makes clear that the very act of identifying a force we feel resists our will—whether we call that force "a fact," "*les faits*," "*δεῖο*," or however else our culture labels such experiences, and by dint of what verification procedures—is a symbolic act, something socio-historically given. This is precisely why there are no facts outside history. Yet while this is the case, what Peirce's definition of fact also makes clear is that skepticism is a pretty half-baked affair. For no matter how skeptical you are about the possibility of our knowledge, you are unlikely to get to a place where you feel that nothing resists your will. Foucault relies on that residual, tragic sense of facticity, and he does this so that he can have effects that are similar to Auden's.

It does not matter whether the reader of a poem feels that he or she is indeed having an experience that merits the use of the word "fact." I suspect it is actually pretty unlikely, and that has to do with the religion of science Peirce was so driven to philosophically annihilate. But it does not matter what they call it. My argument is rather that a poem like "Canzone" engages us in a process of questioning and even transformation in a strikingly similar way to Foucault's texts: by way of what we recognize, or start to recognize, as undeniable about our very own world, those things that resist our will, from which the "I" is excluded. Poems comprise research questions. This is what I set out to argue.

I find support and repudiation of the above arguments in the following famous passage: "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 surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things" (Foucault, *Order* xv). The support is as follows: Foucault states here that the encounter with a poetic text (I refer to its opening attitude to the world rather than any formal category) leads to that massive attempt to trace "all the surfaces and planes" with which we have sought "to tame the wild profusion of existing things" up to and including the idea that there is such a thing as "we," such a creature as "man." Foucault's research question was a poem.

When we turn, however, to the intriguing moment in that same paragraph where Foucault corrects his initial impulse to write "all the familiar landmarks of my thought" and instead improves it with "*our* thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography," we begin to gauge something of the difference between his writing and the ideas I set forth above, drawn from Aristotle and Peirce. To clear up a possible misunderstanding, I hasten to assert that the difference is *not* that I am positing some sort of universal *poiesis*, running from Aristotle into the present. There is no necessary reason to imagine the *Poetics* will still speak to us of the art of reversals in 200 years, or even at all. Ditto Peirce, and for that matter Foucault and Auden. It is a different matter altogether. This is where politics will come into the equation. Or, rather, this is where I point to the politics coursing through all of the questionings considered above.

At first glance it might look like Foucault's self-correction is in support of the radical subjectivization of the experience of fact which I borrow from Peirce and set forth above, in support of it on the grounds that the correction raises a subjective experience of doubt up to becoming the valid platform for calling into question a way of thinking shared by an entire "age" and "geography." But a moment's reflection on the experience of reading Foucault's words makes clear that what he is raising in our minds is something very different. It is the disturbing thought that those very cognitions we think of as our own, up to and including doubt itself, are really those of the discourses that speak through us. This is, in other words, a research question.

Foucault's discussion of the phenomenological dimensions of epistemology is invariably poetic. The discussion is poetic in the sense that I have been hammering out here: it is intended to raise doubts in the reader's mind much more than to state a consciously-held position.

Consider the contradiction at the heart of Foucault's writing, the one on which I structure this essay. Foucault's entire body of work militates against the very feature I

track in it here: its invocation of self-evident facts. As he proclaims in the much-cited "Truth and Power" interview, "the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how the effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false" (60). Yet Foucault's actual textual practices are in flagrant contradiction with such programmatic statements.

Furthermore, it is clear that he knew this. Consider that beguiling 1978 interview in which he refers to his scholarly practice as a "*game* of truth and fiction—or if you prefer, of evidence and fabrication," and in which he further claims that his research "makes use of 'true' documents, but in such a way as to furnish not just evidence of a truth but also an experience that might permit an alteration, a transformation, of the relationship we have with ourselves and our cultural universe: in a word, with our knowledge" (qtd. in Halperin 25). It is clear from this comment that Foucault knew of the contradiction between his theory of facts and his usage of them. But is that enough? I cannot help but retort, in relation to this same interview, that the experience of reading Foucault and finding oneself assailed by the searing doubts he raises is very little like a "game." It is often highly disturbing. We heard Foucault proceed to claim that the aim of this "game" is not only evidentiary, but also, and even moreso, to effect "transformation" (25). But that reference to transformation begs the same question: how does something as trivial as "a game" have the power to bring about transformation?

And what are we to make of Didier Eribon's laconic reference to Foucault's "almost daily" walks with Gérard Deledalle during the years Foucault spent in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Tunis from 1966 to 1968? Eribon comments that Foucault, then writing *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* "consulted him as a specialist on English and American philosophy, which he did not know well" (192). Until his death in 2003, Deledalle was France's preeminent Peirce scholar. I find it unbelievable that those walks would have skirted those aspects of Peirce's work that might have filled in gaps in Foucault's own.

A game? How could someone so attuned to the pragmatics of discourse allow himself such an obtuse characterization when it came to his own writing? Then again, is there not something decidedly coy, and even teasing, in that very characterization? I am reminded of the stagy opening to *History of Sexuality Volume 1.* As we have seen, the play-acting there was not all that trivial a manoeuvre.

Is it not clear that Foucault's refusal to solve the status of fact in his texts is actually consistent with his manner of raising questions more generally? What better way to unsettle his readers' sense of certainty than to leave them pondering whether the very

facts that have impelled them so forcibly into *History of Sexuality Volume 1* and *Discipline and Punish* are not themselves modes of a similar, and as yet unsuspected, apparatus for the production of docile bodies? Why fill in the gap when leaving it open would be so much more likely to achieve that stated aim of producing transformation?

Foucault wants us to feel that something in our will-to-knowledge of these very Foucaultian texts escapes us.

This is tantamount to suggesting that the poetics of his discourse are not simply a way to gain interest and engagement in his theory of the universe (what theory of the universe?), nor merely a matter of the rhetoric or style he deploys to "express" it, but rather that a dramatic desire to impart doubt runs right into the very heart of his thinking and politics. Or, rather: right into the heart of *our* thinking, *our* politics, the thought that bears the stamp. . . .

NOTES

1/ The citations for the text in the original French are *Histoire* 9; 11; 11.
2/ *Histoire* 9.
3/ The square brackets are translator George Whalley's way of indicating words not found in Aristotle's original Greek. The ellipsis between "chance" and "therefore" is my own.
4/ *Histoire* 19.
5/ *Histoire* 67.

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