CHAPTER 10

The Human Sciences

1 THE THREE FACES OF KNOWLEDGE

Man's mode of being as constituted in modern thought enables him to play two roles: he is at the same time at the foundation of all positivities and present, in a way that cannot even be termed privileged, in the element of empirical things. This fact – it is not a matter here of man's essence in general, but simply of that historical *a priori* which, since the nineteenth century, has served as an almost self-evident ground for our thought – this fact is no doubt decisive in the matter of the status to be accorded to the 'human sciences', to the body of knowledge (though even that word is perhaps a little too strong: let us say, to be more neutral still, to the body of discourse) that takes as its object man as an empirical entity.

The first thing to be observed is that the human sciences did not inherit a certain domain, already outlined, perhaps surveyed as a whole, but allowed to lie fallow, which it was then their task to elaborate with positive methods and with concepts that had at last become scientific; the eighteenth century did not hand down to them, in the name of man or human nature, a space, circumscribed on the outside but still empty, which it was then their role to cover and analyse. The epistemological field traversed by the human sciences was not laid down in advance: no philosophy, no political or moral option, no empirical science of any kind, no observation of the human body, no analysis of sensation, imagination, or the passions, had ever encountered, in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, anything like man; for man did not exist (any more than life, or language, or labour); and the human sciences did not appear when, as a result of some pressing rationalism, some unresolved scientific problem, some practical concern, it was decided to include man (willy-nilly, and with a greater or lesser degree of success) among the objects of

science – among which it has perhaps not been proved even yet that it is absolutely possible to class him; they appeared when man constituted himself in Western culture as both that which must be conceived of and that which is to be known. There can be no doubt, certainly, that the historical emergence of each one of the human sciences was occasioned by a problem, a requirement, an obstacle of a theoretical or practical order: the new norms imposed by industrial society upon individuals were certainly necessary before psychology, slowly, in the course of the nineteenth century, could constitute itself as a science; and the threats that, since the French Revolution, have weighed so heavily on the social balances, and even on the equilibrium established by the bourgeoisie, were no doubt also necessary before a reflection of the sociological type could appear. But though these references may well explain why it was in fact in such and such a determined set of circumstances and in answer to such and such a precise question that these sciences were articulated, nevertheless, their intrinsic possibility, the simple fact that man, whether in isolation or as a group, and for the first time since human beings have existed and have lived together in societies, should have become the object of science – that cannot be considered or treated as a phenomenon of opinion: it is an event in the order of knowledge.

And this event was itself produced in a general redistribution of the *episteme*: when, abandoning the space of representation, living beings took up their places in the specific depths of life, wealth in the onward thrust of new forms of production, and words in the development of languages. It was indeed necessary, given these conditions, that the knowledge of man should appear, in its scientific aims, as contemporaneous and of the same origin as biology, economics, and philology, so that it has been viewed, quite naturally, as one of the most decisive forward steps made in the history of European culture by empirical rationality. But since the general theory of representation was disappearing at the same time, and the necessity of interrogating man's being as the foundation of all positivities was imposing itself in its place, an imbalance could not fail to occur: man became that upon the basis of which all knowledge could be constituted as immediate and non-problematized evidence; he became, *a fortiori*, that which justified the calling into question of all knowledge of man. Hence that double and inevitable contestation: that which lies at the root of the perpetual controversy between the sciences of man and the sciences proper – the first laying an invincible claim to be the foundation of the second, which are ceaselessly obliged in turn to seek their own

foundation, the justification of their method, and the purification of their history, in the teeth of 'psychologism', 'sociologism', and 'historicism'; and that which lies at the root of the endless controversy between philosophy, which objects to the naïveté with which the human sciences try to provide their own foundation, and those same human sciences which claim as their rightful object what would formerly have constituted the domain of philosophy.

But the fact that all these observations must be made does not necessarily mean that their development occurs within the element of pure contradiction; their existence, and their untiring repetition for more than a century, do not indicate the permanence of an ever-open question; they refer back to a precise and extremely well-determined epistemological arrangement in history. In the Classical period, the field of knowledge, from the project of an analysis of representation to the theme of the *mathesis universalis*, was perfectly homogeneous: all knowledge, of whatever kind, proceeded to the ordering of its material by the establishment of differences and defined those differences by the establishment of an order; this was true for mathematics, true also for *taxonomies* (in the broad sense) and for the sciences of nature; but it was equally true for all those approximative, imperfect, and largely spontaneous kinds of knowledge which are brought into play in the construction of the least fragment of discourse or in the daily processes of exchange; and it was true, finally, for philosophical thought and for those long chains of order that the 'Idéologues', no less than Descartes or Spinoza, though in a different way, attempted to establish in order to create a path leading necessarily from the very simplest and most evident of ideas to the most composite truths. But, from the nineteenth century, the epistemological field became fragmented, or rather exploded in different directions. It is difficult to escape the pre-eminence of linear classifications and hierarchies in the manner of Comte; but to seek to align all the branches of modern knowledge on the basis of mathematics is to subject to the single point of view of objectivity in knowledge the question of the positivity of each branch of knowledge, of its mode of being, and its roots in those conditions of possibility that give it, in history, both its object and its form.

Questioned at this archaeological level, the field of the modern *episteme* is not ordered in accordance with the ideal of a perfect mathematicization, nor does it unfold, on the basis of a formal purity, a long, descending sequence of knowledge progressively more burdened with empiricity. The domain of the modern *episteme* should be represented rather as a

volume of space open in three dimensions. In one of these we would situate the mathematical and physical sciences, for which order is always a deductive and linear linking together of evident or verified propositions; in a second dimension there would be the sciences (such as those of language, life, and the production and distribution of wealth) that proceed by relating discontinuous but analogous elements in such a way that they are then able to establish causal relations and structural constants between them. These first two dimensions together define a common plane: that which can appear, according to the direction in which one traverses it, as a field of application of mathematics to these empirical sciences, or as the domain of the mathematicizable in linguistics, biology, and economics. The third dimension would be that of philosophical reflection, which develops as a thought of the Same; it forms a common plane with the dimension of linguistics, biology, and economics: it is here that we may meet, and indeed have met, the various philosophies of life, of alienated man, of symbolical forms (when concepts and problems that first arose in different empirical domains are transposed into the philosophical dimension); but we have also encountered here, if we question the foundation of these empiricities from a radically philosophical point of view, those regional ontologies which attempt to define what life, labour, and language are in their own being; lastly, the philosophical dimension and that of the mathematical disciplines combine to define another common plane: that of the formalization of thought.

From this epistemological trihedron the human sciences are excluded, at least in the sense that they cannot be found along any of its dimensions or on the surface of any of the planes thus defined. But one can equally well say that they are included in it, since it is in the interstices of these branches of knowledge, or, more exactly, in the volume defined by their three dimensions, that the human sciences have their place. This situation (in one sense minor, in another sense privileged) places them in relation to all the other forms of knowledge: they have the more or less deferred, but constant, aim of giving themselves, or in any case of utilizing, at one level or another, a mathematical formalization; they proceed in accordance with models or concepts borrowed from biology, economics, and the sciences of language; and they address themselves to that mode of being of man which philosophy is attempting to conceive at the level of radical finitude, whereas their aim is to traverse all its empirical manifestations. It is perhaps this cloudy distribution within a three-dimensional space that renders the human sciences so difficult to situate, that gives their

localization in the epistemological domain its irreducible precariousness, that makes them appear at once perilous and in peril. Perilous, because they represent, as it were, a permanent danger to all the other branches of knowledge: true, neither the deductive sciences, nor the empirical sciences, nor philosophical reflection run any risk, if they remain within their own dimensions, of 'defecting' to the human sciences, or of being contaminated by their impurity; but we know what difficulties may be encountered, at times, in the establishing of those intermediary planes that link together the three dimensions of the epistemological space; for the slightest deviation from these rigorously defined planes sends thought tumbling over into the domain occupied by the human sciences: hence the danger of 'psychologism', of 'sociologism', – of what we might term, in a word, 'anthropologism' – which becomes a threat as soon as the relations of thought to formalization are not reflected upon correctly, for example, or as soon as the modes of being of life, labour, and language are incorrectly analysed. 'Anthropologization' is the great internal threat to knowledge in our day. We are inclined to believe that man has emancipated himself from himself since his discovery that he is not at the centre of creation, nor in the middle of space, nor even, perhaps, the summit and culmination of life; but though man is no longer sovereign in the kingdom of the world, though he no longer reigns at the centre of being, the 'human sciences' are dangerous intermediaries in the space of knowledge. The truth of the matter is, however, that this very posture dooms them to an essential instability. What explains the difficulty of the 'human sciences', their precariousness, their uncertainty as sciences, their dangerous familiarity with philosophy, their ill-defined reliance upon other domains of knowledge, their perpetually secondary and derived character, and also their claim to universality, is not, as is often stated, the extreme density of their object; it is not the metaphysical status or the inerasable transcendence of this man they speak of, but rather the complexity of the epistemological configuration in which they find themselves placed, their constant relation to the three dimensions that give them their space.

II THE FORM OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES

We must now sketch out the form of this positivity. Usually, the attempt is made to define it in terms of mathematics: either by trying to bring it as near to mathematics as possible, by drawing up an inventory of every-

thing in the sciences of man that is mathematicizable, and supposing that everything that is not susceptible of such a formalization has not yet attained to scientific positivity; or, on the contrary, by trying to distinguish very carefully between the domain of the mathematicizable and that other domain which is regarded as irreducible to the former because it is the locus of interpretation, because the methods applied to it are above all those of comprehension, because it finds itself wound around the clinical pole of knowledge. Such analyses are wearisome not only because they are hackneyed but, above all, because they lack relevance. Certainly there can be no doubt that this form of empirical knowledge which is applicable to man (and which, in order to conform to convention, we may still term 'human sciences' even before we know in what sense and within what limits they can be called 'sciences') has a relation to mathematics: like any other domain of knowledge, these sciences may, in certain conditions, make use of mathematics as a tool; some of their procedures and a certain number of their results can be formalized. It is undoubtedly of the greatest importance to know those tools, to be able to practise those formalizations and to define the levels upon which they can be performed; it is no doubt of interest historically to know how Condorcet was able to apply the calculation of probabilities to politics, how Fechner defined the logarithmic relation between the growth of sensation and that of excitation, how contemporary psychologists make use of information theory in order to understand the phenomena of learning. But despite the specificity of the problems posed, it is unlikely that the relation to mathematics (the possibilities of mathematicization, or the resistance to all efforts at formalization) is constitutive of the human sciences in their particular positivity. And for two reasons: because, essentially, they share these problems with many other disciplines (such as biology and genetics) even if these problems are not always identical; and, above all, because archaeological analysis has not revealed, in the historical *a priori* of the human sciences, any new form of mathematics, or any sudden advance by mathematics into the domain of the human, but rather a sort of retreat of the mathesis, a dissociation of its unitary field, and the emancipation, in relation to the linear order of the smallest possible differences, of empirical organizations such as life, language, and labour. In this sense, the appearance of man and the constitution of the human sciences (even if it were only in the form of a project) would be correlated to a sort of 'de-mathematicization'. It may well be objected that this dissociation of a body of knowledge conceived

in its entirety as mathesis was not in fact a recession on the part of mathematics, for the very good reason that the knowledge in question had never led (except in the case of astronomy and certain areas of physics) to an effective mathematicization; rather, by disappearing, it left nature and the entire field of empiricities free for an application, limited and controlled moment by moment, of mathematics; for do not the first great advances of mathematical physics, the first massive utilizations of the calculation of probabilities, date from the time when the attempt at an immediate constitution of a general science of non-quantifiable orders was abandoned? It cannot really be denied that the renunciation of a mathesis (provisionally at least) made it possible, in certain domains of knowledge, to remove the obstacle of quality, and to apply mathematical tools where they had been unable to penetrate hitherto. But if, on the level of physics, the dissociation of the project to create a mathesis came to exactly the same thing as the discovery of new applications for mathematics, this was not so in all the domains of knowledge: biology, for example, was constituted, outside a science of qualitative orders, as an analysis of the relations between organs and functions, as a study of structures and balances, as research into their formation and development in the history of individuals or species; all of this did not prevent biology from making use of mathematics, or the latter from being much more broadly applicable to biology than it had been in the past. But it is not in its relation to mathematics that biology acquired its autonomy and defined its particular positivity. And the same was true for the human sciences: it was the retreat of the mathesis, and not the advance of mathematics, that made it possible for man to constitute himself as an object of knowledge; it was the involution of labour, life, and language upon themselves that determined the appearance of this new domain of knowledge from outside; and it was the appearance of that empirico-transcendental being, of that being whose thought is constantly interwoven with the unthought, of that being always cut off from an origin which is promised to him in the immediacy of the return – it was this appearance that gave the human sciences their particular form. Here again, as with other disciplines, it is very possible that the application of mathematics was facilitated (and is increasingly so) by all the modifications that occurred in Western knowledge at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But to imagine that the human sciences defined their most radical project and inaugurated their positive history when it was decided to apply the calculation of probabilities to the phenomena of political opinion, and to employ logarithms

as a means of measuring the increase of intensity in sensations, that would be to take a superficial counter-effect for the fundamental event.

In other words, of the three dimensions that provide the human sciences with their particular space and produce the volume in which those sciences exist as a mass, that of mathematics is perhaps the least problematical; it is with mathematics, in any case, that the human sciences maintain the clearest, the most untroubled, and, as it were, the most transparent, relations: indeed, the recourse to mathematics, in one form or another, has always been the simplest way of providing positive knowledge about man with a scientific style, form, and justification. On the other hand, the most fundamental difficulties, those that make it possible to define most clearly what the human sciences are in their essence, are situated in the direction of the two other dimensions of knowledge: that in which the analytic of finitude is deployed, and that along which are distributed the empirical sciences which have as their objects language, life, and labour.

In fact, the human sciences are addressed to man in so far as he lives, speaks, and produces. It is as a living being that he grows, that he has functions and needs, that he sees opening up a space whose movable coordinates meet in him; in a general fashion, his corporeal existence interlaces him through and through with the rest of the living world; since he produces objects and tools, exchanges the things he needs, organizes a whole network of circulation along which what he is able to consume flows, and in which he himself is defined as an intermediary stage, he appears in his existence immediately interwoven with others; lastly, because he has a language, he can constitute a whole symbolic universe for himself, within which he has a relation to his past, to things, to other men, and on the basis of which he is able equally to build something like a body of knowledge (in particular, that knowledge of himself, of which the human sciences outline one of the possible forms). The site of the sciences of man may therefore be fixed in the vicinity, on the immediate frontiers, and along the whole length of those sciences that deal with life, labour, and language. Were they not formed, after all, at precisely that period when, for the first time, man offered himself to the possibility of a positive knowledge? Nevertheless, biology, economics, and philology must not be regarded as the first human sciences, or the most fundamental. This is easily recognized in the case of biology, since it is addressed to many other living beings besides man; but it is more difficult to accept in the cases of economics and philology, which have as

their particular and exclusive domain activities that are specific to man. But we do not ask ourselves why human biology or physiology, why the anatomy of the cortical centres of language, cannot in any way be considered as sciences of man. This is because the object of those sciences is never posited in the mode of being of a biological function (or even in that of its particular form, and, as it were, its extension into man); it is rather its reverse, or the hollow it would leave; it begins at the point, not where the action or the effects stop, but where that function's own being stops – at that point where representations are set free, true or false, clear or obscure, perfectly conscious or rooted in some deep sleep, observable directly or indirectly, presented within what man himself expresses, or discoverable only from the outside; research into the intracortical connections between the different centres of linguistic integration (auditive, visual, motor) is not the province of the human sciences; but those sciences will find their field of action as soon as we question that space of words, that presence or that forgetfulness of their meaning, that hiatus between what one wishes to say and the articulation in which that aim is invested, whose subject may not be conscious, but which would have no assignable mode of being if that subject did not have representations.

In a more general fashion, man for the human sciences is not that living being with a very particular form (a somewhat special physiology and an almost unique autonomy); he is that living being who, from within the life to which he entirely belongs and by which he is traversed in his whole being, constitutes representations by means of which he lives, and on the basis of which he possesses that strange capacity of being able to represent to himself precisely that life. Similarly, even though man is, if not the only species in the world that works, at least the one in whom the production, distribution, and consumption of goods have taken on so great an importance and acquired so many and such differentiated forms, economics is still not a human science. It may perhaps be objected that in order to define certain laws, even though they are interior to the mechanics of production (such as the accumulation of capital or the relations between wage rates and prices), economics has recourse to human behaviour patterns and a representation that provide its foundation (interest, the search for maximum profit, the tendency to accumulate savings); but, in doing so, it is utilizing representations as the requisite of a function (which occurs, in effect, within an explicitly human activity); on the other hand, there will be no science of man unless we examine the way in which individuals or groups represent to themselves the partners with whom

they produce or exchange, the mode in which they clarify or ignore or mask this function and the position they occupy in it, the manner in which they represent to themselves the society in which it takes place, the way in which they feel themselves integrated with it or isolated from it, dependent, subject, or free; the object of the human sciences is not that man who, since the dawn of the world, or the first cry of his golden age, is doomed to work; it is that being who, from within the forms of production by which his whole existence is governed, forms the representation of those needs, of the society by which, with which, or against which he satisfies them, so that upon that basis he can finally provide himself with a representation of economics itself. The same is true of language: although man is the only being in the world who speaks, inquiry into phonetic mutations, relationships between languages, and semantic shifts, does not constitute a human science; on the other hand, it will be possible to speak of human science when an attempt is made to define the way in which individuals or groups represent words to themselves, utilize their forms and their meanings, compose real discourse, reveal and conceal in it what they are thinking or saying, perhaps unknown to themselves, more or less than they wish, but in any case leave a mass of verbal traces of those thoughts, which must be deciphered and restored as far as possible to their representative vivacity. The object of the human sciences is not language (though it is spoken by men alone); it is that being which, from the interior of the language by which he is surrounded, represents to himself, by speaking, the sense of the words or propositions he utters, and finally provides himself with a representation of language itself.

The human sciences are not, then, an analysis of what man is by nature; but rather an analysis that extends from what man is in his positivity (living, speaking, labouring being) to what enables this same being to know (or seek to know) what life is, in what the essence of labour and its laws consist, and in what way he is able to speak. The human sciences thus occupy the distance that separates (though not without connecting them) biology, economics, and philology from that which gives them possibility in the very being of man. It would therefore be wrong to see the human sciences as an extension, interiorized within the human species, within its complex organism, within its behaviour and consciousness, of biological mechanisms; and it would be no less wrong to place within the human sciences the science of economics or the science of language (whose irreducibility to the human sciences is expressed in the effort to constitute a pure economics and a pure linguistics). In fact, the human

sciences are no more within these sciences than they give them interiority by deflecting them towards man's subjectivity; if they take them up again in the dimension of representation, it is rather by re-apprehending them upon their outer slope, by leaving them their opacity, by accepting as things the mechanisms and functions they isolate, by questioning those functions and mechanisms not in terms of what they are but in terms of what they cease to be when the space of representation is opened up; and upon that basis they show how a representation of what they are can come into being and be deployed. Surreptitiously, they lead the sciences of life, labour, and language back to that analytic of finitude which shows how man, in his being, can be concerned with the things he knows, and know the things that, in positivity, determine his mode of being. But what the analytic requires in the interiority, or at least in the profound kinship, of a being who owes his finitude only to himself, the human sciences develop in the exteriority of knowledge. This is why what characterizes the human sciences is not that they are directed at a certain content (that singular object, the human being); it is much more a purely formal characteristic: the simple fact that, in relation to the sciences in which the human being is given as object (exclusive in the case of economics and philology, or partial in that of biology), they are in a position of duplication, and that this duplication can serve *a fortiori* for themselves.

This position is made perceptible on two levels: the human sciences do not treat man's life, labour, and language in the most transparent state in which they could be posited, but in that stratum of conduct, behaviour, attitudes, gestures already made, sentences already pronounced or written, within which they have already been given once to those who act, behave, exchange, work, and speak; at another level (it is still the same formal property, but carried to its furthest, rarest point), it is always possible to treat in the style of the human sciences (of psychology, sociology, and the history of culture, ideas, or science) the fact that for certain individuals or certain societies there is something like a speculative knowledge of life, production, and language – at most, a biology, an economics, and a philology. This is probably no more than the indication of a possibility which is rarely realized and is perhaps not capable, at the level of the empiricities, of yielding much of value; but the fact that it exists as a possible distance, as a space given to the human sciences to withdraw into, away from what they spring from, and the fact, too, that this action can be applied to themselves (it is always possible to make human sciences of human sciences – the psychology of psychology, the sociology of

sociology, etc.) suffice to demonstrate their peculiar configuration. In relation to biology, to economics, to the sciences of language, they are not, therefore, lacking in exactitude and rigour; they are rather like sciences of duplication, in a 'meta-epistemological' position. Though even that prefix is perhaps not very well chosen: for one can speak of meta-language only when defining the rules of interpretation of a primary language. Here, the human sciences, when they duplicate the sciences of language, labour, and life, when at their finest point they duplicate themselves, are directed not at the establishment of a formalized discourse: on the contrary, they thrust man, whom they take as their object in the area of finitude, relativity, and perspective, down into the area of the endless erosion of time. It would perhaps be better to speak in their case of an 'ana-' or 'hypo-epistemological' position; if the pejorative connotations of this last prefix were removed, it would no doubt provide a good account of the facts: it would suggest how the invincible impression of haziness, inexactitude, and imprecision left by almost all the human sciences is merely a surface effect of what makes it possible to define them in their positivity.

III THE THREE MODELS

At first glance, one could say that the domain of the human sciences is covered by three 'sciences' – or rather by three epistemological regions, all subdivided within themselves, and all interlocking with one another; these regions are defined by the triple relation of the human sciences in general to biology, economics, and philology. Thus one could admit that the 'psychological region' has found its locus in that place where the living being, in the extension of its functions, in its neuro-motor blueprints, its physiological regulations, but also in the suspense that interrupts and limits them, opens itself to the possibility of representation; in the same way, the 'sociological region' would be situated where the labouring, producing, and consuming individual offers himself a representation of the society in which this activity occurs, of the groups and individuals among which it is divided, of the imperatives, sanctions, rites, festivities, and beliefs by which it is upheld or regulated; lastly, in that region where the laws and forms of a language hold sway, but where, nevertheless, they remain on the edge of themselves, enabling man to introduce into them the play of his representations, in that region arise the study of literature and myths, the analysis of all oral expressions and written documents, in short, the analysis of the verbal traces that a culture or an individual may

leave behind them. This division, though very summary, is probably not too inexact. It does, however, leave two fundamental problems unsolved: one concerns the form of positivity proper to the human sciences (the concepts around which they are organized, the type of rationality to which they refer and by means of which they seek to constitute themselves as knowledge); the other is their relation to representation (and the paradoxical fact that even while they take place only where there is representation, it is to unconscious mechanisms, forms, and processes, or at least to the exterior boundaries of consciousness, that they address themselves).

The controversies to which the search for a specific positivity in the field of the human sciences has given rise are only too well known: Genetic or structural analysis? Explanation or comprehension? Recourse to what is 'underneath' or decipherment kept strictly to the level of reading? In fact, all these theoretical discussions did not arise and were not pursued throughout the history of the human sciences because the latter had to deal, in man, with an object so complex that it was not yet possible to find a unique mode of access towards it, or because it was necessary to use several in turn. These discussions were able to exist only in so far as the positivity of the human sciences rests simultaneously upon the transference of three distinct models. This transference is not a marginal phenomenon for the human sciences (a sort of supporting framework, a detour to include some exterior intelligibility, a confirmation derived from sciences already constituted); nor is it a limited episode in their history (a crisis of formation, at a time when they were still so young that they could not fix their concepts and their laws themselves). On the contrary, it is a matter of an ineffaceable fact, which is bound up, forever, with their particular arrangement in the epistemological space. We should, indeed, distinguish between two different sorts of model utilized by the human sciences (leaving aside models of formalization). On the one hand, there were – and often still are – concepts introduced from another domain of knowledge, which, losing all operational efficacity in the process, now play only the role of an image (organic metaphors in nineteenth-century sociology; energy metaphors in Janet; geometrical and dynamic metaphors in Lewin). But there are also constituent models, which are not just techniques of formalization for the human sciences, or simple means of devising methods of operation with less effort; they make it possible to create groups of phenomena as so many 'objects' for a possible branch of knowledge; they ensure their connection in the

empirical sphere, but they offer them to experience already linked together. They play the role of 'categories' in the area of knowledge particular to the human sciences.

These constituent models are borrowed from the three domains of biology, economics, and the study of language. It is upon the projected surface of biology that man appears as a being possessing *functions* – receiving stimuli (physiological ones, but also social, interhuman, and cultural ones), reacting to them, adapting himself, evolving, submitting to the demands of an environment, coming to terms with the modifications it imposes, seeking to erase imbalances, acting in accordance with regularities, having, in short, conditions of existence and the possibility of finding average *norms* of adjustment which permit him to perform his functions. On the projected surface of economics, man appears as having needs and desires, as seeking to satisfy them, and therefore as having interests, desiring profits, entering into opposition with other men; in short, he appears in an irreducible situation of *conflict*; he evades these conflicts, he escapes from them or succeeds in dominating them, in finding a solution that will – on one level at least, and for a time – appease their contradictions; he establishes a body of *rules* which are both a limitation of the conflict and a result of it. Lastly, on the projected surface of language, man's behaviour appears as an attempt to say something; his slightest gestures, even their involuntary mechanisms and their failures, have a *meaning*; and everything he arranges around him by way of objects, rites, customs, discourse, all the traces he leaves behind him, constitute a coherent whole and a *system* of signs. Thus, these three pairs of *function* and *norm*, *conflict* and *rule*, *signification* and *system* completely cover the entire domain of what can be known about man.

It must not be supposed, however, that any of these pairs of concepts remains localized on the projected surface on which it may have appeared: function and norm are not psychological concepts exclusively; conflict and rule do not have an application limited wholly to the sociological domain; signification and system are not valid solely for phenomena more or less akin to language. All these concepts occur throughout the entire volume common to the human sciences and are valid in each of the regions included within it: hence the frequent difficulty in fixing limits, not merely between the objects, but also between the methods proper to psychology, sociology, and the analysis of literature and myth. Nevertheless, we can say in a general way that psychology is fundamentally a study of man in terms of functions and norms (functions and norms which can,

in a secondary fashion, be interpreted on the basis of conflicts and significations, rules and systems); sociology is fundamentally a study of man in terms of rules and conflicts (but these may be interpreted, and one is constantly led to interpret them, in a secondary way, either on the basis of functions, as though they were individuals organically connected to themselves, or on the basis of systems of significations, as though they were written or spoken texts); lastly, the study of literature and myth is essentially the province of an analysis of significations and signifying systems, but we all know that this analysis may be carried out in terms of functional coherence or of conflicts and rules. In this way all the human sciences interlock and can always be used to interpret one another: their frontiers become blurred, intermediary and composite disciplines multiply endlessly, and in the end their proper object may even disappear altogether. But whatever the nature of the analysis and the domain to which it is applied, we have a formal criterion for knowing what is on the level of psychology, what on that of sociology, and what on that of language analysis: this is the choice of the fundamental model and the position of the secondary models, which make it possible to know at what point one begins to 'psychologize' or 'sociologize' in the study of literature and myth, or at what point in psychology one has moved over into the decipherment of texts or into sociological analysis. But this superimposition of several models is not a defect of method. It becomes a defect only if the models have not been precisely ordered and explicitly articulated in relation to one another. As we know, it proved possible to conduct an admirably precise study of the Indo-European mythologies by using the sociological model superimposed upon the basic analysis of significants and significations. We know also, on the other hand, to what syncretic platitudes the still mediocre undertaking of founding a so-called 'clinical' psychology has led.

Whether properly founded and controlled, or carried out in confusion, this interlocking of constituent models explains the discussions of method referred to above. They do not have their origin and justification in a sometimes contradictory complexity which we know as the character proper to man; but in the play of oppositions, which makes it possible to define each of the three models in relation to the two others. To oppose genesis to structure is to oppose function (in its development, in its progressively diversified operations, in the powers of adaptation it has acquired and balanced in time) to the synchronism of conflict and rule, of signification and system; to oppose analysis by means of that which is

'underneath' to analysis on the same level as its object is to oppose conflict (a primary, archaic datum inscribed at the same time as man's fundamental needs) to function and signification as they are deployed in their particular realization; to oppose comprehension to explanation is to oppose the technique that makes it possible to decipher a meaning on the basis of a signifying system to those that make it possible to give an account of a conflict together with its consequences, or of the forms and deformations that a function and its organs may assume or undergo. But we must go further. We know that in the human sciences the point of view of discontinuity (the threshold between nature and culture, the irreducibility one to another of the balances or solutions found by each society or each individual, the absence of intermediary forms, the non-existence of a continuum existing in space or time) is in opposition to the point of view of continuity. The existence of this opposition is to be explained by the bipolar character of the models: analysis in a continuous mode relies upon the permanence of function (which is to be found in the very depths of life in an identity that authorizes and provides roots for succeeding adaptations), upon the interconnection of conflicts (they may take various forms, but they are always present in the background), upon the fabric of significations (which link up with one another and constitute, as it were, the continuous expanse of a discourse); on the contrary, the analysis of discontinuities seeks rather to draw out the internal coherence of signifying systems, the specificity of bodies of rules and the decisive character they assume in relation to what must be regulated, and the emergence of the norm above the level of functional fluctuations.

It might be possible to retrace the entire history of the human sciences, from the nineteenth century onward, on the basis of these three models. They have, in fact, covered the whole of that history, since we can follow the dynasty of their privileges for more than a century: first, the reign of the biological model (man, his psyche, his group, his society, the language he speaks – all these exist in the Romantic period as living beings and in so far as they were, in fact, alive; their mode of being is organic and is analysed in terms of function); then comes the reign of the economic model (man and his entire activity are the locus of conflicts of which they are both the more or less manifest expression and the more or less successful solution); lastly – just as Freud comes after Comte and Marx – there begins the reign of the philological (when it is a matter of interpretation and the discovery of hidden meanings) and linguistic model (when it is a matter of giving a structure to and clarifying the signifying system). Thus

a vast shift has led the human sciences from a form more dense in living models to another more saturated with models borrowed from language. But this shift was paralleled by another: that which caused the first term in each of the constituent pairs (function, conflict, signification) to recede, and the second term (norm, rule, system) to emerge with a correspondingly greater intensity and importance: Goldstein, Mauss, Dumezil may be taken to represent, as near as makes no difference, the moment at which the reversal took place within each of the models. Such a reversal has two series of noteworthy consequences: as long as the functional point of view continued to carry more weight than the normative point of view (as long as it was not on the basis of the norm and the interior of the activity determining that norm that the attempt was made to understand how a function was performed), it was of course necessary, *de facto*, to share the normal functions with the non-normal; thus a pathological psychology was accepted side by side with normal psychology, but forming as it were an inverted image of it (hence the importance of the Jacksonian notion of disintegration in Ribot or Janet); in the same way, a pathology of societies (Durkheim), of irrational and quasi-morbid forms of belief (Lévy-Bruhl, Blondel) was also accepted; similarly, as long as the point of view of conflict carried more weight than that of the rule, it was supposed that certain conflicts could not be overcome, that individuals and societies ran the risk of destroying themselves by them; finally, as long as the point of view of signification carried more weight than that of system, a division was made between significant and non-significant: it was accepted that there was meaning in certain domains of human behaviour or certain regions of the social area, but not in others. So that the human sciences laid down an essential division within their own field: they always extended between a positive pole and a negative pole; they always designated an alterity (based, furthermore, on the continuity they were analysing). When, on the other hand, the analysis was conducted from the point of view of the norm, the rule, and the system, each area provided its own coherence and its own validity; it was no longer possible to speak of 'morbid consciousness' (even referring to the sick), of 'primitive mentalities' (even with reference to societies left behind by history), or of 'insignificant discourse' (even when referring to absurd stories, or to apparently incoherent legends). Everything may be thought within the order of the system, the rule, and the norm. By pluralizing itself – since systems are isolated, since rules form closed wholes, since norms are posited in their autonomy – the field of the human sciences

found itself unified: suddenly, it was no longer fissured along its former dichotomy of values. And bearing in mind that Freud more than anyone else brought the knowledge of man closer to its philological and linguistic model, and that he was also the first to undertake the radical erasure of the division between positive and negative (between the normal and the pathological, the comprehensible and the incommunicable, the significant and the non-significant), it is easy to see how he prefigures the transition from an analysis in terms of functions, conflicts, and significations to an analysis in terms of norms, rules, and systems: thus all this knowledge, within which Western culture had given itself in one century a certain image of man, pivots on the work of Freud, though without, for all that, leaving its fundamental arrangement. But even so, it is not here – as we shall see later on – that the most decisive importance of psychoanalysis lies.

In any case, this transition to the point of view of the norm, the rule, and the system brings us to a problem that has been left in suspense: that of the role of representation in the human sciences. It might already appear extremely contestable to include the human sciences (as opposed to biology, economics, and philology) within the space of representation: was it not already necessary to point out that a function can be performed, a conflict can develop its consequences, a signification can impose its intelligibility, without passing through the stage of explicit consciousness? And now, is it not necessary to recognize that the peculiar property of the norm in relation to the function it determines, of the rule in relation to the conflict it regulates, of the system in relation to the signification it makes possible, is precisely that of not being given to consciousness? Are we not forced to add a third historical gradient to the two already isolated, and to say that since the nineteenth century the human sciences have never ceased to approach that region of the unconscious where the action of representation is held in suspense? In fact, representation is not consciousness, and there is nothing to prove that this bringing to light of elements or structures that are never presented to consciousness as such enables the human sciences to escape the law of representation. The role of the concept of signification is, in fact, to show how something like a language, even if it is not in the form of explicit discourse, and even if it has not been deployed for a consciousness, can in general be given to representation; the role of the complementary concept of system is to show how signification is never primary and contemporaneous with itself, but always secondary and as it were derived in relation to a system that

precedes it, constitutes its positive origin, and posits itself, little by little, in fragments and outlines through signification; in relation to the consciousness of a signification, the system is indeed always unconscious since it was there before the signification, since it is within it that the signification resides and on the basis of it that it becomes effective; but because the system is always promised to a future consciousness which will perhaps never add it up. In other words, the signification/system pair is what ensures both the representability of language (as text or structure analysed by philology and linguistics) and the near but withdrawn presence of the origin (as it is manifested as man's mode of being by means of the analytic of finitude). In the same way, the notion of conflict shows how need, desire, and interest, even if they are not presented to the consciousness experiencing them, can take form in representation; and the role of the inverse concept of rule is to show how the violence of conflict, the apparently untamed insistence of need, the lawless infinity of desire are in fact already organized by an unthought which not only prescribes their rules, but renders them possible upon the basis of a rule. The conflict/rule pair ensures the representability of need (of the need that economics studies as an objective process in labour and production) and the representability of the unthought that is unveiled by the analytic of finitude. Lastly, the concept of function has the role of showing how the structures of life may give rise to representation (even though they are not conscious), and the concept of norm how function provides its own conditions of possibility and the frontiers within which it is effective.

Thus it can be understood why these broad categories can structure the entire field of the human sciences: it is because they span it from end to end, because they both hold apart and link together the empirical positivities of life, labour, and language (on the basis of which man first detached himself historically as a form of possible knowledge) and the forms of finitude that characterize man's mode of being (as he constituted himself when representation ceased to define the general space of knowledge). These categories are not, therefore, mere empirical concepts of rather broad generality; they are indeed the basis on which man is able to present himself to a possible knowledge; they traverse the entire field of his possibility and articulate it boldly in accordance with the two dimensions that form its frame.

But that is not all: they also permit the dissociation, which is characteristic of all contemporary knowledge about man, of consciousness and representation. They define the manner in which the empiricities can be

given to representation but in a form that is not present to the consciousness (function, conflict, and signification are indeed the manner in which life, need, and language are doubled over in representation, but in a form that may be completely unconscious); on the other hand, they define the manner in which the fundamental finitude can be given to representation in a form both positive and empirical, yet not transparent to the naïve consciousness (neither norm, not rule, not system is given in daily experience: they run through it, give rise to partial consciousnesses of themselves, but can never be wholly illumined except by a reflexive form of knowledge). So the human sciences speak only within the element of the representable, but in accordance with a conscious/unconscious dimension, a dimension that becomes more and more marked as one attempts to bring the order of systems, rules, and norms to light. It is as though the dichotomy between normal and pathological were tending to be eclipsed in favour of the bipolarity of consciousness and the unconscious.

It must not be forgotten, therefore, that the increasingly marked importance of the unconscious in no way compromises the primacy of representation. This primacy does, however, raise an important problem. Now that the empirical forms of knowledge, such as those of life, labour, and language, have escaped from its law, now that the attempt to define man's mode of being is being made outside the field of representation, what is representation, if not a phenomenon of an empirical order which occurs within man, and could be analysed as such? And if representation occurs within man, what difference is there between it and consciousness? But representation is not simply an object for the human sciences; it is, as we have just seen, the very field upon which the human sciences occur, and to their fullest extent; it is the general pedestal of that form of knowledge, the basis that makes it possible. Two consequences emerge from this. One is of a historical order: it is the fact that the human sciences, unlike the empirical sciences since the nineteenth century, and unlike modern thought, have been unable to find a way around the primacy of representation; like the whole of Classical knowledge, they reside within it; but they are in no way its heirs or its continuation, for the whole configuration of knowledge has been modified and they came into being only to the degree to which there appeared, with man, a being who did not exist before in the field of the *episteme*. However, it is easy to understand why every time one tries to use the human sciences to philosophize, to pour back into the space of thought what one has been able to learn of man, one finds oneself imitating the philosophical posture of the eighteenth

century, in which, nevertheless, man had no place; for by extending the domain of knowledge about man beyond its limits one is similarly extending the reign of representation beyond itself, and thus taking up one's position once more in a philosophy of the Classical type. The other consequence is that the human sciences, when dealing with what is representation (in either conscious or unconscious form), find themselves treating as their object what is in fact their condition of possibility. They are always animated, therefore, by a sort of transcendental mobility. They never cease to exercise a critical examination of themselves. They proceed from that which is given to representation to that which renders representation possible, but which is still representation. So that, unlike other sciences, they seek not so much to generalize themselves or make themselves more precise as to be constantly demystifying themselves: to make the transition from an immediate and non-controlled evidence to less transparent but more fundamental forms. This quasi-transcendental process is always given in the form of an unveiling. It is always by an unveiling that they are able, as a consequence, to become sufficiently generalized or refined to conceive of individual phenomena. On the horizon of any human science, there is the project of bringing man's consciousness back to its real conditions, of restoring it to the contents and forms that brought it into being, and elude us within it; this is why the problem of the unconscious – its possibility, status, mode of existence, the means of knowing it and of bringing it to light – is not simply a problem within the human sciences which they can be thought of as encountering by chance in their steps; it is a problem that is ultimately coextensive with their very existence. A transcendental raising of level that is, on the other side, an unveiling of the non-conscious is constitutive of all the sciences of man.

We may find in this the means of isolating them in their essential property. In any case, we can see that what manifests this peculiar property of the human sciences is not that privileged and singularly blurred object which is man. For the good reason that it is not man who constitutes them and provides them with a specific domain; it is the general arrangement of the *episteme* that provides them with a site, summons them, and establishes them – thus enabling them to constitute man as their object. We shall say, therefore, that a 'human science' exists, not wherever man is in question, but wherever there is analysis – within the dimension proper to the unconscious – of norms, rules, and signifying totalities which unveil to consciousness the conditions of its forms and contents. To speak

of 'sciences of man' in any other case is simply an abuse of language. We can see, then, how vain and idle are all those wearisome discussions as to whether such and such forms of knowledge may be termed truly scientific, and to what conditions they ought to be subjected in order to become so. The 'sciences of man' are part of the modern *episteme* in the same way as chemistry or medicine or any other such science; or again, in the same way as grammar and natural history were part of the Classical *episteme*. But to say that they are part of the epistemological field means simply that their positivity is rooted in it, that that is where they find their condition of existence, that they are therefore not merely illusions, pseudo-scientific fantasies motivated at the level of opinions, interests, or beliefs, that they are not what others call by the bizarre name of 'ideology'. But that does not necessarily mean that they are sciences.

Although it is true that any science, any science whatever, when it is questioned on the archaeological level and when an attempt is made to clear the ground of its positivity, always reveals the epistemological configuration that made it possible, any epistemological configuration, on the other hand, even if it is completely assignable in its positivity, may very well not be a science: it does not thereby reduce itself, *ipso facto*, to the status of an imposture. We must distinguish carefully between three things. There are themes with scientific pretensions that one may encounter at the level of opinion and that are not (or are no longer) part of a culture's epistemological network: from the seventeenth century, for example, natural magic ceased to belong to the Western *episteme*, but it persisted for a long time in the interaction of beliefs and affective valorizations. Then there are epistemological figures whose outline, position, and function can be reconstituted in their positivity by means of an analysis of the archaeological type; and these, in turn, may obey two different organizations: some present characteristics of objectivity and systematicity which make it possible to define them as sciences; others do not answer to those criteria, that is, their form of coherence and their relation to their object are determined by their positivity alone. The fact that these latter do not possess the formal criteria of a scientific form of knowledge does not prevent them from belonging, nevertheless, to the positive domain of knowledge. It would thus be as futile and unjust to analyse them as phenomena of opinion as to contrast them historically or critically with scientific formations proper; it would be more absurd still to treat them as a combination which mixes together in variable proportions 'rational elements' and other elements that are not rational. They must be replaced

on the level of positivity that renders them possible and necessarily determines their form. Archaeology, then, has two tasks with regard to these figures: to determine the manner in which they are arranged in the *episteme* in which they have their roots; and to show, also, in what respect their configuration is radically different from that of the sciences in the strict sense. There is no reason to treat this peculiar configuration of theirs as a negative phenomenon: it is not the presence of an obstacle nor some internal deficiency which has left them stranded across the threshold of scientific forms. They constitute, in their own form, side by side with the sciences and on the same archaeological ground, *other* configurations of knowledge.

We have already encountered examples of such configurations in general grammar or in the Classical theory of value; they possessed the same ground of positivity as Cartesian mathematics, but they were not sciences, at least for the majority of those who were their contemporaries. Such is also the case with what we today call the human sciences; when analysed archaeologically, they provide the outlines of completely positive configurations; but as soon as these configurations and the way in which they are arranged within the modern *episteme* are determined, we understand why they cannot be sciences: what renders them possible, in fact, is a certain situation of 'vicinity' with regard to biology, economics, and philology (or linguistics); they exist only in so far as they dwell side by side with those sciences – or rather beneath them, in the space of their projections. However, they maintain a relationship with those sciences that is radically different from that which can be established between two 'related' or 'germane' sciences: this relationship presupposes, in fact, the transposition of external models within the dimension of the unconscious and consciousness, and the flowing back of critical reflection towards the very place from which those models come. It is useless, then, to say that the 'human sciences' are false sciences; they are not sciences at all; the configuration that defines their positivity and gives them their roots in the modern *episteme* at the same time makes it impossible for them to be sciences; and if it is then asked why they assumed that title, it is sufficient to recall that it pertains to the archaeological definition of their roots that they summon and receive the transference of models borrowed from the sciences. It is therefore not man's irreducibility, what is designated as his invincible transcendence, nor even his excessively great complexity, that prevents him from becoming an object of science. Western culture has constituted, under the name of man, a being who, by one and the same

interplay of reasons, must be a positive domain of *knowledge* and cannot be an object of *science*.

IV HISTORY

We have spoken of the human sciences; we have spoken of those broad regions delimited more or less by psychology, sociology, and the analysis of literature and mythology. We have not yet mentioned history, though it is the first and as it were the mother of all the sciences of man, and is perhaps as old as human memory. Or rather, it is for that very reason that we have until now passed it over in silence. Perhaps history has no place, in fact, among the human sciences, or beside them: it may well be that it maintains with them all a relation that is strange, undefined, ineffaceable, and more fundamental than any relation of adjacency in a common space would be.

It is true that History existed long before the constitution of the human sciences; from the beginnings of the Ancient Greek civilization, it has performed a certain number of major functions in Western culture: memory, myth, transmission of the Word and of Example, vehicle of tradition, critical awareness of the present, decipherment of humanity's destiny, anticipation of the future, or promise of a return. What characterized this History – or at least what may be used to define it in its general features, as opposed to our own – was that by ordering the time of human beings upon the world's development (in a sort of great cosmic chronology such as we find in the works of the Stoics), or inversely by extending the principle and movement of a human destiny to even the smallest particles of nature (rather in the same way as Christian Providence), it was conceived of as a vast historical stream, uniform in each of its points, drawing with it in one and the same current, in one and the same fall or ascension, or cycle, all men, and with them things and animals, every living or inert being, even the most unmoved aspects of the earth. And it was this unity that was shattered at the b inning of the nineteenth century, in the great upheaval that occurred in the Western *episteme*: it was discovered that there existed a historicity proper to nature; forms of adaptation to the environment were defined for each broad type of living being, which would make possible a subsequent definition of its evolutionary outline; moreover, it became possible to show that activities as peculiarly human as labour or language contained within themselves a historicity that could not be placed within the great narrative common to things and to men:

production has its modes of development, capital its modes of accumulation, prices their laws of fluctuation and change which cannot be fitted over natural laws or reduced to the general progress of humanity; in the same way, language is not modified as much by migrations, trade, and wars, by what happens to man or what his imagination is able to invent, as by conditions that properly belong to the phonetic and grammatical forms of which it is constituted; and if it has been possible to say that the various languages are born, live, lose their energy as they age, and finally die, this biological metaphor is not intended to dissolve their history in a time which would be that of life, but rather to underline the fact that they too have internal laws of functioning, and that their chronology unfolds in accordance with a time that refers in the first place to their own particular coherence.

We are usually inclined to believe that the nineteenth century, largely for political and social reasons, paid closer attention to human history, that the idea of an order or a continuous level of time was abandoned, as well as that of an uninterrupted progress, and that the bourgeoisie, in attempting to recount its own ascension, encountered, in the calendar of its victory, the historical density of institutions, the specific gravity of habits and beliefs, the violence of struggles, the alternation of success and failure. And we suppose that, on this basis, the historicity discovered within man was extended to the objects he had made, the language he spoke, and – even further still – to life. According to this point of view, the study of economies, the history of literatures and grammars, and even the evolution of living beings are merely effects of the diffusion, over increasingly more distant areas of knowledge, of a historicity first revealed in man. In reality, it was the opposite that happened. Things first of all received a historicity proper to them, which freed them from the continuous space that imposed the same chronology upon them as upon men. So that man found himself dispossessed of what constituted the most manifest contents of his history: nature no longer speaks to him of the creation or the end of the world, of his dependency or his approaching judgement; it no longer speaks of anything but a natural time; its wealth no longer indicates to him the antiquity or the imminent return of a Golden Age; it speaks only of conditions of production being modified in the course of history; language no longer bears the marks of a time before Babel or of the first cries that rang through the jungle; it carries the weapons of its own affiliation. The human being no longer has any history: or rather, since he speaks, works, and lives, he finds himself interwoven in his own

being with histories that are neither subordinate to him nor homogeneous with him. By the fragmentation of the space over which Classical knowledge extended in its continuity, by the folding over of each separated domain upon its own development, the man who appears at the beginning of the nineteenth century is 'dehistoricized'.

And the imaginative values then assumed by the past, the whole lyrical halo that surrounded the consciousness of history at that period, the lively curiosity shown for documents or for traces left behind by time – all this is a surface expression of the simple fact that man found himself emptied of history, but that he was already beginning to recover in the depths of his own being, and among all the things that were still capable of reflecting his image (the others have fallen silent and folded back upon themselves), a historicity linked essentially to man himself. But this historicity is immediately ambiguous. Since man posits himself in the field of positive knowledge only in so far as he speaks, works, and lives, can his history ever be anything but the inextricable nexus of different times, which are foreign to him and heterogeneous in respect of one another? Will the history of man ever be more than a sort of modulation common to changes in the conditions of life (climate, soil fertility, methods of agriculture, exploitation of wealth), to transformations in the economy (and consequently in society and its institutions), and to the succession of forms and usages in language? But, in that case, man is not himself historical: since time comes to him from somewhere other than himself, he constitutes himself as a subject of history only by the superimposition of the history of living beings, the history of things, and the history of words. He is subjected to the pure events those histories contain. But this relation of simple passivity is immediately reversed; for what speaks in language, what works and consumes in economics, what lives in human life, is man himself; and, this being so, he too has a right to a development quite as positive as that of beings and things, one no less autonomous – and perhaps even more fundamental: is it not a historicity proper to man, one inscribed in the very depths of his being, that enables him to adapt himself like any living being, and to evolve like any living being (though with the help of tools, techniques, and organizations belonging to no other living being), that enables him to invent forms of production, to stabilize, prolong, or abridge the validity of economic laws by means of the consciousness he attains of them and by means of the institutions he constructs upon or around them, and that enables him to exercise upon language, with every word he speaks, a sort of constant interior pressure which

makes it shift imperceptibly upon itself at any given moment in time. Thus, behind the history of the positivities, there appears another, more radical, history, that of man himself – a history that now concerns man's very being, since he now realizes that he not only 'has history' all around him, but is himself, in his own historicity, that by means of which a history of human life, a history of economics, and a history of languages are given their form. In which case, at a very deep level, there exists a historicity of man which is itself its own history but also the radical dispersion that provides a foundation for all other histories. It was just this primary erosion that the nineteenth century sought in its concern to historicize everything, to write a general history of everything, to go back ceaselessly through time, and to place the most stable of things in the liberating stream of time. Here again, we should no doubt revise the way in which we traditionally write the history of History; we are accustomed to saying that the nineteenth century brought an end to the pure chronicle of events, the simple memory of a past peopled only by individuals and accidents, and that it began the search for the general laws of development. In fact, no history was ever more 'explanatory', more preoccupied with general laws and constants, than were the histories of the Classical age – when the world and man were inextricably linked in a single history. What first comes to light in the nineteenth century is a simple form of human historicity – the fact that man as such is exposed to the event. Hence the concern either to find laws for this pure form (which gives us philosophies such as that of Spengler) or to define it on the basis of the fact that man lives, works, speaks, and thinks: and this gives us interpretations of history from the standpoint of man envisaged as a living species, or from the standpoint of economic laws, or from that of cultural totalities.

In any case, this arrangement of history within the epistemological space is of great importance for its relation with the human sciences. Since historical man is living, working, and speaking man, any content of History is the province of psychology, sociology, or the sciences of language. But, inversely, since the human being has become historical, through and through, none of the contents analysed by the human sciences can remain stable in itself or escape the movement of History. And this for two reasons: because psychology, sociology, and philosophy, even when applied to objects – that is, men – which are contemporaneous with them, are never directed at anything other than synchronological patternings within a historicity that constitutes and traverses them; and

because the forms successively taken by the human sciences, the choice of objects they make, and the methods they apply to them, are all provided by History, ceaselessly borne along by it, and modified at its pleasure. The more History attempts to transcend its own rootedness in historicity, and the greater the efforts it makes to attain, beyond the historical relativity of its origin and its choices, the sphere of universality, the more clearly it bears the marks of its historical birth, and the more evidently there appears through it the history of which it is itself a part (and this, again, is to be found in Spengler and all the philosophers of history); inversely, the more it accepts its relativity, and the more deeply it sinks into the movement it shares with what it is recounting, then the more it tends to the slenderness of the narrative, and all the positive content it obtained for itself through the human sciences is dissipated.

History constitutes, therefore, for the human sciences, a favourable environment which is both privileged and dangerous. To each of the sciences of man it offers a background, which establishes it and provides it with a fixed ground and, as it were, a homeland; it determines the cultural area – the chronological and geographical boundaries – in which that branch of knowledge can be recognized as having validity; but it also surrounds the sciences of man with a frontier that limits them and destroys, from the outset, their claim to validity within the element of universality. It reveals in this way that though man – even before knowing it – has always been subjected to the determinations that can be expressed by psychology, sociology, and the analysis of language, he is not therefore the intemporal object of a knowledge which, at least at the level of its rights, must itself be thought of as ageless. Even when they avoid all reference to history, the human sciences (and history may be included among them) never do anything but relate one cultural episode to another (that to which they apply themselves as their object, and that in which their existence, their mode of being, their methods, and their concepts have their roots); and though they apply themselves to their own synchronology, they relate the cultural episode from which they emerged to itself. Man, therefore, never appears in his positivity and that positivity is not immediately limited by the limitlessness of History.

Here we see being reconstituted a movement analogous to that which animated from within the entire domain of the human sciences: as analysed above, this movement perpetually referred certain positivities determining man's being to the finitude that caused those same positivities to appear; so that the sciences were themselves taken up in that great

oscillation, but in such a way that they in turn took it up in the form of their own positivity by seeking to move ceaselessly backwards and forwards between the conscious and the unconscious. And now we find the beginning of a similar oscillation in the case of History; but this time it does not move between the positivity of man taken as object (and empirically manifested by labour, life, and language) and the radical limits of his being; it moves instead between the temporal limits that define the particular forms of labour, life, and language, and the historical positivity of the subject which, by means of knowledge, gains access to them. Here again, the subject and the object are bound together in a reciprocal questioning of one another; but whereas, before, this questioning took place within positive knowledge itself, and by the progressive unveiling of the unconscious by consciousness, here it takes place on the outer limits of the object and subject; it designates the erosion to which both are subjected, the dispersion that creates a hiatus between them, wrenching them loose from a calm, rooted, and definitive positivity. By unveiling the unconscious as their most fundamental object, the human sciences showed that there was always something still to be thought in what had already been thought on a manifest level; by revealing the law of time as the external boundary of the human sciences, History shows that everything that has been thought will be thought again by a thought that does not yet exist. But perhaps all we have here, in the concrete forms of the unconscious and History, is the two faces of that finitude which, by discovering that it was its own foundation, caused the figure of man to appear in the nineteenth century: a finitude without infinity is no doubt a finitude that has never finished, that is always in recession with relation to itself, that always has something still to think at the very moment when it thinks, that always has time to think again what it has thought.

In modern thought, historicism and the analytic of finitude confront one another. Historicism is a means of validating for itself the perpetual critical relation at play between History and the human sciences. But it establishes it solely at the level of the positivities: the positive knowledge of man is limited by the historical positivity of the knowing subject, so that the moment of finitude is dissolved in the play of a relativity from which it cannot escape, and which itself has value as an absolute. To be finite, then, would simply be to be trapped in the laws of a perspective which, while allowing a certain apprehension – of the type of perception or understanding – prevents it from ever being universal and definitive intellection. All knowledge is rooted in a life, a society, and a language

that have a history; and it is in that very history that knowledge finds the element enabling it to communicate with other forms of life, other types of society, other significations: that is why historicism always implies a certain philosophy, or at least a certain methodology, of living comprehension (in the element of the *Lebenswelt*), of interhuman communication (against a background of social structures), and of hermeneutics (as the re-apprehension through the manifest meaning of the discourse of another meaning at once secondary and primary, that is, more hidden but also more fundamental). By this means, the different positivities formed by History and laid down in it are able to enter into contact with one another, surround one another in the form of knowledge, and free the content dormant within them; it is not, then, the limits themselves that appear, in their absolute rigour, but partial totalities, totalities that turn out to be limited by fact, totalities whose frontiers can be made to move, up to a certain point, but which will never extend into the space of a definitive analysis, and will never raise themselves to the status of absolute totality. This is why the analysis of finitude never ceases to use, as a weapon against historicism, the part of itself that historicism has neglected: its aim is to reveal, at the foundation of all the positivities and before them, the finitude that makes them possible; where historicism sought for the possibility and justification of concrete relations between limited totalities, whose mode of being was predetermined by life, or by social forms, or by the significations of language, the analytic of finitude tries to question this relation of the human being to the being which, by designating finitude, renders the positivities possible in their concrete mode of being.

V PSYCHOANALYSIS AND ETHNOLOGY

Psychoanalysis and ethnology occupy a privileged position in our knowledge – not because they have established the foundations of their positivity better than any other human science, and at last accomplished the old attempt to be truly scientific; but rather because, on the confines of all the branches of knowledge investigating man, they form an undoubted and inexhaustible treasure-hoard of experiences and concepts, and above all a perpetual principle of dissatisfaction, of calling into question, of criticism and contestation of what may seem, in other respects, to be established. Now, there is a reason for this that concerns the object they respectively give to one another, but concerns even more the position they

occupy and the function they perform within the general space of the *episteme*.

Psychoanalysis stands as close as possible, in fact, to that critical function which, as we have seen, exists within all the human sciences. In setting itself the task of making the discourse of the unconscious speak through consciousness, psychoanalysis is advancing in the direction of that fundamental region in which the relations of representation and finitude come into play. Whereas all the human sciences advance towards the unconscious only with their back to it, waiting for it to unveil itself as fast as consciousness is analysed, as it were backwards, psychoanalysis, on the other hand, points directly towards it, with a deliberate purpose – not towards that which must be rendered gradually more explicit by the progressive illumination of the implicit, but towards what is there and yet is hidden, towards what exists with the mute solidity of a thing, of a text closed in upon itself, or of a blank space in a visible text, and uses that quality to defend itself. It must not be supposed that the Freudian approach is the combination of an interpretation of meaning and a dynamics of resistance or defence; by following the same path as the human sciences, but with its gaze turned the other way, psychoanalysis moves towards the moment – by definition inaccessible to any theoretical knowledge of man, to any continuous apprehension in terms of signification, conflict, or function – at which the contents of consciousness articulate themselves, or rather stand gaping, upon man's finitude. This means that, unlike the human sciences, which, even while turning back towards the unconscious, always remain within the space of the representable, psychoanalysis advances and leaps over representation, overflows it on the side of finitude, and thus reveals, where one had expected functions bearing their norms, conflicts burdened with rules, and significations forming a system, the simple fact that it is possible for there to be system (therefore signification), rule (therefore conflict), norm (therefore function). And in this region where representation remains in suspense, on the edge of itself, open, in a sense, to the closed boundary of finitude, we find outlined the three figures by means of which life, with its function and norms, attains its foundation in the mute repetition of Death, conflicts and rules their foundation in the naked opening of Desire, significations and systems their foundation in a language which is at the same time Law. We know that psychologists and philosophers have dismissed all this as Freudian mythology. It was indeed inevitable that this approach of Freud's should have appeared to them in this way; to a knowledge

situated within the representable, all that frames and defines, on the outside, the very possibility of representation can be nothing other than mythology. But when one follows the movement of psychoanalysis as it progresses, or when one traverses the epistemological space as a whole, one sees that these figures are in fact – though imaginary no doubt to the myopic gaze – the very forms of finitude, as it is analysed in modern thought. Is death not that upon the basis of which knowledge in general is possible – so much so that we can think of it as being, in the area of psychoanalysis, the figure of that empirico-transcendental *duplication* that characterizes man's mode of being within finitude? Is desire not that which remains always *unthought* at the heart of thought? And the law-language (at once word and word-system) that psychoanalysis takes such pains to make speak, is it not that in which all signification assumes an *origin* more distant than itself, but also that whose return is promised in the very act of analysis? It is indeed true that this Death, and this Desire, and this Law can never meet within the knowledge that traverses in its positivity the empirical domain of man; but the reason for this is that they designate the conditions of possibility of all knowledge about man.

And precisely when this language emerges in all its nudity, yet at the same time eludes all signification as if it were a vast and empty despotic system, when Desire reigns in the wild state, as if the rigour of its rule had levelled all opposition, when Death dominates every psychological function and stands above it as its unique and devastating norm – then we recognize madness in its present form, madness as it is posited in the modern experience, as its truth and its alterity. In this figure, which is at once empirical and yet foreign to (and in) all that we can experience, our consciousness no longer finds – as it did in the sixteenth century – the trace of another world; it no longer observes the wandering of a straying reason; it sees welling up that which is, perilously, nearest to us – as if, suddenly, the very hollowness of our existence is outlined in relief; the finitude upon the basis of which we are, and think, and know, is suddenly there before us: an existence at once real and impossible, thought that we cannot think, an object for our knowledge that always eludes it. This is why psychoanalysis finds in that madness *par excellence* – which psychiatrists term schizophrenia – its intimate, its most invincible torture: for, given in this form of madness, in an absolutely manifest and absolutely withdrawn form, are the forms of finitude towards which it usually advances unceasingly (and interminably) from the starting-point of that which is voluntarily-involuntarily offered to it in the patient's language.

So psychoanalysis 'recognizes itself' when it is confronted with those very psychoses which nevertheless (or rather, for that very reason) it has scarcely any means of reaching: as if the psychosis were displaying in a savage illumination, and offering in a mode not too distant but just too close, that towards which analysis must make its laborious way.

But this relation of psychoanalysis with what makes all knowledge in general possible in the sphere of the human sciences has yet another consequence – namely, that psychoanalysis cannot be deployed as pure speculative knowledge or as a general theory of man. It cannot span the entire field of representation, attempt to evade its frontiers, or point towards what is more fundamental, in the form of an empirical science constructed on the basis of careful observation; that breakthrough can be made only within the limits of a praxis in which it is not only the knowledge we have of man that is involved, but man himself – man together with the Death that is at work in his suffering, the Desire that has lost its object, and the language by means of which, through which, his Law is silently articulated. All analytic knowledge is thus invincibly linked with a praxis, with that strangulation produced by the relation between two individuals, one of whom is listening to the other's language, thus freeing his desire from the object it has lost (making him understand he has lost it), liberating him from the ever-repeated proximity of death (making him understand that one day he will die). This is why nothing is more alien to psychoanalysis than anything resembling a general theory of man or an anthropology.

Just as psychoanalysis situates itself in the dimension of the unconscious (of that critical animation which disturbs from within the entire domain of the sciences of man), so ethnology situates itself in the dimension of historicity (of that perpetual oscillation which is the reason why the human sciences are always being contested, from without, by their own history). It is no doubt difficult to maintain that ethnology has a fundamental relation with historicity since it is traditionally the knowledge we have of peoples without histories; in any case, it studies (both by systematic choice and because of the lack of documents) the structural invariables of cultures rather than the succession of events. It suspends the long 'chronological' discourse by means of which we try to reflect our own culture within itself, and instead it reveals synchronological correlations in other cultural forms. And yet ethnology itself is possible only on the basis of a certain situation, of an absolutely singular event which involves not only our historicity but also that of all men who can con-

stitute the object of an ethnology (it being understood that we can perfectly well apprehend our own society's ethnology): ethnology has its roots, in fact, in a possibility that properly belongs to the history of our culture, even more to its fundamental relation with the whole of history, and enables it to link itself to other cultures in a mode of pure theory. There is a certain position of the Western *ratio* that was constituted in its history and provides a foundation for the relation it can have with all other societies, even with the society in which it historically appeared. Obviously, this does not mean that the colonizing situation is indispensable to ethnology: neither hypnosis, nor the patient's alienation within the fantasmatic character of the doctor, is constitutive of psychoanalysis; but just as the latter can be deployed only in the calm violence of a particular relationship and the transference it produces, so ethnology can assume its proper dimensions only within the historical sovereignty – always restrained, but always present – of European thought and the relation that can bring it face to face with all other cultures as well as with itself.

But this relation (in so far as ethnology does not seek to efface it, but on the contrary deepens it by establishing itself definitively within it) does not imprison it within the circular system of actions and reactions proper to historicism; rather, it places it in a position to find a way round that danger by inverting the movement that gave rise to it; in fact, instead of relating empirical contents – as revealed in psychology, sociology, or the analysis of literature and myth – to the historical positivity of the subject perceiving them, ethnology places the particular forms of each culture, the differences that contrast it with others, the limits by which it defines itself and encloses itself upon its own coherence, within the dimension in which its relations occur with each of the three great positivities (life, need and labour, and language): thus, ethnology shows how, within a given culture, there occur the normalization of the broad biological functions, the rules that render possible or obligatory all the forms of exchange, production, and consumption, and the systems that are organized around or on the model of linguistic structures. Ethnology, then, advances towards that region where the human sciences are articulated upon that biology, that economics, and that philology and linguistics which, as we have seen, dominate the human sciences from such a very great height: this is why the general problem of all ethnology is in fact that of the relations (of continuity or discontinuity) between nature and culture. But in this mode of questioning, the problem of history is found to have been reversed: for it then becomes a matter of determining, according to

the symbolic systems employed, according to the prescribed rules, according to the functional norms chosen and laid down, what sort of historical development each culture is susceptible of; it is seeking to re-apprehend, in its very roots, the mode of historicity that may occur within that culture, and the reasons why its history must inevitably be cumulative or circular, progressive or subjected to regulating fluctuations, capable of spontaneous adjustments or subject to crises. And thus is revealed the foundation of that historical flow within which the different human sciences assume their validity and can be applied to a given culture and upon a given synchronological area.

Ethnology, like psychoanalysis, questions not man himself, as he appears in the human sciences, but the region that makes possible knowledge about man in general; like psychoanalysis, it spans the whole field of that knowledge in a movement that tends to reach its boundaries. But psychoanalysis makes use of the particular relation of the transference in order to reveal, on the outer confines of representation, Desire, Law, and Death, which outline, at the extremity of analytic language and practice, the concrete figures of finitude; ethnology, on the other hand, is situated within the particular relation that the Western *ratio* establishes with all other cultures; and from that starting-point it avoids the representations that men in any civilization may give themselves of themselves, of their life, of their needs, of the significations laid down in their language; and it sees emerging behind those representations the norms by which men perform the functions of life, although they reject their immediate pressure, the rules through which they experience and maintain their needs, the systems against the background of which all signification is given to them. The privilege of ethnology and psychoanalysis, the reason for their profound kinship and symmetry, must not be sought, therefore, in some common concern to pierce the profound enigma, the most secret part of human nature; in fact, what illuminates the space of their discourse is much more the historical *a priori* of all the sciences of man – those great caesuras, furrows, and dividing-lines which traced man's outline in the Western *episteme* and made him a possible area of knowledge. It was quite inevitable, then, that they should both be sciences of the unconscious: not because they reach down to what is below consciousness in man, but because they are directed towards that which, outside man, makes it possible to know, with a positive knowledge, that which is given to or eludes his consciousness.

On this basis, a certain number of decisive facts become comprehensible.

And the first is this: that psychoanalysis and ethnology are not so much two human sciences among others, but that they span the entire domain of those sciences, that they animate its whole surface, spread their concepts throughout it, and are able to propound their methods of decipherment and their interpretations everywhere. No human science can be sure that it is out of their debt, or entirely independent of what they may have discovered, or certain of not being beholden to them in one way or another. But their development has one particular feature, which is that, despite their quasi-universal 'bearing', they never, for all that, come near to a general concept of man: at no moment do they come near to isolating a quality in him that is specific, irreducible, and uniformly valid wherever he is given to experience. The idea of a 'psychoanalytic anthropology', and the idea of a 'human nature' reconstituted by ethnology, are no more than pious wishes. Not only are they able to do without the concept of man, they are also unable to pass through it, for they always address themselves to that which constitutes his outer limits. One may say of both of them what Lévi-Strauss said of ethnology: that they dissolve man. Not that there is any question of revealing him in a better, purer, and as it were more liberated state; but because they go back towards that which foments his positivity. In relation to the 'human sciences', psychoanalysis and ethnology are rather 'counter-sciences'; which does not mean that they are less 'rational' or 'objective' than the others, but that they flow in the opposite direction, that they lead them back to their epistemological basis, and that they ceaselessly 'unmake' that very man who is creating and re-creating his positivity in the human sciences. Lastly, we can understand why psychoanalysis and ethnology should have been constituted in confrontation, in a fundamental correlation: since *Totem and taboo*, the establishment of a common field for these two, the possibility of a discourse that could move from one to the other without discontinuity, the double articulation of the history of individuals upon the unconscious of culture, and of the historicity of those cultures upon the unconscious of individuals, has opened up, without doubt, the most general problems that can be posed with regard to man.

One can imagine what prestige and importance ethnology could possess if, instead of defining itself in the first place – as it has done until now – as the study of societies without history, it were deliberately to seek its object in the area of the unconscious processes that characterize the system of a given culture; in this way it would bring the relation of historicity, which is constitutive of all ethnology in general, into play

within the dimension in which psychoanalysis has always been deployed. In so doing it would not assimilate the mechanisms and forms of a society to the pressure and repression of collective hallucinations, thus discovering – though on a larger scale – what analysis can discover at the level of the individual; it would define as a system of cultural unconsciouses the totality of formal structures which render mythical discourse significant, give their coherence and necessity to the rules that regulate needs, and provide the norms of life with a foundation other than that to be found in nature, or in pure biological functions. One can imagine the similar importance that a psychoanalysis would have if it were to share the dimension of an ethnology, not by the establishment of a 'cultural psychology', not by the sociological explanation of phenomena manifested at the level of individuals, but by the discovery that the unconscious also possesses, or rather that it *is* in itself, a certain formal structure. By this means, ethnology and psychoanalysis would succeed, not in superimposing themselves on one another, nor even perhaps in coming together, but in intersecting like two lines differently oriented: one proceeding from the apparent elision of the signified in a neurosis to the lacuna in the signifying system through which the neurosis found expression; the other proceeding from the analogy between the multiple things signified (in mythologies, for example) to the unity of a structure whose formal transformations would yield up the diversity existing in the actual stories. It would thus not be at the level of the relations between the individual and society, as has often been believed, that psychoanalysis and ethnology could be articulated one upon the other; it is not because the individual is a part of his group, it is not because a culture is reflected and expressed in a more or less deviant manner in the individual, that these two forms of knowledge are neighbours. In fact, they have only one point in common, but it is an essential and inevitable one: the one at which they intersect at right angles; for the signifying chain by which the unique experience of the individual is constituted is perpendicular to the formal system on the basis of which the significations of a culture are constituted: at any given instant, the structure proper to individual experience finds a certain number of possible choices (and of excluded possibilities) in the systems of the society; inversely, at each of their points of choice the social structures encounter a certain number of possible individuals (and others who are not) – just as the linear structure of language always produces a possible choice between several words or several phonemes at any given moment (but excludes all others).

Whereupon there is formed the theme of a pure theory of language which would provide the ethnology and the psychoanalysis thus conceived with their formal model. There would thus be a discipline that could cover in a single movement both the dimension of ethnology that relates the human sciences to the positivities in which they are framed and the dimension of psychoanalysis that relates the knowledge of man to the finitude that gives it its foundation. In linguistics, one would have a science perfectly founded in the order of positivities exterior to man (since it is a question of pure language), which, after traversing the whole space of the human sciences, would encounter the question of finitude (since it is through language, and within it, that thought is able to think: so that it is in itself a positivity with the value of a fundamental). Above ethnology and psychoanalysis, or, more exactly, interwoven with them, a third 'counter-science' would appear to traverse, animate, and disturb the whole constituted field of the human sciences; and by overflowing it both on the side of positivities and on that of finitude, it would form the most general contestation of that field. Like the two other counter-sciences, it would make visible, in a discursive mode, the frontier-forms of the human sciences; like them, it would situate its experience in those enlightened and dangerous regions where the knowledge of man acts out, in the form of the unconscious and of historicity, its relation with what renders them possible. In 'exposing' it, these three counter-sciences threaten the very thing that made it possible for man to be known. Thus we see the destiny of man being spun before our very eyes, but being spun backwards; it is being led back, by those strange bobbins, to the forms of its birth, to the homeland that made it possible. And is that not one way of bringing about its end? For linguistics no more speak of man himself than do psychoanalysis and ethnology.

It may be said that, in playing this role, linguistics is doing no more than resuming the functions that had once been those of biology or of economics, when, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an attempt was made to unify the human sciences under concepts borrowed from biology or economics. But linguistics may have a much more fundamental role. And for several reasons. First, because it permits – or in any case strives to render possible – the structuration of contents themselves; it is therefore not a theoretical reworking of knowledge acquired elsewhere, the interpretation of an already accomplished reading of phenomena; it does not offer a 'linguistic version' of the facts observed in the human sciences, it is rather the principle of a primary decipherment:

to a gaze forearmed by linguistics, things attain to existence only in so far as they are able to form the elements of a signifying system. Linguistic analysis is more a perception than an explanation: that is, it is constitutive of its very object. Moreover, we find that by means of this emergence of structure (as an invariable relation within a totality of elements) the relation of the human sciences to mathematics has been opened up once more, and in a wholly new dimension; it is no longer a matter of knowing whether one can quantify results, or whether human behaviour is susceptible of being introduced into the field of a measurable probability; the question that arises is that of knowing whether it is possible without a play on words to employ the notion of structure, or at least whether it is the same structure that is referred to in mathematics and in the human sciences: a question that is central if one wishes to know the possibilities and rights, the conditions and limitations, of a justified formalization; it will be seen that the relation of the sciences of man to the axis of the formal and *a priori* disciplines – a relation that had not been essential till then, and as long as the attempt was made to identify it with the right to measure – returns to life and perhaps becomes fundamental now that within the space of the human sciences there emerges their relation both to the empirical positivity of language and to the analytic of finitude; the three axes which define the volume proper to the sciences of man thus become visible, and almost simultaneously so, in the questions they pose. Lastly, as a result of the importance of linguistics and of its application to the knowledge of man, the question of the being of language, which, as we have seen, is so intimately linked with the fundamental problems of our culture, reappears in all its enigmatic insistence. With the continually extended use of linguistic categories, it is a question of growing importance, since we must henceforth ask ourselves what language must be in order to structure in this way what is nevertheless not in itself either word or discourse, and in order to articulate itself on the pure forms of knowledge. By a much longer and much more unexpected path, we are led back to the place that Nietzsche and Mallarmé signposted when the first asked: Who speaks?, and the second saw his glittering answer in the Word itself. The question as to what language is in its being is once more of the greatest urgency.

At this point, where the question of language arises again with such heavy over-determination, and where it seems to lay siege on every side to the figure of man (that figure which had once taken the place of Classical Discourse), contemporary culture is struggling to create an

important part of its present, and perhaps of its future. On the one hand, suddenly very near to all these empirical domains, questions arise which before had seemed very distant from them: these questions concern a general formalization of thought and knowledge; and at a time when they were still thought to be dedicated solely to the relation between logic and mathematics, they suddenly open up the possibility, and the task, of purifying the old empirical reason by constituting formal languages, and of applying a second critique of pure reason on the basis of new forms of the mathematical *a priori*. However, at the other extremity of our culture, the question of language is entrusted to that form of speech which has no doubt never ceased to pose it, but which is now, for the first time, posing it to itself. That literature in our day is fascinated by the being of language is neither the sign of an imminent end nor proof of a radicalization: it is a phenomenon whose necessity has its roots in a vast configuration in which the whole structure of our thought and our knowledge is traced. But if the question of formal languages gives prominence to the possibility or impossibility of structuring positive contents, a literature dedicated to language gives prominence, in all their empirical vivacity, to the fundamental forms of finitude. From within language experienced and traversed as language, in the play of its possibilities extended to their furthest point, what emerges is that man has 'come to an end', and that, by reaching the summit of all possible speech, he arrives not at the very heart of himself but at the brink of that which limits him; in that region where death prowls, where thought is extinguished, where the promise of the origin interminably recedes. It was inevitable that this new mode of being of literature should have been revealed in works like those of Artaud or Roussel – and by men like them; in Artaud's work, language, having been rejected as discourse and re-apprehended in the plastic violence of the shock, is referred back to the cry, to the tortured body, to the materiality of thought, to the flesh; in Roussel's work, language, having been reduced to powder by a systematically fabricated chance, recounts interminably the repetition of death and the enigma of divided origins. And as if this experiencing of the forms of finitude in language were insupportable, or inadequate (perhaps its very inadequacy was insupportable), it is within madness that it manifested itself – the figure of finitude thus positing itself in language (as that which unveils itself within it), but also before it, preceding it, as that formless, mute, unsignifying region where language can find its freedom. And it is indeed in this space thus revealed that literature, first with surrealism (though still in a very

much disguised form), then, more and more purely, with Kafka, Baraille, and Blanchot, posited itself as experience: as experience of death (and in the element of death), of unthinkable thought (and in its inaccessible presence), of repetition (of original innocence, always there at the nearest and yet always the most distant limit of language); as experience of finitude (trapped in the opening and the tyranny of that finitude).

It is clear that this 'return' of language is not a sudden interruption in our culture; it is not the irruptive discovery of some long-buried evidence; it does not indicate a folding back of thought upon itself, in the movement by which it emancipates itself from all content, or a narcissism occurring within a literature freeing itself at last from what it has to say in order to speak henceforth only about the fact that it is language stripped naked. It is, in fact, the strict unfolding of Western culture in accordance with the necessity it imposed upon itself at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It would be false to see in this general indication of our experience, which may be termed 'formalism', the sign of a drying up, of a rarefaction of thought losing its capacity for re-apprehending the plenitude of contents; it would be no less false to place it from the outset upon the horizon of some new thought or new knowledge. It is within the very tight-knit, very coherent outlines of the modern *episteme* that this contemporary experience found its possibility; it is even that *episteme* which, by its logic, gave rise to such an experience, constituted it through and through, and made it impossible for it not to exist. What occurred at the time of Ricardo, Cuvier, and Bopp, the form of knowledge that was established with the appearance of economics, biology, and philology, the thought of finitude laid down by the Kantian critique as philosophy's task – all that still forms the immediate space of our reflection. We think in that area.

And yet the impression of fulfilment and of end, the muffled feeling that carries and animates our thought, and perhaps lulls it to sleep with the facility of its promises, and makes us believe that something new is about to begin, something we glimpse only as a thin line of light low on the horizon – that feeling and that impression are perhaps not ill founded. It will be said that they exist, that they have never ceased to be formulated over and over again since the early nineteenth century; it will be said that Hölderlin, Hegel, Feuerbach, and Marx all felt this certainty that in them a thought and perhaps a culture were coming to a close, and that from the depths of a distance, which was perhaps not invincible, another was approaching – in the dim light of dawn, in the brilliance of noon, or in

the dissension of the falling day. But this close, this perilous imminence whose promise we fear today, whose danger we welcome, is probably not of the same order. Then, the task enjoined upon thought by that annunciation was to establish for man a stable sojourn upon this earth from which the gods had turned away or vanished. In our day, and once again Nietzsche indicated the turning-point from a long way off, it is not so much the absence or the death of God that is affirmed as the end of man (that narrow, imperceptible displacement, that recession in the form of identity, which are the reason why man's finitude has become his end); it becomes apparent, then, that the death of God and the last man are engaged in a contest with more than one round: is it not the last man who announces that he has killed God, thus situating his language, his thought, his laughter in the space of that already dead God, yet positing himself also as he who has killed God and whose existence includes the freedom and the decision of that murder? Thus, the last man is at the same time older and yet younger than the death of God; since he has killed God, it is he himself who must answer for his own finitude; but since it is in the death of God that he speaks, thinks, and exists, his murder itself is doomed to die; new gods, the same gods, are already swelling the future Ocean; man will disappear. Rather than the death of God – or, rather, in the wake of that death and in a profound correlation with it – what Nietzsche's thought heralds is the end of his murderer; it is the explosion of man's face in laughter, and the return of masks; it is the scattering of the profound stream of time by which he felt himself carried along and whose pressure he suspected in the very being of things; it is the identity of the Return of the Same with the absolute dispersion of man. Throughout the nineteenth century, the end of philosophy and the promise of an approaching culture were no doubt one and the same thing as the thought of finitude and the appearance of man in the field of knowledge; in our day, the fact that philosophy is still – and again – in the process of coming to an end, and the fact that in it perhaps, though even more outside and against it, in literature as well as in formal reflection, the question of language is being posed, prove no doubt that man is in the process of disappearing.

For the entire modern *episteme* – that which was formed towards the end of the eighteenth century and still serves as the positive ground of our knowledge, that which constituted man's particular mode of being and the possibility of knowing him empirically – that entire *episteme* was bound up with the disappearance of Discourse and its featureless reign, with the shift of language towards objectivity, and with its reappearance

in multiple form. If this same language is now emerging with greater and greater insistence in a unity that we ought to think but cannot as yet do so, is this not the sign that the whole of this configuration is now about to topple, and that man is in the process of perishing as the being of language continues to shine ever brighter upon our horizon? Since man was constituted at a time when language was doomed to dispersion, will he not be dispersed when language regains its unity? And if that were true, would it not be an error – a profound error, since it could hide from us what should now be thought – to interpret our actual experience as an application of the forms of language to the human order? Ought we not rather to give up thinking of man, or, to be more strict, to think of this disappearance of man – and the ground of possibility of all the sciences of man – as closely as possible in correlation with our concern with language? Ought we not to admit that, since language is here once more, man will return to that serene non-existence in which he was formerly maintained by the imperious unity of Discourse? Man had been a figure occurring between two modes of language; or, rather, he was constituted only when language, having been situated within representation and, as it were, dissolved in it, freed itself from that situation at the cost of its own fragmentation: man composed his own figure in the interstices of that fragmented language. Of course, these are not affirmations; they are at most questions to which it is not possible to reply; they must be left in suspense, where they pose themselves, only with the knowledge that the possibility of posing them may well open the way to a future thought.

VI IN CONCLUSION

One thing in any case is certain: man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge. Taking a relatively short chronological sample within a restricted geographical area – European culture since the sixteenth century – one can be certain that man is a recent invention within it. It is not around him and his secrets that knowledge prowled for so long in the darkness. In fact, among all the mutations that have affected the knowledge of things and their order, the knowledge of identities, differences, characters, equivalences, words – in short, in the midst of all the episodes of that profound history of the *Same* – only one, that which began a century and a half ago and is now perhaps drawing to a close, has made it possible for the figure of man to appear.

And that appearance was not the liberation of an old anxiety, the transition into luminous consciousness of an age-old concern, the entry into objectivity of something that had long remained trapped within beliefs and philosophies: it was the effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge. As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.

If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility – without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises – were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.