

points to the crisis in the mechanisms which ensured the production of legitimate senders and receivers. The outraged faithful are not wrong when they associate the anarchic diversification of ritual with a crisis in the religious institution: 'Every parish priest has become a little pope or a little bishop, and the faithful are in disarray. Some worshippers, faced with this torrent of changes, no longer believe that the church is solid and that it possesses the truth.'⁵ The diversification of the liturgy, which is the most obvious manifestation of the redefinition of the contract of delegation uniting the priest and the Church and, through it, the priest and the faithful, is experienced in such a dramatic way by a large body of worshippers and priests only because they reveal the transformation of the relations of power within the Church (in particular, between the high and the common clergy), which is linked to a transformation of the social conditions for the reproduction of the priesthood (a crisis of priestly 'calling') and of the lay public ('dechristianization').

The crisis over the liturgy points to the crisis in the priesthood (and the whole clerical field), which itself points to a general crisis of religious belief. It reveals, through a kind of quasi-experimental dismantling, the 'conditions of felicity' which allow a set of agents engaged in a rite to accomplish it *felicitously*; it also shows retrospectively that this objective and subjective felicity is based on a total lack of awareness of these conditions, a lack of awareness which, in so far as it defines the doxic relation to social rituals, constitutes the most indispensable condition for their effective accomplishment. The performative magic of ritual functions fully only as long as the religious official who is responsible for carrying it out in the name of the group acts as a kind of *medium* between the group and itself: it is the group which, through its intermediary, exercises on itself the magical efficacy contained in the performative utterance.

The symbolic efficacy of words is exercised only in so far as the person subjected to it recognizes the person who exercises it as authorized to do so, or, what amounts to the same thing, only in so far as he fails to realize that, in submitting to it, he himself has contributed, through his recognition, to its establishment. It rests entirely on the belief which is the foundation of the social fiction called ministry, and which goes much deeper than the beliefs and the mysteries which the ministry preaches and guarantees.⁶ That is why the crisis of religious language and its performative efficacy is not limited, as is often believed, to the collapse of a world of representations: it is part of the disintegration of an entire universe of social relations of which it was constitutive.

4

Rites of Institution

With the notion of rites of passage, Arnold Van Gennep *named*, indeed described a social phenomenon of great importance. I do not believe that he did much more and neither did those who, like Victor Turner, have taken up his theory and offered a more explicit and more systematic description of the phases of *ritual*. In fact, it seems to me that in order to develop the theory of rites of passage any further, one has to ask the questions that this theory does not raise, and in particular those regarding the *social* function of ritual and the social significance of the boundaries or limits which the ritual allows one to pass over or transgress in a lawful way. One can ask oneself whether, by stressing the temporal transition – e.g. from childhood to adulthood – this theory does not conceal one of the essential effects of rites, namely that of separating those who have undergone it, not from those who have not yet undergone it, but from those who will not undergo it in any sense, and thereby instituting a lasting difference between those to whom the rite pertains and those to whom it does not pertain. That is why, rather than describing them as rites of passage, I would prefer to call them rites of consecration, or rites of legitimation, or, quite simply, *rites of institution* – giving this word the active sense it has, for example, in expressions like '*institution d'un héritier*' ('appointing an heir'). Why substitute one word for another in this way? I would quote Poincaré, who defined mathematical generalization as 'the art of giving the same name to different things', and who insisted on the decisive importance of the choice of words: as he used to say, when the language has been well chosen, then what has been shown with regard to a known object can be applied to all sorts of new objects. The analyses which I shall put forward are produced by generalizing from the results of an analysis

of the ways in which elite schools function.¹ In a somewhat risky exercise, I will endeavour to bring out the invariant properties of social rituals understood as rites of institution.

To speak of rites of institution is to suggest that all rites tend to consecrate or legitimate an *arbitrary boundary*, by fostering a misrecognition of the arbitrary nature of the limit and encouraging a recognition of it as legitimate; or, what amounts to the same thing, they tend to involve a solemn transgression, i.e. one conducted in a lawful and extra-ordinary way, of the limits which constitute the social and mental order which rites are designed to safeguard at all costs – like the division between the sexes with regard to the rituals of marriage. By solemnly marking the passage over a line which establishes a fundamental division in the social order, rites draw the attention of the observer to the passage (whence the expression 'rites of passage'), whereas the important thing is the line. What, in effect, does this line separate? Obviously, it separates a before and an after: the uncircumcised child and the circumcised child; or even the whole set of uncircumcised children and the set of circumcised adults. In fact, the most important division, and one which passes unnoticed, is the division it creates between all those who are subject to circumcision, boys and men, children or adult, and those who are not subject to it, i.e. girls and women. There is thus a hidden set of individuals in relation to which the instituted group is defined. The most important effect of the rite is the one which attracts the least attention: by treating men and women differently, the rite *consecrates* the difference, institutes it, while at the same time instituting man as man, i.e. circumcised, and woman as woman, i.e. not subject to this ritual operation. An analysis of the Kabyle ritual illustrates this clearly: circumcision separates the young boy not so much from his childhood, or from boys still in childhood, but from women and the feminine world, i.e. from the mother and from everything that is associated with her – humidity, greenness, rawness, spring, milk, blandness, etc. One can see in passing that, as the process of institution consists of assigning properties of a *social* nature in a way that makes them seem like properties of natural nature, the rite of institution tends logically, as Pierre Centlivres and Luc de Heusch have observed, to integrate specifically social oppositions, such as masculine/feminine, into series of cosmological oppositions – with relations like: man is to women as the sun is to the moon – which represents a very effective way of naturalizing them. Thus sexually differentiated rites consecrate the difference between the sexes: they constitute a simple difference of fact as a legitimate distinction, as an institution. The separation accomplished in the ritual (which itself

effects a separation) exercises an effect of consecration.

But do we really know what it means to consecrate, and particularly to consecrate a difference? How is what I would call the 'magical' consecration of a difference achieved, and what are its technical effects? Does the fact of socially instituting, through an act of *constitution*, a pre-existing difference – like the one separating the sexes – have only symbolic effects, in the sense that we give to this term when we speak of the symbolic gift, in other words, no effects at all? There is a Latin expression that means 'you're teaching fish to swim'. That is exactly what the ritual of institution does. It says: this man is a man – implying that he is a real man, which is not always immediately obvious. It tends to make the smallest, weakest, in short, the most effeminate man into a truly manly man, separated by a difference in nature and essence from the most masculine woman, the tallest, strongest woman, etc. To institute, in this case, is to consecrate, that is, to sanction and sanctify a particular state of things, an established order, in exactly the same way that a *constitution* does in the legal and political sense of the term. An *investiture* (of a knight, Deputy, President of the Republic, etc.) consists of sanctioning and sanctifying a difference (pre-existent or not) by making it *known* and *recognized*; it consists of making it exist as a social difference, known and recognized as such by the agent invested and everyone else.

In short, if it wishes to understand the most fundamental social phenomena, which occur as much in pre-capitalist societies as in our own world (degrees are just as much a part of magic as are amulets), social science must take account of the symbolic efficacy of rites of institution, that is, the power they possess to act on reality by acting on its representation. The process of investiture, for example, exercises a symbolic efficacy that is quite real in that it really transforms the person consecrated: first, because it transforms the representations others have of him and above all the behaviour they adopt towards him (the most visible changes being the fact that he is given titles of respect and the respect actually associated with these enunciations); and second, because it simultaneously transforms the representation that the invested person has of himself, and the behaviour he feels obliged to adopt in order to conform to that representation. By the same logic, one can understand the effect of all social titles of credit and credence – of *credentials* – which, like aristocratic titles and academic qualifications, increase in a durable way the value of their bearer by increasing the extent and the intensity of the belief in their value.

The act of institution is an act of social magic that can create

difference *ex nihilo*, or else (as is more often the case) by exploiting as it were pre-existing differences, like the biological differences between the sexes or, as in the case of the institution of an heir on the basis of primogeniture, the difference in age. In this sense, as with religion according to Durkheim, it is a 'well-founded delusion', a symbolic imposition but *cum fundamento in re*. The distinctions that are the most efficacious socially are those which give the appearance of being based on objective differences (I think, for example, of the notion of 'natural boundary' in geography). None the less, as is very clear in the case of social classes, we are always dealing with continua, with continuous distributions, due to the fact that different principles of differentiation produce different divisions that are never completely congruent. However, social magic always manages to produce discontinuity out of continuity. The paradigmatic example of this, and my starting point, is the competitive academic examination (*concours*): between the last person to pass and the first person to fail, the competitive examination creates differences of all or nothing that can last a lifetime. The former will graduate from an elite institution like the *Ecole Polytechnique* and enjoy all the associated advantages and perks, while the latter will become a nobody.

None of the criteria that one can use to justify technically the distinction (understood as legitimate difference) of the nobility fits perfectly. For example, the poorest nobleman-fencer remains noble (even if his image is subsequently tarnished, to a degree that varies according to national traditions and historical periods); conversely, the best commoner-fencer remains common (even if he is able to draw a form of 'nobility' from his excellence at a typically noble practice). And the same holds for every criterion defining the nobility at any given moment in time: bearing, elegance and so on. The institution of an identity, which can be a title of nobility or a stigma ('you're nothing but a . . .'), is the imposition of a name, i.e. of a social essence. To institute, to assign an essence, a competence, is to impose a right to be that is an obligation of being so (or to be so). It is to *signify* to someone what he is and how he should conduct himself as a consequence. In this case, the indicative is an imperative. The code of honour is only a developed form of the expression that says of a man: 'he's a man's man'. To institute, to give a social definition, an identity, is also to impose *boundaries*. Thus *noblesse oblige* might translate Plato's *ta heautou prattein*, acting in keeping with one's essence and nothing else, which, in the case of a nobleman, means acting in keeping with one's rank and refusing to

demean oneself. It behoves the noble to behave nobly, and the source of nobility is just as clear in a noble act as the source of noble actions is in nobility itself. I read the following this morning in the newspaper: 'It behoved Mr Kurt Furgler, the President of the Confederation, to express, on Tuesday evening, the condolences of the Federal Council to the Egyptian people after the death of president Anwar Sadat.' The authorized spokesperson is the one whom it behoves and on whom it is incumbent to speak on behalf of the collectivity. It is both his privilege and his duty, his proper function, in a word, his competence (in the legal sense of the term). Social essence is the set of those social attributes and attributions produced by the act of institution as a solemn act of categorization which tends to produce what it designates.

The act of institution is thus an act of communication, but of a particular kind: it *signifies* to someone what his identity is, but in a way that both expresses it to him and imposes it on him by expressing it in front of everyone (*kategorein*, meaning originally, to accuse publicly) and thus informing him in an authoritative manner of what he is and what he must be. This is clearly evident in the insult, a kind of curse (*sacer* also signifies cursed) which attempts to imprison its victim in an accusation which also depicts his destiny. But this is even truer of an investiture or an act of naming, a specifically social judgement of attribution which assigns to the person involved everything that is inscribed in a social definition. It is through the effect of statutory assignation (*noblesse oblige*) that the ritual of institution produces its most 'real' effects: the person instituted feels obliged to comply with his definition, with the status of his function. The designated heir (according to a more or less arbitrary criterion) is recognized and treated as such by the whole group, beginning with his family, and this different and distinctive treatment can only encourage him to fulfil his essence, to live in conformity with his social essence. The sociology of science has shown that the greatest scientific successes are achieved by researchers who come from the most prestigious academic institutions. This is largely explained by the high level of subjective aspirations determined by the collective (i.e. objective) recognition of these aspirations and their assignation to a class of agents (men, students in elite institutions, established writers, etc.) to whom these aspirations are not only accorded and recognized as rights or privileges (in contrast to the pretentious pretensions of pretenders), but assigned, imposed, like duties, through emphasis, encouragement and incessant calls to order. I think of the cartoon by Schulz which shows Snoopy perched on the

roof of his kennel saying: 'How can one be modest when one is the best?' One would have to say simply: when it is common knowledge – which is the effect of officialization – that one is the best, *aristos*.

'Become what you are': that is the principle behind the performative magic of all acts of institution. The essence assigned through naming and investiture is, literally, a *fatum* (this is also and especially true of *injunctions*, sometimes tacit and sometimes explicit, which members of the family group address continually to the young child, varying in intention and intensity according to social class and, within the latter, according to sex and rank within the kinship unit). All social destinies, positive or negative, by consecration or stigma, are equally *fatal* – by which I mean mortal – because they enclose those whom they characterize within the limits that are assigned to them and that they are made to recognize. The self-respecting heir will behave like an heir and, according to Marx's expression, will be inherited by the heritage: that is, invested in the things and appropriated by the things which he has himself appropriated. This, of course, is barring accidents. There are exceptions: the unworthy heir, the priest who abandons his calling, the nobleman who demeans himself and the bourgeois who turns common. Nevertheless, the limit, the sacred boundary remains clear. Owen Lattimore used to say that the Great Wall of China was meant not only to stop foreigners entering China but also to stop Chinese leaving it. That is also the function of all magical boundaries (whether the boundary between masculine and feminine, or between those selected and those rejected by the educational system): to stop those who are inside, on the right side of the line, from leaving, demeaning or down-grading themselves. Pareto used to say that elites are destined to 'waste away' when they cease to believe in themselves, when they lose their morale and their morality, and begin to cross the line in the wrong direction. This is also one of the functions of the act of institution: to discourage permanently any attempt to cross the line, to transgress, desert, or *quit*.

All aristocracies must expend considerable energy to convince the elect of the need to accept the sacrifices that are implied by privilege, or by the acquisition of durable dispositions which are a condition for the preservation of privilege. When the party of the dominant is the party of culture, i.e. almost invariably the party of asceticism, of tension and contention, the work of institution must reckon with the temptation presented by nature, or by the counter-culture. (I would like to add in parenthesis that, in speaking of the work of institution and by making the more or less painful inculcation of durable

dispositions an essential component of the social action of institution, I have merely tried to attribute to the word 'institution' its full significance. Having stressed, with Poincaré, the importance of the choice of words, it may be useful to suggest that one has only to assemble the different senses of *instituere* and of *institutio* to form an idea of an inaugural act of constitution, of foundation, indeed of the invention which, through education, leads to durable dispositions, habits and usages.) The universally adopted strategy for effectively denouncing the temptation to demean oneself is to naturalize difference, to turn it into a second nature through inculcation and incorporation in the form of the *habitus*. This explains the role given to ascetic practices, even physical suffering, in all the negative rites which are destined, as Durkheim said, to produce people who are out of the ordinary, in a word, distinguished. It also explains the role of the training which is universally imposed on the future members of the 'elite' (the learning of dead languages, the experience of prolonged isolation, etc.). All groups entrust the body, treated like a kind of memory, with their most precious possessions, and the use made of the suffering inflicted on the body by rites of initiation in all societies is understandable if one realizes, as numerous psychological experiments have shown, that people's adherence to an institution is directly proportional to the severity and painfulness of the rites of initiation. The work of inculcation through which the lasting imposition of the arbitrary limit is achieved can seek to naturalize the decisive breaks that constitute an arbitrary cultural limit – those expressed in fundamental oppositions like masculine/feminine, etc. – in the form of a *sense of limits*, which inclines some people to maintain their rank and distance and others to know their place and be happy with what they are, to be what they have to be, thus depriving them of the very sense of deprivation. It can also tend to inculcate durable dispositions like class tastes which, being the principle behind the 'choice' of outward signs expressing social position, like clothes, but also bodily hexis or language, make all social agents the carriers of distinctive signs, of which the signs of distinction are but a sub-class, capable of uniting and separating people as surely as explicit prohibitions and barriers – I am thinking here of class endogamy. More convincingly than the external signs which adorn the body (like decorations, uniforms, army stripes, insignia, etc.), the incorporated signs (such as manners, ways of speaking – accents –, ways of walking or standing – gait, posture, bearing –, table manners, etc. and taste) which underlie the production of all practices aimed, intentionally or not, both at signifying

and at signifying social position through the interplay of distinctive differences, are destined to function as so many calls to order, by virtue of which those who might have forgotten (or forgotten themselves) are reminded of the position assigned to them by the institution.

The power of the categorical judgement of attribution, realized through the institution, is so great that it is capable of resisting all practical refutations. Kantorowicz's analysis of the king's two bodies is a familiar one: the invested king outlives the biological king, who is mortal, prone to illness, imbecility or death. Similarly, if the student at an elite institution like the *Ecole Polytechnique* shows that he is useless at mathematics, it will be assumed that he is doing it on purpose or that he has invested his intellectual energies in other, more important things. But what best illustrates the autonomy of *ascription* in relation to *achievement* (one can, for once, refer to Talcott Parsons), of social being in relation to doing, is undoubtedly the possibility of resorting to the strategies of condescension which allow one to push the denial of social definition to the limit while still being perceived through it. Strategies of condescension are those symbolic transgressions of limits which provide, at one and the same time, the benefits that result from conformity to a social definition and the benefits that result from transgression. An example would be the aristocrat who patted his coachman on the arse and of whom they would have said, 'He's a straightforward chap,' meaning straightforward for an aristocrat, i.e. for a man who is essentially superior, and whose essence did not in principle entail that kind of behaviour.

It is, in fact, not that simple, and one would have to introduce a distinction: in one of his works Schopenhauer spoke of the 'pedantically comical', that is, of the laughter provoked by a character when he produces an action that is not inscribed within the limits of the concept which defines him – in the manner, remarked Schopenhauer, of a stage horse which begins to leave droppings on the stage. And he referred to professors, particularly German professors, like Unrat in *The Blue Angel*, who are conceived within limits that are so powerfully and narrowly defined that their transgression becomes very obvious. Unlike Professor Unrat who, carried away by passion, loses any sense of the ridiculous or – what amounts to the same thing – any sense of dignity, the condescending and consecrated person chooses deliberately to transgress the boundary; he enjoys the privilege of privileges, that which consists of taking liberties with his privilege. That is why, with regard to speech, the

bourgeois and especially the intellectual can permit themselves forms of hypo-correction, and of the relaxation of tension, that are forbidden to petits-bourgeois individuals, who are condemned to hyper-correction. In short, one of the privileges of consecration consists in the fact that, by conferring an undeniable and indelible essence on the individuals consecrated, it authorizes transgressions that would otherwise be forbidden. The person who is sure of his cultural identity can play with the rules of the cultural game; he can confess that he likes Tchaikovsky or Gershwin, and even have the 'nerve' to say that he likes Charles Aznavour or 'B' movies.

Acts of social magic as diverse as marriage or circumcision, the attribution of titles or degrees, the conferring of knighthoods, the appointment to offices, posts or honours, the attribution of a quality label, or the corroboration by a signature or initials, are all acts which can only succeed if the institution – meaning to institute in an active way someone or something endowed with this or that status or property – is guaranteed by the whole group or by a recognized institution. Even when the act is accomplished by a sole agent duly empowered to accomplish it and to do so within the recognized forms (that is, according to the conventions regarded as appropriate concerning time, place, means, etc., the whole set of which constitutes correct, i.e. socially valid and therefore efficient ritual), it rests fundamentally on the belief of an entire group (which may be physically present), that is, on the socially fashioned dispositions to know and recognize the institutional conditions of a valid ritual. (And this implies that the symbolic efficacy of the ritual will vary – simultaneously or successively – according to the degree to which the people for whom the ritual is performed are more or less prepared, or more or less disposed, to receive it.)

This is what is forgotten by linguists who, following Austin, look in words themselves for the 'illocutionary force' which they sometimes possess as performative utterances. In contrast to the impostor who is not what he appears to be, who, in other words, usurps the name, title, rights and honours of another person, in contrast also to the mere 'stand-in', the trainee or substitute who plays the part of the teacher or headmaster without having the qualifications, the legitimate representative (e.g. the authorized spokesperson) is an object of guaranteed belief, certified as correct. He lives up in reality to his appearance, he really is what everyone believes him to be because his reality – whether priest, teacher or minister – is based not on his personal conviction or pretension (always liable to be rebuffed and snubbed: What's his game? Who does he think he is? etc.) but rather

on the collective belief, guaranteed by the institution and made concrete through qualifications and symbols like stripes, uniforms and other attributes. The marks of respect, such as those which consist in addressing people by their titles (Mr President, Your Excellency, etc.), are so many repetitions of the inaugural act of institution carried out by a universally recognized authority and therefore based on the *consensus omnium*. They are valid as oaths of allegiance, proofs of recognition regarding the particular person to whom they are addressed, but above all regarding the institution which instituted him (that is why the respect for forms and the forms of respect that define politeness are so profoundly political). The belief of everyone, which pre-exists ritual, is the condition for the effectiveness of ritual. One only preaches to the converted. And the miracle of symbolic efficacy disappears if one sees that the magic of words merely releases the 'springs' – the dispositions – which are wound up beforehand.

I would like to conclude by posing a final question which, I fear, may seem somewhat metaphysical: could rites of institution, whichever they may be, exercise their power (I think of the most obvious example, what Napoleon used to call 'baubles', i.e. decorations and other distinctions) if they were not capable of giving at least the appearance of a meaning, a purpose, to those beings without a purpose who constitute humanity, of giving them the feeling of having a role or, quite simply, some importance, and thus tearing them from the clutches of insignificance? The veritable miracle produced by acts of institution lies undoubtedly in the fact that they manage to make consecrated individuals believe that their existence is justified, that their existence serves some purpose. But, through a kind of curse, because of the essentially diacritical, differential and distinctive nature of symbolic power, the rise of the distinguished class to Being has, as an inevitable counterpart, the slide of the complementary class into Nothingness or the lowest Being.

5

Description and Prescription

The Conditions of Possibility and the Limits of Political Effectiveness

Specifically political action is possible because agents, who are part of the social world, have a (more or less adequate) knowledge of this world and because one can act on the social world by acting on their knowledge of this world. This action aims to produce and impose representations (mental, verbal, visual or theatrical) of the social world which may be capable of acting on this world by acting on agents' representation of it. Or, more precisely, it aims to make or unmake groups – and, by the same token, the collective actions they can undertake to transform the social world in accordance with their interests – by producing, reproducing or destroying the representations that make groups visible for themselves and for others.

As an object of knowledge for the agents who inhabit it, the economic and social world exerts a force upon them not in the form of a mechanical determination, but in the form of a knowledge effect. It is clear that, at least in the case of dominated individuals, this effect does not tend to favour political action. We know that the social order owes some measure of its permanence to the fact that it imposes schemes of classification which, being adjusted to objective classifications, produce a form of recognition of this order, the kind implied by the misrecognition of the arbitrariness of its foundations: the correspondence between objective divisions and classificatory schemes, between objective structures and mental structures, underlies a kind of original adherence to the established order. Politics begins, strictly speaking, with the denunciation of this tacit contract of adherence to the established order which defines the original doxa; in other words, political subversion presupposes cognitive

subversion, a conversion of the vision of the world.

But the heretical break with the established order, and with the dispositions and representations engendered by it among the agents moulded according to its structures, itself presupposes a conjuncture of critical discourse and an objective crisis, capable of disrupting the close correspondence between the incorporated structures and the objective structures which produce them, and of instituting a kind of practical *épochè*, a suspension of the initial adherence to the established order.

Heretical subversion exploits the possibility of changing the social world by changing the representation of this world which contributes to its reality or, more precisely, by counterposing a *paradoxical pre-vision*, a utopia, a project or programme, to the ordinary vision which apprehends the social world as a natural world: the *performative* utterance, the political pre-vision, is in itself a pre-diction which aims to bring about what it utters. It contributes practically to the reality of what it announces by the fact of uttering it, of pre-dicting it and making it pre-dicted, of making it conceivable and above all credible and thus creating the collective representation and will which contribute to its production. Every theory, as the word itself suggests, is a programme of perception, but this is all the more true of theories about the social world. And there are, no doubt, relatively few cases in which the structuring power of words, their capacity to prescribe while seeming to describe and to denounce while seeming to enunciate, is so clear. Many 'intellectual debates' are less unrealistic than they seem if one is aware of the degree to which one can modify social reality by modifying the agents' representation of it. One can see the extent to which the social reality of something like alcoholism (and one could say the same of abortion, drug abuse or euthanasia) changes according to whether it is perceived and thought of as a hereditary weakness, a moral failure, a cultural tradition or a way of compensating for something. A word like *paternalism* wreaks havoc by throwing suspicion on everything which, by a permanent denial of self-interest, transforms the relation of domination into an enchanted relation. Like hierarchical relations organized according to the model of enchanted relations, of which the domestic group is the site *par excellence*, all forms of symbolic capital – prestige, charisma, charm – and the relations of exchange through which this capital accumulates – the exchange of services, gifts, attention, care, affection – are particularly vulnerable to the destructive effect of words which expose and disenchant. But the constitutive power of (religious or political)

language, and of the schemes of perception and thought which it procures, is never clearer than in situations of crisis: these *paradoxical* and *extra-ordinary* situations call for an extra-ordinary kind of discourse, capable of raising the practical principles of an ethos to the level of explicit principles which generate (quasi-) systematic responses, and of expressing all the unheard-of and ineffable characteristics of the situation created by the crisis.

Heretical discourse must not only help to sever the adherence to the world of common sense by publicly proclaiming a break with the ordinary order, it must also produce a new common sense and integrate within it the previously tacit or repressed practices and experiences of an entire group, investing them with the legitimacy conferred by public expression and collective recognition. Indeed, since every language that makes itself heard by an entire group is an authorized language, invested with the authority of this group, it authorizes what it designates at the same time as it expresses it, drawing its legitimacy from the group over which it exercises its authority and which it helps to produce as such by offering it a unitary expression of its experiences. The efficacy of heretical discourse does not reside in the magic of a force immanent to language, such as Austin's 'illocutionary force', or in the person of its author, such as Weber's 'charisma' (two screen-like concepts which prevent one from examining the reasons for the effects which they merely designate), but rather in the dialectic between the authorizing and authorized language and the dispositions of the group which authorizes it and authorizes itself to use it. This dialectical process is accomplished, in the case of each of the agents concerned and, most of all, in the case of the person producing the heretical discourse, in and through the *labour of enunciation* which is necessary in order to externalize the inwardness, to name the unnamed and to give the beginnings of objectification to pre-verbal and pre-reflexive dispositions and ineffable and unobservable experiences, through words which by their nature make them common and communicable, therefore meaningful and socially sanctioned. It may also be accomplished in the labour of dramatization, particularly visible in exemplary prophecy, which alone is capable of destroying the self-evident truths of the doxa, and in the transgression which is indispensable in order to *name the unnameable*, to break the censorships, institutionalized or internalized, which prohibit the return of the repressed; and first of all in the heresiarch himself.

But it is in the constitution of groups that the effectiveness of representations is most apparent, and particularly in the words,

slogans and theories which help to create the social order by imposing principles of di-vision and, more generally, the symbolic power of the whole political theatre which actualizes and officializes visions of the world and political divisions. The political labour of representation (not only in words or theories but also in demonstrations, ceremonies or any other form of symbolization of divisions or oppositions) gives the objectivity of public discourse and exemplary practice to a way of seeing or of experiencing the social world that was previously relegated to the state of a practical disposition of a tacit and often confused experience (unease, rebelliousness, etc.). It thus enables agents to discover within themselves common properties that lie beyond the diversity of particular situations which isolate, divide and demobilize, and to construct their social identity on the basis of characteristics or experiences that seemed totally dissimilar so long as the principle of pertinence by virtue of which they could be constituted as indices of membership of the same class was lacking.

The transition from the state of being a practical group to the state of being an instituted group (class, nation, etc.) presupposes the construction of the principle of classification capable of producing the set of distinctive properties which characterize the set of members in this group, and capable also of annulling the set of non-pertinent properties which part or all of its members possess in other contexts (e.g. properties of nationality, age or sex), and which might serve as a basis for other constructions. The struggle lies therefore at the very root of the construction of the class (social, ethnic, sexual, etc.): every group is the site of a struggle to impose a legitimate principle of group construction, and every distribution of properties, whether it concerns sex or age, education or wealth, may serve as a basis for specifically political divisions or struggles. The construction of dominated groups on the basis of such and such specific difference is inseparable from the deconstruction of groups established on the basis of generic properties or qualities (men, the old, the French, Parisians, citizens, patriots, etc.) which, in another state of symbolic relations of power, defined the social identity, and sometimes even the legal identity, of the agents concerned. Indeed, any attempt to institute a new division must reckon with the resistance of those who, occupying a dominant position in the space thus divided, have an interest in perpetuating a doxic relation to the social world which leads to the acceptance of established divisions as natural or to their symbolic denial through the affirmation of a higher unity (national, familial, etc.).¹ In other words, dominant individuals favour the

consensus, a fundamental agreement concerning the meaning or sense of the social world (thus converted into the doxic, natural world) which is based on agreement concerning the principles of di-vision.

The propulsive force of heretical criticism is met by the resistant force of orthodoxy. Dominated individuals make common cause with discourse and consciousness, indeed with science, since they cannot constitute themselves as a separate group, mobilize themselves or mobilize their potential power unless they question the categories of perception of the social order which, being the product of that order, inclined them to recognize that order and thus submit to it.

Dominated individuals are less likely to bring about a symbolic revolution – which is the condition for the reappropriation of the social identity of which their acceptance of dominant taxonomies has deprived them (even subjectively) – when the subversive force and critical competence accumulated in the course of previous struggles is relatively slight, and consequently when the consciousness of the positive or, more likely, negative properties which define them is relatively weak. Thus dispossessed of the economic and cultural conditions necessary for their awareness of the fact that they are dispossessed and enclosed within the limits of the knowledge authorized by their instruments of knowledge, the utterances and the actions that sub-proletarians and proletarianized peasants produce, in order to subvert the social order of which they are the victims, are organized according to the principles of logical division which are at the very root of this order (cf. wars of religion).

In contrast to this, dominant individuals, in the absence of being able to restore the *silence of the doxa*, strive to produce, through a purely reactionary discourse, a substitute for everything that is threatened by the very existence of heretical discourse. Finding nothing for which to reproach the social world as it stands, they endeavour to impose universally, through a discourse permeated by the simplicity and transparency of common sense, the feeling of obviousness and necessity which this world imposes on them; having an interest in leaving things as they are, they attempt to undermine politics in a depoliticized political discourse, produced through a process of neutralization or, even better, of negation, which seeks to restore the doxa to its original state of innocence and which, being oriented towards the naturalization of the social order, always borrows the language of nature.

This politically unmarked political language is characterized by a rhetoric of impartiality, marked by the effects of symmetry, balance, the golden mean, and sustained by an ethos of propriety and decency, exemplified by the avoidance of the most violent polemical forms, by discretion, an avowed respect for adversaries, in short, everything which expresses the negation of political struggle as struggle. This strategy of (ethical) neutrality is naturally accomplished in the rhetoric of scientificity.

This nostalgic yearning for the protodoxa is expressed with utter naïvety in the admiration that all conservatisms display for 'decent people' (most often personified by the peasant), whose essential property is designated clearly by the euphemisms ('simple folk', 'working people') which feature in orthodox discourse: their submission to the established order. In fact, the struggle between orthodoxy and heterodoxy that occurs in the political field conceals the opposition between the set of political propositions taken as a whole (whether orthodox or heterodox), that is, the sphere of what is politically utterable in the political field, on the one hand, and, on the other, everything that remains beyond discussion (in the field), that is, beyond the reach of discourse and which, relegated to the state of doxa, is accepted tacitly without discussion or examination by the very people who confront one another at the level of declared political choices.

The struggle in which knowledge of the social world is at stake would be pointless if each agent could find, within himself, the source of an infallible knowledge of the truth of his condition and his position in the social space, and it would be equally pointless if the same agents could not recognize themselves in different discourses and classifications (according to class, ethnicity, religion, sex, etc.), or in opposing evaluations of the products resulting from the same principles of classification. But the effects of this struggle would be totally unpredictable if there were no limit to allodoxia, to errors in perception and above all in expression, and if the propensity to recognize oneself in the different discourses and classifications offered were equally probable among all agents, whatever their position in the social space (and hence their dispositions), and whatever the structure of that space, the form of the distributions and the nature of the divisions according to which it is actually organized.

The pre-vision or theory effect (understood as the effect of imposition of the principles of di-vision which occurs whenever an attempt is made to make something explicit) operates in the margin

of uncertainty resulting from the discontinuity between the silent and self-evident truths of the ethos and the public expressions of the logos: thanks to the allodoxia made possible by the distance between the order of practice and the order of discourse, the same dispositions may be recognized in very different, sometimes opposing stances. This means that science is destined to exert a theory effect, but one which takes a very particular form: by expressing in a coherent and empirically valid discourse what was previously ignored, i.e. what was (according to the case in question) implicit or repressed, it transforms the representation of the social world as well as simultaneously transforming the social world itself, at least to the extent that it renders possible practices that conform to this transformed representation. Thus, if it is true that one can trace (virtually as far back in history as one wishes) the first manifestations of class struggle, and even the first more or less elaborated expressions of a 'theory' of class struggle (by speaking of 'precursors'), the fact remains that it is only after Marx, and indeed only after the creation of parties capable of imposing (on a large scale) a vision of the social world organized according to the theory of class struggle, that one could refer, strictly speaking, to classes and class struggle. Those who, in the name of Marxism, search for classes and class struggle in pre-capitalist (and pre-Marxist) societies are committing a theoretic error which is altogether typical of the combination of scientistic realism and economism which always inclined the Marxist tradition to look for classes in the very reality of the social world, often reduced to its economic dimension:² paradoxically, Marxist theory, which has exercised a theory effect unrivalled in history, devotes no space to the theory effect in its theory of history and of class.

Reality and will: class (or the class struggle) is reality to the extent that it is will and will to the extent that it is reality. Political practices and political representations (and in particular the representations of the division into classes), of the kind that can be observed and measured at a given moment in time in a society which has had a long exposure to the theory of class struggle, are partly the product of the theory effect – it being understood that this effect has owed a measure of its symbolic effectiveness to the fact that the theory of class struggle was objectively rooted in objective and incorporated properties, and as a consequence encountered the complicity of political dispositions. The categories according to which a group envisages itself, and according to which it represents itself and its specific reality, contribute to the reality of this group. This implies that the whole history of the working-class movement and of the

theories through which it has constructed social reality is present in the reality of this movement considered at a particular moment in time. It is in the struggles which shape the history of the social world that the categories of perception of the social world, and the groups produced according to these categories, are simultaneously constructed.³

Even the most strictly constative scientific description is always open to the possibility of functioning in a prescriptive way, capable of contributing to its own verification by exercising a theory effect through which it helps to bring about that which it declares. Like the phrase, 'the meeting is open', the thesis, 'there are two classes', may be understood as a constative utterance or a performative utterance. This is what creates the intrinsic indeterminacy of all political theses which, like the affirmation or negation of the existence of classes, regions or nations, take a clear stand on the reality of different representations of reality, or on their ability to make reality. The science which may be tempted to cut through these debates by providing an objective measure of the degree of realism of the respective positions must, if it is to proceed in a logical way, describe the space in which these struggles take place and where what is at stake, among other things, is the representation of the forces engaged in the struggle and their chances of success – and it must do so without ignoring the fact that any 'objective' evaluation of those aspects of reality which are at stake in the struggles in reality is likely to exert effects that are entirely real. How can one fail to see that a prediction may have a role not only in its author's intentions, but also in the reality of its social realization, either as a *self-fulfilling prophecy*, a performative representation capable of exerting a specifically political effect of consecrating the established order (and all the more so the more recognized it is), or as an *exorcism*, capable of eliciting the actions likely to refute it? As Gunnar Myrdal has clearly demonstrated, the key words in the vocabulary of economics, not only terms like 'principle', 'equilibrium', 'productivity', 'adjustment', 'function', etc., but also more central and unavoidable concepts like 'utility', 'value', 'real' or 'subjective' costs, etc., not to mention notions like 'economic', 'natural', 'equitable' (to which one should add 'rational'), are always simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive.⁴

The most neutral science exerts effects which are anything but neutral. Thus, simply by establishing and publishing the value assumed by the probability function of an event, i.e., as Popper suggests, the force of the *propensity* of this event to occur, an

objective property inherent in the nature of things, one may help to reinforce this event's 'claim to exist', as Leibniz used to say, by determining agents to prepare for it and to submit to it, or, conversely, by inciting them to mobilize in an effort to prevent it by using their knowledge of its probability in order to make its occurrence more difficult, if not impossible. Equally, it is not enough to replace the academic opposition between two ways of conceiving social differentiation, as a set of hierarchical strata or as a set of antagonistic strata, with the question – which is of capital importance for any revolutionary strategy – of whether, at the moment in question, the dominated classes constitute an antagonistic power capable of defining its own objectives, in short, a mobilized class, or, on the contrary, a stratum situated at the lowest point in a hierarchized space and defined by its distance from the dominant values; or, in other words, whether the struggle between the classes is a revolutionary struggle, aimed at overturning the established order, or a competitive struggle, a kind of race in which the dominated endeavour to appropriate the properties of the dominant. Nothing would be more open to refutation by reality, and therefore less scientific, than an answer to this question which, considering exclusively the practices and dispositions of the agents at the moment in question, failed to take into account the existence or non-existence of agents or organizations capable of working to confirm or invalidate one vision or the other, on the basis of more or less realistic pre-visions or predictions of the objective prospects for one possibility or the other, predictions and prospects that are themselves liable to be affected by scientific knowledge of reality.

All the indications are that the *theory effect*, which may be exerted, in reality itself, by agents and organizations capable of imposing a principle of division or, if you like, of producing or reinforcing symbolically the systematic propensity to favour certain aspects of reality and ignore others, is all the more powerful and above all durable when the processes of objectification and of rendering things explicit are rooted in reality, and hence the divisions in thought correspond more precisely to real divisions. In other words, the potential force which is mobilized by symbolic constitution is all the more important when the *classificatory properties* through which a group is explicitly characterized, and in which it *recognizes* itself, encompass more completely the properties with which the agents constitutive of the group are objectively endowed (and which define their position in the distribution of the instruments of appropriation of the accumulated social product).

The science of the social mechanisms which, like the mechanisms of cultural heredity linked to the functioning of the educational system, or the mechanisms of symbolic domination linked to the unification of the market in economic and cultural goods, tend to ensure the reproduction of the established order can be put to the service of an opportunistic, *laissez-faire* approach committed to *rationalizing* (in both senses) the way these mechanisms function. But this science may just as easily serve as a foundation for a politics oriented towards completely different ends which, breaking just as much with the voluntarism of ignorance or despair as with the *laissez-faire* approach, would arm itself with the knowledge of these mechanisms in order to try and neutralize them; and which would find, in the knowledge of the probable, not an incitement to fatalistic resignation or irresponsible utopianism, but the foundation for a rejection of the probable based on the scientific mastery of the laws of production governing the eventuality rejected.

6

Censorship and the Imposition of Form

Louche [*skewed*]. This word is used, in grammatical contexts, to indicate expressions which seem at first to introduce one meaning but which go on to determine an entirely different one. It is used in particular of phrases whose construction is equivocal to the point of disturbing their clarity of expression. What renders a phrase skewed arises therefore in the specific disposition of the words which compose it, when they seem at first glance to create a certain relation, although in fact they enjoy a different one: just as skew-eyed people seem to look in one direction, while they are actually looking somewhere else.

M. Beauzée, *Encyclopédie méthodique*,
grammaire et littérature, vol. 2

The specialized languages that schools of specialists produce and reproduce through the systematic alteration of the common language are, as with all discourses, the product of a *compromise* between an *expressive interest* and a *censorship* constituted by the very structure of the field in which the discourse is produced and circulates. This 'compromise formation', in the Freudian sense, is more or less 'successful' depending on the *specific competence* of the producer, and is the product of *strategies of euphemization* that consist in imposing form as well as observing formalities. These strategies tend to guarantee the satisfaction of the expressive interest, biological drive or political interest (in the broad sense of the term), within the limits of the *structure of opportunities for material or symbolic profit* which the different forms of discourse can procure for different