

ontology, nor with the formulation of a general philosophy. They are concerned with such topics as politics, aesthetics, literature, anthropology, linguistics, and are often very specific in content. They often discuss a particular political event or situation, a particular artist or the theories of a specific anthropologist and many are journalistic in form. However, for all their concreteness, these writings - even newspaper articles - cannot be fully appreciated without an understanding of the philosophy implicitly contained in them. For whether writing about the Algerian war or the French Communist Party, Cézanne's painting or Lévi-Strauss, Merleau-Ponty's approach remains a function of his own philosophical perspective.

Thus, for example, his discussion of Cézanne's painting in 'Cézanne's doubt'<sup>23</sup> cannot be fully understood unless we realise the implicit parallel which Merleau-Ponty draws between what he believes Cézanne is doing and what he sees himself doing: Cézanne is concerned to overcome the dichotomy of art and nature; he attempts to paint the world and his feelings about it as they are, avoiding either a total subjectivism, which could make his vision and feeling non-communicable, or an 'objective' approach, which would make of him the dispassionate observer of a thing-like nature - analogous to the philosopher who surveys the world as if he is not part of it. Cézanne's use of perspective does not conform to its 'laws'. We know that 'objectively', according to geometric perspective, objects diminish in size for us as we get further away from them. But 'lived perspective' is not like that: we do not perceive by geometry, but on the basis of our own situation which is not purely spatial, but is a function of our total existence. The 'deformations' of perspective, for which Cézanne is known, capture the non-geometric manner in which we actually see, in which size and spatial relations vary according to what concerns us about a scene.

To give another example, this time drawn from

politics: we have to grasp Merleau-Ponty's notions of freedom and history, as developed in the *Phenomenology*, in order to understand his criticisms of the Soviet Union and of the French Communist Party. These criticisms are most fully developed in a book entitled *The Adventures of the Dialectic*,<sup>24</sup> written in 1955. In this work, Merleau-Ponty's central argument against the Communism of the time is that it has destroyed the dialectic of individual and history - and hence the possibility of a humanistic society and individual freedom - by denying the subjectivity of men in the name of the inevitable laws of historical development. For Merleau-Ponty, as we have seen, men make history as concrete, experiencing individuals. If we forget this and suppress the individual in the name of the general - i.e. the inevitable march of the proletariat to communism - then we destroy the relationship of the 'for-itself' and the 'in-itself'; we destroy the dialectical relationship in which the free and open human project consists.

Merleau-Ponty's breadth of interests and his competence in fields as apparently distant from each other as art and politics, physiology, linguistics and history of philosophy is something rarely found among British philosophers. It is a breadth of interest, however, wholly consistent with his conception of philosophy. To philosophise is, in his view, to 'return to things themselves'. Philosophy cannot be an endless scrutiny of its own propositions. If it were, it would become a solipsistic activity, divorced from the world around it and doomed to unreality. To philosophise is to think about something and the concrete world around the philosopher must be his field of study. Philosophy is an activity turned outwards towards the world; the philosopher a person who examines in wonderment the complexity and coherence of the world ... it is, among other qualities, his sense of wonderment and his ability to communicate it which makes Merleau-Ponty a philosopher worth reading.

# Film and Popular Memory

## An Interview with Michel Foucault

The following interview originally appeared in *Cahiers du Cinéma* (251-2), July-August 1974. It has been translated by Martin Jordin. The discussion is introduced by PB and ST of *Cahiers*

Lacombe Lucien, *Night Porter*, *The Chinese in Paris*, *The Infernal Trio*, etc, films whose avowed aim is to rewrite history, are not isolated occurrences. They are themselves part of history, a history in the making; they have (as we are sometimes reproached for saying) a context. In France, this context is the coming to power of a new bourgeoisie, a fraction of the bourgeoisie with its own ideology (Giscard, president of all the French; a more-just-and-humane society, etc), with its own conception of France and of history. What is called 'post-Gaullism' is also an opportunity for the bourgeoisie to discard a particular image of itself - heroic and nationalist, but also anti-Pétainist and anti-fascist - which de Gaulle and Gaullism embodied, if not, strictly speaking, Pompidou. Chaban's electoral failure signed the death warrant of this pompous and rather grotesque heroic image

(cf. Malraux) of France's recent history. A different version is beginning to be written and screened: that France was not so anti-fascist as all that, that the French people didn't give a damn about Nazism, that the anti-fascism and resistance were never anything more than precisely this farcical image of Gaullist 'grandeur' which is currently being shown up as a fraud.

What is emerging is an ideology of cynicism: the ideology of the technocratic multinationals whose representative Giscard is. They feel the French people are ripe for such cynicism (a cynicism of the ruling class; the disenchantment of the exploited classes). A cynicism which appears on the screen in the so-called 'retro style': a snobbish fetishism of the old-fashioned (clothes and ornaments) and a ridiculing of history.

All the implications, all the effects of this fake archaeology of history had to be exposed. It was and is necessary to confront it with a gen-

(1) The current fad for the recent past, this harking-back to the thirties and forties, etc, has come to be known in France as 'la mode retro'. (trans.)

uine archaeology; that popular memory of struggles (and of all their forms) which has never really found expression - which has never had the power to do so - and which must be refreshed, faced with forces which are constantly striving to stifle it, and silence it for good.

No one was better placed than Michel Foucault to put these issues in perspective. His work has been a systematic attempt to restore to light what officialdom conceals, what lies forgotten in the black archives of the ruling class. We hope the following talk will suggest some directions for future study.

*Cahiers*: Let's start from the journalistic phenomenon of the 'retro style'. Basically, we can put the question like this: how is it that films like *Lacombe Lucien* or *Night Porter* can be made today? Why do they meet with such a fantastic response? We think the answer has to be sought on three levels:

- 1 The present political situation. Giscard d'Estaing has been elected. A new kind of approach to politics, to history, to the political apparatus is coming into existence, indicating very clearly - in such a way that everyone can see it - that Gaullism is dead. So it's necessary, insofar as Gaullism remains very closely linked to the period of the Resistance, to look at how this is translated in the films which are being made.
- 2 How is it possible for bourgeois ideology to attack the weak points of orthodox Marxism (rigid, economic, mechanical - the terms don't matter much) which has for so long provided the only framework for interpreting social phenomena?
- 3 Lastly, what does all this mean for political militants? Given that militants are consumers and sometimes also makers of films.

The thing is, that after Marcel Ophüls' film *The Sorrow and the Pity*, the floodgates have been open. Something hitherto completely repressed or forbidden has flooded out. Why?

*Foucault*: I think this comes from the fact that the history of the war, and what took place around it, has never really been written except in completely official accounts. These official histories are to all intents and purposes centred on Gaullism, which, on the one hand, was the only way of writing this history in terms of an honourable nationalism; and, on the other hand, the only way of introducing the Great Man, the man of the right, the man of the old 19th century nationalisms, as an historical figure.

It boils down to the fact that France was exonerated by de Gaulle, while the right (and we know how it behaved at the time of the war) was purified and sanctified by him.

What has never been described is what was going on in the very heart of the country from 1936, and even from the end of the 1914 war, up until Liberation.

*Cahiers*: So what has come about since *The Sorrow and the Pity* is some kind of return to truth in history. The point is whether it really is the truth.

*Foucault*: This has to be linked to the fact that the end of Gaullism means an end to this exoneration of the right by de Gaulle and by this brief period. The old right of Petain and Maurras, the old reactionary and collaborating right; which disguised itself behind de Gaulle as best it could, now feels entitled to write its own history. This old right which, since Tardieu, had been upstaged both historically and politically, is now coming back into the lime-light.

It openly supported Giscard. There's no longer

any need for it to rely on disguises, it can write its own history. And among the factors which account for the present acceptance of Giscard by half of France (a majority of 200,000), we mustn't forget to include films like those we're discussing - whatever their makers' intention. The fact that it's been possible to show everything has enabled the right to carry out a certain regrouping. In the same way that, conversely, it's really the healing of the breach between the national right and the collaborating right which has made these films possible. The two are inextricably linked.

*Cahiers*: This history, then, is being rewritten both in the cinema and on television. It seems this rewriting of history is being carried out by film-makers who are thought of as more or less left-wing. This is a problem we should look at more closely.

*Foucault*: I don't think it's that simple. What I've just said is very schematic. Let's go over it again.

There's a real fight going on. Over what? Over what we can roughly describe as *popular memory*. It's an actual fact that people - I'm talking about those who are barred from writing, from producing their books themselves, from drawing up their own historical accounts - that these people nevertheless do have a way of recording history, or remembering it, of keeping it fresh and of using it. This popular history was, to a certain extent, even more alive, more clearly formulated in the 19th century, where, for instance, there was a whole tradition of struggles which were transmitted orally, or in writing or songs, etc.

Now, a whole number of apparatuses have been set up ('popular literature', cheap books and the stuff that's taught in school as well) to obstruct the flow of this popular memory. And it could be said that this attempt has been pretty successful. The historical knowledge the working class has of itself is continually shrinking. If you think, for instance, of what workers at the end of the 19th century knew about their own history, what the trade union tradition (in the strict sense of the word) was like up until the 1914 war, it's really quite remarkable. This has been progressively diminished, but although it gets less, it doesn't vanish.

Today, cheap books aren't enough. There are much more effective means like television and the cinema. And I believe this was one way of re-programming popular memory, which existed but had no way of expressing itself. So people are shown not what they were, but what they must remember having been.

Since memory is actually a very important factor in struggle (really, in fact, struggles develop in a kind of conscious moving forward of history), if one controls people's memory, one controls their dynamism. And one also controls their experience, their knowledge of previous struggles. Just what the Resistance was, must no longer be known...

I think we have to understand these films in some such way as this. Their theme is, roughly, that there's been no popular struggle in the 20th century. This assertion has been successively formulated in two ways. The first, immediately after the war, simply said: 'What a century of heroes the 20th century is! There's been Churchill, de Gaulle, those chaps who did the parachuting, the fighter squadrons, etc!' It amounted to saying: 'There's been no popular struggle, because this is where the real struggle was'. But still no one said directly, 'There's been no popular struggle'.

The other, more recent formulation - sceptical

or cynical, as you prefer - consists in proceeding to the blunt assertion itself: 'Just look at what happened. Where have you seen any struggles? Where do you see people rising up, taking up rifles?'

Cahiers: There's been a sort of half-rumour going round since, perhaps, *The Sorrow and the Pity*, to the effect that the French people, as a whole, didn't resist the Germans, that they even accepted collaboration, that they took it all lying down. The question is what all this finally means. And it does indeed seem that what is at stake is popular struggle, or rather the memory of that struggle.



Foucault: Exactly. It's vital to have possession of this memory, to control it, administer it, tell it what it must contain. And when you see these films, you find out what you have to remember: 'Don't believe all you've been told. There aren't any heroes. And if there aren't any, it's because there's no struggle'. So a sort of ambiguity arises: to start with, 'there aren't any heroes' is a positive debunking of the whole war-hero mythology à la Burt Lancaster. It's a way of saying, 'No, that's not what war is about'. So your first impression is that history is beginning to reappear; that eventually they're going to tell us why we're not all obliged to identify with de Gaulle or the members of the Normandy-Niemen squadron, etc. But beneath the sentence 'There are no heroes' is hidden a different meaning, its true message: 'There was no struggle'. This is what the exercise is all about.

Cahiers: There's another phenomenon which explains why these films are so successful. The resentment of those who really did struggle is used against those who didn't. The people who formed the Resistance, watching *The Sorrow and the Pity* for example, see the passive citizens of a town in central France, and they recognize this passivity. And then the resentment takes over; they forget that they themselves did struggle.

Foucault: In my view, the politically important phenomenon is, rather than any one particular film, that of the series, the network established by all these films and the place - excuse the pun - they 'occupy'. In other words, the important thing is to ask: 'Is it possible at the moment to make a positive film about the struggles of the Resistance?' Well - clearly the answer's no. One gets the impression that people would laugh at a film

like this, or else, quite simply wouldn't go and see it.

Cahiers: Yes. It's the first thing to be brought up against us when we attack a film like Malle's. The response is always, 'What would you have done, then?' And you're right: it's impossible to answer. We should be beginning to develop - how shall I put it - a left-wing perspective on all this, but it's true that one doesn't exist ready-made.

Alternatively, this restates the problem of how one is to produce a positive hero, a new type of hero.

Foucault: The problem's not the hero, but the struggle. Can you make a film about a struggle without going through the traditional process of creating heroes? It's a new form of an old problem.

Cahiers: Let's go back to the 'retro style'. From its own standpoint, the bourgeoisie has largely concentrated its attention on one historical period (the forties) which throws into focus both its strong and weak points. For on the one hand, this is where it's most easily exposed (it's the bourgeoisie which created the breeding-ground of Nazism or of collaboration with it); while on the other hand, it's here that it's currently trying to justify its historical behaviour - in the most cynical ways. The difficulty is how to reveal what, for us, is the positive content of this same historical period - for us, that is, the generation of the struggles of 1968 or Lip. Is the period of the Resistance really a weak point to be attacked, the point where some different kinds of ideological hegemony could emerge? For it's a fact that the bourgeoisie is simultaneously defensive and offensive about its recent history: strategically defensive, but tactically offensive because it's found this strong point from which it can best sow confusion. But do we have to be restricted (which is to be on the defensive) to simply re-establishing the truth about history? Isn't it possible to find some weak point where we might attack the ideology? Is this point necessarily the Resistance? Why not 1789 or 1968?

Foucault: Thinking about these films and their common subject, I wonder whether something different couldn't be done. And when I say 'subject', I don't mean showing the struggles or showing they didn't exist. I mean that it's historically true that while the war was going on there was a kind of rejection of it among the French masses. Now where did this come from? From a whole series of episodes that no one talks about - the right doesn't, because it wants to hide them; and the left doesn't, because it's afraid of being associated with anything contrary to 'national honour'.

A good seven or eight million men went through the 1914-18 war. For four years they lived a horrifying existence, seeing millions upon millions of men die all around them. And what do they find themselves facing again in 1920? The right-wing in power, full-scale economic exploitation and finally an economic crisis and the unemployment of 1932. How could these people, who'd been packed into the trenches, still feel attracted by war in the two decades of 1920-30 and 1930-40? If the Germans still did, it's because defeat had re-awakened such a national feeling in them that the desire for revenge could overcome this sort of repulsion. But even so, people don't enjoy fighting these bourgeois wars, with middle-class officers and these kind of benefits resulting from them. I think this was a crucial experience for the working class. And when, in 1940, these blokes tossed their bikes into the ditch and said, 'I'm going home' - you can't simply say 'They're yellow!' and

you can't hide it either. You have to find a place for it in this sequence of events. This non-compliance with national instructions has to be fitted in. And what happened during the Resistance is the opposite of what we're shown. What happened was that the process of repoliticisation, remobilisation and a taste for fighting reappeared little by little, in the working class. It gradually reappeared after the rise of Nazism and the Spanish Civil War. Now what these films show is just the opposite process; namely, that after the great dream of 1939, which was shattered in 1940, people just gave up. This process did really take place, but as part of another, much more extended process which was going in the opposite direction: starting from a disgust with war, it ended up, in the middle of the occupation, as a conscious awareness of the need to struggle...

I think there was a positive political meaning to this noncompliance with the demands of the national armed struggles. The historical theme of Lacombe Lucien and his family takes on a new light if you look back to Ypres and Douaumont...

**Cahiers:** This raises the problem of popular memory; of a memory working at its own pace, a pace quite detached from any seizure of central power or from the outbreak of any war...

**Foucault:** This has always been the aim of the history taught in schools: to teach ordinary people that they got killed and that this was very heroic. Look at what's been made of Napoleon and the Napoleonic wars...

**Cahiers:** A number of films, including those of Malle and Cavani, leave off talking about history or the struggle over Nazism and fascism; usually talking instead, or at the same time, about sex. What's the nature of this discourse?

**Foucault:** But don't you make a sharp distinction between Lacombe Lucien and *Night Porter* on this? It seems to me that the erotic, passionate aspect of Lacombe Lucien has a quite easily identifiable function. It's basically a way of making the anti-hero acceptable, of saying he's not as anti as all that.

In fact, if all the power relations in his life are distorted, and if it's through him that they keep on running; on the other hand, just when you think he's distorting all the erotic relations, a true relationship suddenly appears and he loves the girl. On the one hand, there's the machinery of power which, starting with a flat tyre, carries Lacombe closer and closer to something crazy. On the other hand, there's the machinery of love, which seems hooked up to it, which seems distorted, but which, on the contrary, has just the opposite effect and in the end restores Lucien as the handsome naked youth living in the fields with a girl.

So there's a fairly elementary antithesis between power and love. While in *Night Porter* the question is - both generally and in the present situation - a very important one: love for power.

Power has an erotic charge. There's an historical problem involved here. How is it that Nazism - which was represented by shabby, pathetic, puritanical characters, laughably Victorian old maids, or at best, smutty individuals - how has it now managed to become, in France, in Germany, in the United States, in all pornographic literature throughout the world, the ultimate symbol of eroticism? Every shoddy erotic fantasy is now attributed to Nazism. Which raises a fundamentally serious problem: how do you love power? Nobody loves power any more. This kind of affective, erotic attachment, this desire one has for power, for the power that's exercised over you, doesn't

exist any more. The monarchy and its rituals were created to stimulate this sort of erotic relationship towards power. The massive Stalinist apparatus, and even that of Hitler, were constructed for the same purpose. But it's all collapsed in ruins and obviously you can't be in love with Brezhnev, Pompidou or Nixon. At a pinch you might love de Gaulle, Kennedy or Churchill. But what's going on at the moment? Aren't we witnessing the beginnings of a re-eroticisation of power, taken to a pathetic, ridiculous extreme by the porn-shops with Nazi insignia that you find in the United States, and (a much more acceptable but just as ridiculous version) in the behaviour of Giscard d'Estaing when he says, 'I'm going to march down the streets in a lounge-suit, shaking hands with ordinary people and kids on half-day holidays'? It's a fact that Giscard has built part of his campaign not only on his fine physical bearing but also on a certain eroticising of his character, his stylishness.

**Cahiers:** That's how he's portrayed himself on an electoral poster - the one where you see his daughter turned towards him.

**Foucault:** That's right. He's looking at France, but she's looking at him. It's the restoration to power of seduction.

**Cahiers:** Something that struck us during the electoral campaign, particularly at the time of the big televised debate between Mitterand and Giscard, was that they weren't at all on the same level. Mitterand appeared as the old type of political man, belonging to the old left, let's say. He was trying to sell ideas, which were themselves dated and a bit old-fashioned, and he did it with a lot of style. But Giscard was selling the idea of power, exactly like an advertiser sells cheese.

**Foucault:** Even quite recently, it was necessary to apologise for being in power. It was necessary for power to be self-effacing, for it not to show itself as power. To a certain extent, this is how the democratic republics have functioned, where the aim was to render power sufficiently invisible and insidious for it to be impossible to grasp, to grasp what it was doing or where it was.

**Cahiers:** Perhaps we have to talk about a certain powerlessness of traditional Marxist discourse to account for fascism. Let's say that Marxism has given an historical account of the phenomenon of Nazism in a deterministic, economic fashion, while completely leaving aside what the specific ideology of Nazism was. So it's scarcely surprising that someone like Malle, who's pretty familiar with what's going on the left, can benefit from this weakness, and rush into the breach.

**Foucault:** Marxism has given a definition of Nazism and fascism: 'an overt terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary fraction of the bourgeoisie'. It's a definition that leaves out an entire part of its content and a whole series of relationships. In particular, it leaves out the fact that Nazism and fascism were only possible insofar as there could exist within the masses a relatively large section which took on the responsibility for a number of state functions of repression, control, policing, etc. This, I believe, is a crucial characteristic of Nazism; that is, its deep penetration inside the masses and the fact that a part of the power was actually delegated to a specific fringe of the masses. This is where the word 'dictatorship' becomes true in general, and relatively false. When you think of the power an individual could possess under a Nazi regime as soon as he was simply S.S. or signed up in the

Party! You could actually kill your neighbour, steal his wife, his house! This is where *Lacombe Lucien* is interesting, because it's one side it shows up well. The fact is that contrary to what is usually understood by dictatorship - the power of a single person - you could say that in this kind of regime the most repulsive (but in a sense the most intoxicating) part of power was given to a considerable number of people. The S.S. was that which was given the power to kill, to rape...

*Cahiers*: This is where orthodox Marxism falls down. Because it's obliged to talk about desire.

*Foucault*: About desire and power...

*Cahiers*: It's also where films like *Lacombe Lucien* and *Night Porter* are relatively 'strong'. They can talk about desire and power in a way which seem coherent...

*Foucault*: It's interesting to see in *Night Porter* how under Nazism the power of a single person is taken over and operated by ordinary people. The kind of mock trial which is set up is quite fascinating. Because on the one hand, it has all the trappings of a psychotherapy group, while in fact having the power structure of a secret society. What they re-establish is basically an S.S. cell, endowed with a judicial power that's different from, and opposed to the central power. You have to bear in mind the way power was delegated, distributed within the very heart of the population; you have to bear in mind this vast transfer of power that Nazism carried out in a society like Germany. It's wrong to say that Nazism was the power of the great industrialists carried on under a different form. It wasn't simply the intensified, central power of the military - it was that, but only on one particular level.

*Cahiers*: This is an interesting side of the film, in fact. But what in our view seems very open to criticism is that it appears to say: 'If you're a typical S.S. man, you'll act like this. But if, in addition, you have a certain inclination for the job, it will offer you incredible erotic experiences'. So the film keeps up the seductive-ness.

*Foucault*: Yes, this is where it meets up with *Lacombe Lucien*. Because Nazism never gave people any material advantages, it never handed out anything but power. You still have to ask why it was, if this regime was nothing but a bloody dictatorship, that on May 3rd, 1945 there were still Germans who fought to the last drop of blood; whether these people didn't have some form of emotional attachment to power. Bearing in mind, of course, all the pressuring, the denunciations... In *Lacombe Lucien*, as in *Night Porter*, this excess of power they're given is converted back into love. It's very clear at the end of *Night Porter*, where a miniature concentration camp is built up around Max in his room, where he starves to death. So here love has converted power, surplus power, back into a total absence of power. In one sense, it's almost the same reconciliation as in *Lacombe Lucien* where love turns the excess of power in which he's been trapped, into a rustic poverty far removed from the Gestapo's shady hotel, and far removed, too, from the farm where the pigs were being butchered.

*Cahiers*: So we now have the beginnings of an explanation for the problem you were posing at the start of our discussion: why is Nazism, which was a repressive, puritanical system, nowadays universally associated with eroticism? There's a sort of shift of emphasis: the central problem of power,

which one doesn't want to confront head on, is dodged, or rather shoved completely into the question of sexuality. So that this eroticising is ultimately a process of evasion, or repression...

*Foucault*: The problem's really very difficult and it hasn't been studied perhaps enough, even by Reich. What leads to power being desirable, and to being actually desired? It's easy to see the processes by which this eroticising is transmitted, reinforced, etc. But for the eroticising to work, it's necessary that the attachment to power, the acceptance of power by those over whom it is exerted, is already erotic.

*Cahiers*: It's that much more difficult since the representation of power is rarely erotic. De Gaulle or Hitler are not particularly seductive.

*Foucault*: True - and I wonder if the Marxist analyses aren't victims to some extent of the abstractness of the notion of liberty. In a regime like the Nazi regime, it's a fact that there's no liberty. But not having liberty doesn't mean not having power...

There's a battle for and around history going on at this very moment which is extremely interesting. The intention is to reprogramme, to stifle what I've called the 'popular memory'; and also to propose and impose on people a framework in which to interpret the present. Up to 1968, popular struggles were part of folklore. For some people, they weren't even part of their immediate concept of reality. After 1968, every popular struggle, whether in South America or Africa, has found some echo, some sympathetic response. So it's no longer possible to keep up their separation, this geographical 'cordon sanitaire'. Popular struggles have become for our society, not part of the actual, but of the possible. So they have to be set at a distance. How? Not by providing a direct interpretation of them, which would be asking to be exposed. But by offering an historical interpretation of those popular struggles which have occurred in France in the past, in order to show that they never really happened! Before 1968, it was: 'It won't happen here because it's going on somewhere else'. Now it's: 'It won't happen here because it never has done! Take something like the Resistance even, this glorious past you've talked about so much, just look at it for a moment ... Nothing. It's empty, a hollow facade!' It's another way of saying, 'Don't worry about Chile, it's no different; the Chilean peasants couldn't care less. And France, too: the bulk of the population isn't interested in anything a few malcontents might do'.

*Cahiers*: When we react to all this - against it all - it's important that we don't limit ourselves to re-establishing the truth, to saying, about the Resistance, for example, 'No, I was there and it wasn't like that!' If you're going to wage any effective ideological struggle on the kind of ground dictated by these films, we believe you have to have a much broader, more extensive and positive frame of reference. For many people this consists in reappropriating the 'history of France', for instance. It was with this in mind that we undertook a close reading of *I, Pierre Rivière*; because we realised that, paradoxically enough, it was useful to us in understanding *Lacombe Lucien*, that their comparison was not unproductive. A significant difference between them, for example, is that *Pierre Rivière* is someone who writes, who commits a murder and who has a quite extraordinary memory. While Malle, on the other hand, treats his hero as a half-wit, as someone who goes through

everything - history, the war, collaboration - without accumulating any experience. This is where the theme of memory, of popular memory, can help to separate off someone like Pierre Rivière from the character created by Malle and Modiano. Pierre Rivière, having no way of making his voice heard, takes the floor and is obliged to kill before he wins the right to speak. While Malle's character proves, precisely by making nothing of what has happened to him, that there's nothing worth the trouble of remembering. It's a pity you haven't seen *The Courage of the People*. It's a Bolivian film made with the explicit aim of becoming evidence on a criminal record. The characters in this film - which has been shown throughout the world (but not in Bolivia, thanks to the regime) - are played by the very people who were part of the real drama it re-enacts (a miners' strike and its bloody repression). They themselves take charge of their picture, so that nobody shall forget.....

There are two things going on in the cinema at the moment. On the one hand there are historical documents, which have an important role. In *A Whole Life*, for example, they play a very big part. Or again, in the films of Marcel Ophüls, or of Harris and Sédouy, it's very moving to watch the reality of Duclos in action in 1936 or 1939. And on the other hand, there are fictional characters who, at a given moment in history, condense within themselves the greatest possible number of social relations, of links with history. This is why *Lacombe Lucien* is so successful. Lacombe is a Frenchman under the occupation, an ordinary bloke who has a concrete connexion with Nazism, with the countryside, with local power, etc. And we shouldn't ignore this way of personifying history, of incarnating it in a character or a collection of characters who embody, at a given moment, a privileged relation to power.

There are lots of figures in the history of the workers' movement that aren't known; there are plenty of heroes in the history of the working class, who've been completely driven out of its memory. And I think there's a real issue to be fought here. There's no need for Marxism to keep on making films about Lenin, we've got plenty already.

Foucault: What you say is important. It's a trait of many Marxists nowadays - ignorance of history. All these people who spend their time talking about the misinterpretation of history, are only capable of producing commentaries on texts. What did Marx say? Did Marx really say that? Look, what is Marxism but a different way of analysing history itself? In my opinion, the left in France has no real grasp of history. It used to have. At one time in the 19th century, Michelet might be said to have represented the left. There was Jaurès too, and after them there grew up a kind of tradition of left-wing, social democratic historians (Mathiez, etc). Nowadays it's dwindled to a trickle; whereas it could be a formidable wave, carrying along writers, film-makers. True, there has been Aragon and *Les Cloches de Bâle* - a very great historical novel. But there are relatively few things, compared to what it could be like in a society where, after all, one can say that the intellectuals are more or less impregnated with Marxism.

Cahiers: In this respect, the cinema offers something new: history captured 'Live'... How do people in America relate to history, seeing the Vietnam war on television every evening while they're eating?

Foucault: As soon as you start seeing pictures of

war every evening, war becomes totally acceptable. That's to say, thoroughly tedious, you'd really love to see something else. But when it becomes boring, you put up with it. You don't even watch it. So how is this particular reality on film to be reactivated as an existing, historically important reality?

Cahiers: Have you seen *The Camisards*?

Foucault: Yes, I liked it very much. Historically, it's impeccable. It's well made, intelligent and it makes a lot of things clear.

Cahiers: I think that's the direction we have to take in making films. To come back to the films we were talking about at the beginning - we must raise the question of the extreme-left's confusion in the face of certain aspects of *Lacombe Lucien* and *Night Porter*, particularly the sexual one; and how this confusion can be of benefit to the right...

Foucault: As for what you call the extreme-left, I find myself in considerable difficulty. I'm not at all sure that it still exists. Nonetheless, there really needs to be a thorough summing-up of what the extreme-left has done since 1968; both negatively and positively. It's true that this extreme-left has been the means of spreading a whole number of important ideas: on sexuality, women, homosexuality, psychiatry, housing, medicine. It's also been the means of spreading methods of action, where it continues to be of importance. The extreme-left has played as important a role in the forms of activity as in its themes. But there's also a negative summing-up to be made, concerning certain Stalinist and terrorist organisational practices. And a misunderstanding, too, of certain broad and deeply-rooted processes which recently resulted in 13 million people backing Mitterand, and which have always been disregarded, on the pretext that this was the politics of the politicians, that this was the business of the parties. A whole heap of things have been ignored; notably, that the desire to defeat the right has been a very important political factor within the masses for a number of months and even years. The extreme-left hasn't sensed this desire, thanks to a false definition of the masses, a wrong appreciation of what this will to win really is. Faced with the risks a co-opted victory would involve, it prefers not to take the risk of winning. Defeat, at least, can't be co-opted (*récupère*). Personally, I'm not so sure.

## RESISTANCE THROUGH RITUALS YOUTH subCULTURES

Demystifying youth culture, radical intervention, generational consciousness, method, significance of style, why no girls, doin' nothin', reggae / rastas / rudies, teds-mods, skins-hippies.

subscription:

1 year (2 issues) - individual	£1.80 (\$4.50 USA)
library	£2.80 (\$6.75 USA)
2 years (4 issues) - individual	£3.40 (\$8.00 USA)
library	£5.40 (\$13.00 USA)
individual copies	£1.00

CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY  
CULTURAL STUDIES  
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM  
BIRMINGHAM 15



**WPCS 7**  
summer 1975