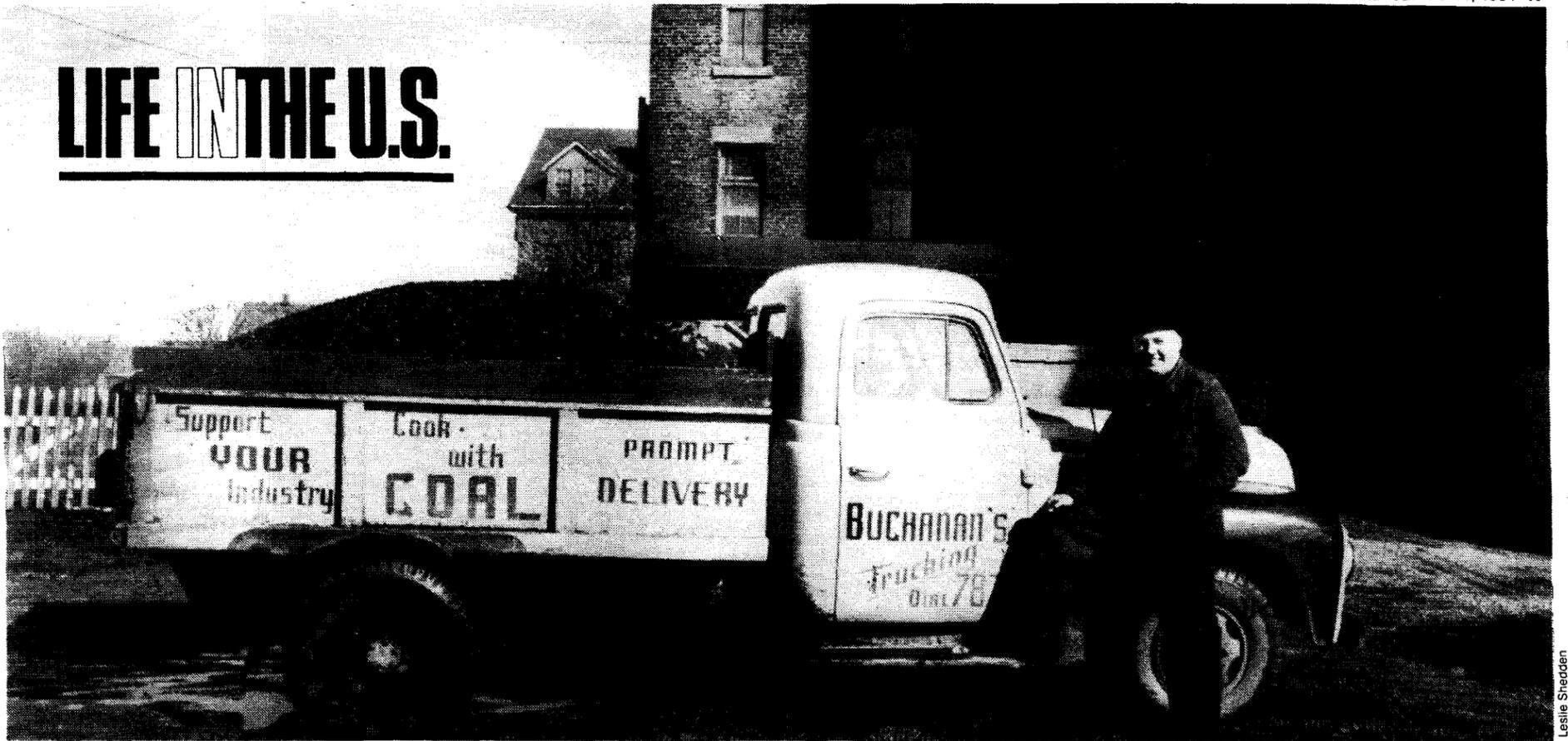


LIFE IN THE U.S.



By Anthony Schmitz

MINNEAPOLIS

Fifty years after the truckers' strike that rocked this city in 1934, evidence that it occurred is scant. The union's old headquarters is now a parking lot. The garage that held a union hospital, commissary and picket dispatching crew has been replaced by a city employment and training program office. If there is a plaque or a statue to commemorate the strike that made Minneapolis a union town, it is surely well hidden.

A couple of weeks ago the local unions organized a picnic to commemorate the two who died and the 65 others wounded during the struggle to organize the Teamsters. It was one of those days when levels of history collide with each other. Bernadette Devlin McAliskey spoke about Irish labor history while an organizer of the Minneapolis strike, Harry De Boer, embraced the middle-aged sons of Harry Ness. Fifty years ago their father died with 37 police slugs in his body and was followed to his grave by a crowd estimated to be anywhere from 20,000 to 100,000.

An aging history professor recounted the story of the strike, but on that sunstruck day, in a park near the river, his story sounded like one about a different place and another century.

The strike began with coal haulers. In his book, *Teamster Rebellion*, Farrell Dobbs describes the life he lived in the coal yards. He shoveled coal for 60 hours a week at 18. He was eminently replaceable, since the city's skid row was full of out-of-work lumberjacks and farm hands. Any hope of organizing was crushed by the Citizens Alliance, a group of local businessmen. They had smashed the 1916 transit strike and confined organized labor to conservative craft unions.

Dobbs' life was changed by Grant Dunne, a driver whose truck he helped fill with coal. The Dunne brothers—Ray, Miles and Grant—and a Swedish immigrant named Carl Skoglund built a following among workers in the city's 67 coal yards. Ray Dunne and Skoglund both had experience with the Wobblies. Dunne was a lumberjack at 14, a harvest hand and IWW member at 15, and a convicted vagrant on an Arkansas chain gang at 19. He ran to Minnesota after his escape

and found work in the coal yards. Skoglund was born on a feudal estate in Sweden, emigrating after organizing a union in a pulp mill. He moved to Minneapolis after injuring his foot in the lumbercamps. He, too, ended up in the coal yards.

The Dunnes and Skoglund started organizing in the winter of 1930-31, using the structure of Local 574, a moribund union with a broad charter. Their efforts accelerated after Ray Dunne was fired for speaking at Communist League functions. By Dobbs' analysis, coal workers like himself were ripe for a revolt. If there is hope of getting ahead, however slowly, he wrote later, nothing will happen. But if workers are losing ground and the future is uncertain, then "the tinder of discontent" piles up. Minneapolis was ready for any spark, he said.

Dunne and Skoglund convinced 574's president, Bill Brown, to confront coal yard employers with a demand to recognize the union and negotiate. When they refused to talk to Brown, 500 drivers and helpers struck on Feb. 7, 1934. A fuel strike during a Minnesota winter, if the strike is at all effective, cannot be a lengthy affair. The truckers' strike was brilliantly organized. Teams of cruising pickets harassed scab trucks, dumping the contents of any truck they caught. The strike was over three days after it started.

A city-wide strategy.

The Dunnes, Skoglund and Brown reached an obvious conclusion after the coal yard strike: by controlling the movements of goods they controlled the economic life of the city. They started a drive to expand the union, adding other drivers and inside workers to Local 574. In doing so they bucked the Teamster's central office in Indianapolis, which dictated that workers be organized by the commodities they handled. The strategy pushed the Teamsters into an industrial form of organization for the first time.

Union teams went, Dobbs wrote later, "to garages, docks, warehouses, market areas, everywhere in the trucking industry." Weeks of organizing were capped by a mid-April forum at a downtown theater. There a letter was read from the Farmer-Labor governor, Floyd Olson, who said bosses fight unions because they

LABOR HISTORY

Another time, another place: Minneapolis, '34

mean "the end of their reign of exploitation of the working man and woman." Organize, he advised.

At the same time, employers held strategy sessions and formed a group called the Minneapolis Employers of Drivers and Helpers that rejected the local's demands for shorter hours, more pay and a closed shop. The union voted to strike on May 15.

This time the union organized as though it were conducting a military campaign. A garage was rented on the south edge of downtown and outfitted with a kitchen, hospital and mechanics' shop. Motorcycle patrols scoured the city for strikebreakers, reporting movements of scab trucks. Dispatchers sent out cruising pickets to intercept them. Other workers posted on major roads outside the city stopped trucks without union clearance.

Six days after the strike began, the Citizens Army—a group of police and deputized businessmen—marched on the market in downtown Minneapolis' near north side. When they were met by an army of Teamsters, the two sides set upon each other with clubs. In the battle that followed, 30 police and a handful of pickets were hurt. The union paper declared a victory and maintained control of the market. In a skirmish the following day two members of the Citizens Army were killed, including the vice-president of the Citizens Alliance.

The governor imposed a truce by threatening to call out the National Guard, but bargaining between employers and the union went nowhere. Truck operations resumed when the federal government's Labor Board announced an agreement so ambiguous that it inevitably fell apart.

On July 17 the union went out again. Teamster negotiators accepted a deal that federal mediators proposed, but employers held out. Their recalcitrance led three days later to the one-sided

shoot-out in the market.

That day police were determined to move a loaded truck through the streets. When a picket truck cut ahead of it, police opened fire. They fired again when pickets ran to carry off the wounded, and again when more pickets rushed into the market. One policeman was injured, while 50 pickets and 17 bystanders were hurt. Harry Ness and John Belor died from their wounds.

After employers again refused a mediated settlement, Gov. Olson declared martial law. At his order guardsmen raided the union headquarters, arresting Ray and Miles Dunne and Bill Brown. A few days later he sent guardsmen to raid the Citizens Alliance headquarters as well. Next Olson put a lid on military permits for truck movement, squeezing employers to agree to a

Farmer-Labor Gov. Floyd Olson said bosses fight unions because they mean "the end of their reign of exploitation of the working man and woman." Organize, he advised.

deal. When employers sought an injunction against martial law, Olson went to President Franklin Roosevelt, who was visiting the Mayo Clinic in Rochester. After that meeting, the federal mediator pressured bankers who had allegedly extended the strike by threatening businessmen who caved in with ruined credit. A settlement was announced on August 21.

Sharing power.

Not long ago Hyman Berman, a University of Minnesota professor with a specialty in labor issues, considered the effects of the Teamsters' strike. It destroyed the Citizens Alliance, he said, and cleared the way for collective bargaining in Minneapolis. By his estimate, the battle was not over money so much as power. The question decided in the strike was whether business leaders would keep unilateral power in the community or share it with labor.

To hear union officials here tell it, the fight is far from over. Plant shutdowns are their issue now. Ask them about plants where their members have been thrown out of work and they start a dreary litany. Whirlpool, Iowa Pork, Crown Iron, Northrup-King—the list goes on and on. They know how to run a strike, but they are not sure how to fight with a boss who would rather run.

Harry DeBoer, the picket leader who took a police slug in his leg in 1934, still lives on the city's north side, and he's still full of advice for the common man. Workers, he told *City Pages'* Craig Cox recently, "got to get rid of this leadership. The only way we're going to accomplish this, set this thing on the right track, is workers have got to join a union, got to have a democratic union, and they have to support a labor party controlled by the unions. That's the only way." ■ Anthony Schmitz is editor of the *Minneapolis City Pages*.

By Edward W. Said

According to the medical bulletin published in *Le Monde* (June 27), Michel Foucault died at 1:15 p.m. on June 25 in Paris' Hopital de la Salpetriere of neurological complications following acute septicemia (blood poisoning). Framing the announcement was an extraordinary array of tributes grouped under a page one, two-column headline "La mort du philosophe Michel Foucault."

The lead article was by Pierre Bourdieu, Foucault's distinguished colleague at the College de France. It is difficult to imagine so concentrated and estimable an attention paid to any other contemporary philosopher's death. Despite the difficulty and intransigence of his philosophic and historical work, Foucault even drew a memorial tribute from Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy. All this indicates the startling yet sustained force and influence of his thought.

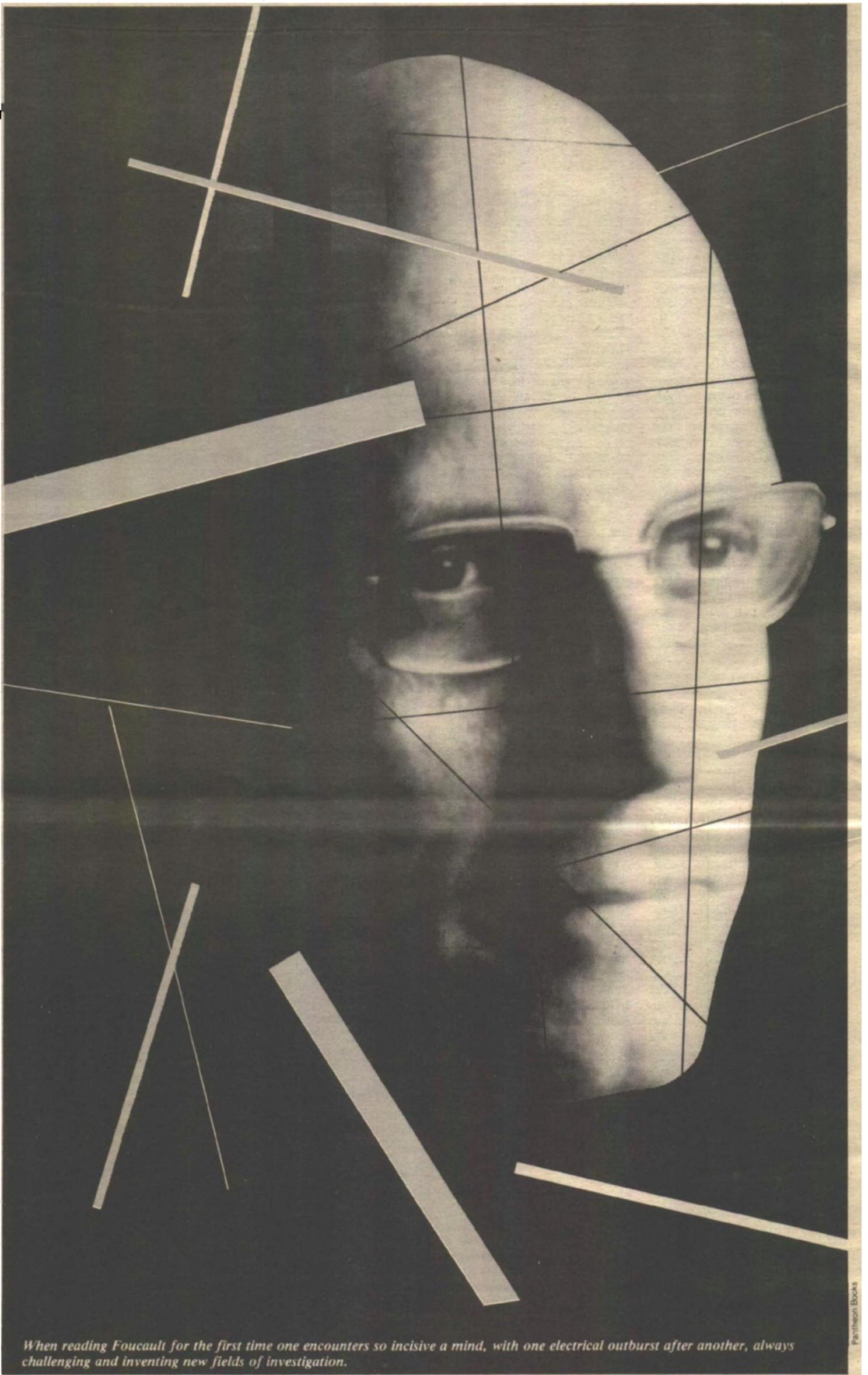
Foucault is best understood as the greatest of Nietzsche's modern disciples and as a central figure in the flowering of oppositional intellectual life in 20th-century Western thought. Along with Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, George Canguihelm, Jean-Pierre Vernant, Lucien Goldmann, Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida, Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze and Bourdieu, Foucault emerged out of a strange revolutionary concatenation of Parisian aesthetic and political currents, which for about 30 years produced a concentration of brilliant work unlikely to be equalled for generations.

In what amounted to a genuine upheaval in modern thought, the barriers between disciplines and languages were broken. The fields separated by these barriers were reshaped from beneath the surface to their most complex superstructures.

Theory, suggestive imagery and vast formal systems—to say nothing of idioms that seemed barbarous at first but soon became fashionable—poured out from these figures, whose ancestry was again a contradictory amalgam of the academic and the insurrectionary. All seemed to have been deeply affected by Marx and (individually to a greater or lesser degree) by Freud. Most were rhetorical tacticians, as well as being obsessed by language as a way of seeing, if not actually constituting, reality.

Many of these thinkers were influenced by university courses and almost legendary teachers—the names of Bachelard, Dumezil, Benveniste, Hyppolite and Kojève, whose famous lectures and seminars on Hegel seemed to have shaped an entire generation, with frequency—as much as they were influenced by surrealist poets and novelists like Andre Breton and Raymond Queneau, as well as by the maverick writer-philosophers George Bataille and Maurice Blanchot.

Yet all of these Parisian intellectuals were deeply rooted in the political actualities of French life, the great milestones of which were World War II, the European crisis of conscience about Communism, the Vietnamese and Algerian colonial



When reading Foucault for the first time one encounters so incisive a mind, with one electrical outburst after another, always challenging and inventing new fields of investigation.

wars and May 1968. Beyond France, it was Germany and German thought that mattered most, rarely the work of British or American writers.

Even in this exceptional company, Foucault stood out. He was the most wide-ranging in his learning: he was the most historical as well as the most radical in theoretical investigation. He seemed the most committed to study for its own sake and thus the least Parisian, the least fashionable or backbiting. More interesting, he covered huge expanses of social and intellectual history, read both the conven-

tional and unconventional texts with equal thoroughness and still never seemed to say unoriginal things, even when in the last part of his career he had a tendency to make comically general observations. He was neither simply a historian, a philosopher nor a literary critic, but all of those things together.

In short, Foucault was a hybrid writer. He was dependent on but moved beyond fiction, history, sociology, political science or philosophy. There is an extra-territoriality to his work that makes him both Nietzschean and post-modern: ironic, skeptical,

savage in its radicalism, comic and amoral in its overturning of orthodoxies, idols and myths. Yet in Foucault's most impersonal prose, and in his interviews, a distinct voice can still be heard. The interview was a very important alternative form of expression for Foucault. (These interviews were collected in *Power/Knowledge*.)

The old acceptable demarcations between criticism and creation do not apply to what Foucault wrote or said, just as they do not apply to Nietzsche's treatises, or to Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, Barthes' writing

generally, Glen Gould's piano and verbal performances or John Berger's work. This is by no means to say that Foucault's histories have no historical validity, but it is to say that—like the others mentioned above—these histories draw attention to themselves as self-conscious artifacts, mixed-genre performances in the present, full of learning, quotation and invention.

In the beginning. Several themes—which are best understood as constellations of ideas, rather than inert objects—recur throughout his work.