The Carceral

(FROM Discipline and Punish)

Were I to fix the date of completion of the carceral system, I would choose not 1810 and the penal code, nor even 1844, when the law laying down the principle of cellular internment was passed; I might not even choose 1838, when books on prison reform by Charles Lucas, Moreau-Christophe, and Faucher were published. The date I would choose would be January 22, 1840, the date of the official opening of Mettray. Or better still, perhaps, that glorious day, unremarked and unrecorded, when a child in Mettray remarked as he lay dying: "What a pity I left the colony so soon." 1 This marked the death of the first penitentiary saint. Many of the blessed no doubt went to join him, if the former inmates of the penal colonies are to be believed when, in singing the praises of the new punitive policies of the body, they remarked: "We preferred the blows, but the cell suits us better."

Why Mettray? Because it is the disciplinary form at its most extreme, the model in which are concentrated all the coercive technologies of behavior. In it were to be found "cloister, prison, school, regiment." The small, highly hierarchized groups, into which the inmates were divided, followed simultaneously five models: that of the family (each group was a "family" composed of "brothers" and two "elder brothers"); that of the army (each family, commanded by a head, was divided into two sections, each of which had a second in command; each inmate had a number and was taught basic military exercises; there was a cleanliness inspection every day, an inspection of clothing every week; a roll call was taken three times a day); that of the workshop, with supervisors and foremen, who were responsible for the regularity of the work and for the apprenticeship of the younger inmates; that of the school (an hour or an hour and a half of lessons every day; the teaching was given by the instructor and by the deputy-heads); lastly, the judicial model (each day "justice" was meted out in the parlor: "The least act of disobedience is punished and the best way of avoiding serious offenses is to punish the most minor offenses very severely: at Mettray, a useless word is punishable"; the principal punishment inflicted was confinement to one's cell; for "isolation is the best means of acting on the moral nature of children; it is there above all that the voice of religion, even if it has never spoken to their hearts, recovers all its emotional power"; 2 the entire parapenal institution, which is created in order not to be a prison, culminates in the cell, on the walls of which are written in black letters: "God sees you."

This superimposition of different models makes it possible to indicate, in its specific features, the function of "training." The chiefs and their deputies at Mettray had to be not exactly judges, or teachers, or foremen, or noncommissioned officers, or "parents," but something of all these things in a quite specific mode of intervention. They were in a sense technicians of behavior: engineers of conduct, orthopedists of individuality. Their task was to produce bodies that were both docile and capable; they supervised the nine or ten working hours of every day (whether in a workshop or in the fields); they directed the orderly movements of groups of inmates, physical exercises, military exercises, rising in the morning, going to bed at night, walks to the accompaniment of bugle and whistle; they taught gymnastics; 3 they checked cleanliness, supervised bathing. Training was accompanied by permanent observation; a body of knowledge was being constantly built up from the everyday behavior of the inmates; it was organized as an instrument of perpetual assessment: "On entering the colony, the child is subjected to a sort of interrogation as to his origins, the position of his family, the offense for which he was brought before the courts and all the other offenses that make up his short and often very sad existence. This information is written down on a board on which everything concerning each inmate is noted in turn, his stay at the colony and the place to which he is sent when he leaves." 4 The modeling of the body produces a knowl-
edge of the individual, the apprenticeship of the techniques induces modes of behavior, and the acquisition of skills is inextricably linked with the establishment of power relations; strong, skilled agricultural workers are produced; in this very work, provided it is technically supervised, submissive subjects are produced and a dependable body of knowledge built up about them. This disciplinary technique exercised upon the body had a double effect: a “soul” to be known and a subjection to be maintained. One result vindicated this work of training: in 1848, at a moment when “the fever of revolution fired the imagination of all, when the schools at Angers, La Flèche, Alfort, even the boarding schools, rose up in rebellion, the inmates of Mettray were calmer than ever.”

Where Mettray was especially exemplary was in the specificity that it recognized in this operation of training. It was related to other forms of supervision, on which it was based: medicine, general education, religious direction. But it cannot be identified absolutely with them. Nor with administration in the strict sense. Heads or deputy-heads of “families,” monitors, and foremen had to live in close proximity to the inmates; their clothes were “almost as humble” as those of the inmates themselves; they practically never left their side, observing them day and night; they constituted among them a network of permanent observation. And, in order to train them themselves, a specialized school had been organized in the colony. The essential element of its program was to subject the future cadres to the same apprenticeships and to the same coercions as the inmates themselves: they were “subjected as pupils to the discipline that, later, as instructors, they would themselves impose.” They were taught the art of power relations. It was the first training college in pure discipline: the “penitentiary” was not simply a project that sought its justification in “humanity” or its foundations in a “science,” but a technique that was learned, transmitted, and which obeyed general norms. The practice that normalized by compulsion the conduct of the undisciplined or dangerous could, in turn, by technical elaboration and rational reflection, be “normalized.” The disciplinary technique became a “discipline” which also had its school.

It so happens that historians of the human sciences date the birth of scientific psychology at this time: during these same years, it seems, Weber was manipulating his little compass for the measurement of sensations. What took place at Mettray (and in other European countries sooner or later) was obviously of a quite different order. It was the emergence or rather the institutional specification, the baptism as it were, of a new type of supervision—both knowledge and power—over individuals who resisted disciplinary normalization. And yet, in the formation and growth of psychology, the appearance of these professionals of discipline, normality, and subjection surely marks the beginning of a new stage. It will be said that the quantitative assessment of sensorial responses could at least derive authority from the prestige of the emerging science of physiology and that for this alone it deserves to feature in the history of the sciences. But the supervision of normality was firmly encased in a medicine or a psychiatry that provided it with a sort of “scientificity”; it was supported by a judicial apparatus which, directly or indirectly, gave it legal justification. Thus, in the shelter of these two considerable protectors, and, indeed, acting as a kind of link between them, or a place of exchange, a carefully worked-out technique for the supervision of norms has continued to develop right up to the present day. The specific, institutional supports of these methods have proliferated since the founding of the small school at Mettray; their apparatuses have increased in quantity and scope; their auxiliary services have increased, with hospitals, schools, public administrations, and private enterprises; their agents have proliferated in number, in power, in technical qualification; the technicians of indiscipline have founded a family. In the normalization of the power of normalization, in the arrangement of a power-knowledge over individuals, Mettray and its school marked a new era.

Notes

2 Ibid.
3 “Anything that helps to tire the body helps to expel bad thoughts; so
care is taken that games consist of violent exercise. At night they fall asleep the moment they touch the pillow” (E. Ducpétiaux, De la condition physique et morale des jeunes ouvriers, II [1854], pp. 375–6).

* Ducpétiaux, Des colonies, p. 61.
* G. Ferrus, Des prisonniers (1850).

Q. In your interview with geographers at Herodoté, you said that architecture becomes political at the end of the eighteenth century. Obviously, it was political in earlier periods, too, such as during the Roman Empire. What is particular about the eighteenth century?

M.F. My statement was awkward in that form. Of course I did not mean to say that architecture was not political before, becoming so only at that time. I only meant to say that in the eighteenth century one sees the development of reflection upon architecture as a function of the aims and techniques of the government of societies. One begins to see a form of political literature that addresses what the order of a society should be, what a city should be, given the requirements of the maintenance of order; given that one should avoid epidemics, avoid revolts, permit a decent and moral family life, and so on. In terms of these objectives, how is one to conceive of both the organization of a city and the construction of a collective infrastructure? And how should houses be built? I am not saying that this sort of reflection appears only in the eighteenth century, but only that in the eighteenth century a very broad and general reflection on these questions takes place. If one opens a police report of the times—the treatises that are devoted to the techniques of government—one finds that architecture and urbanism occupy a place of considerable importance. That is what I meant to say.

Q. Among the ancients, in Rome or Greece, what was the difference?

This interview with Michel Foucault was conducted by Paul Rabinow and translated by Christian Hubert.