

BOOK REVIEWS

Cultural Excavations

The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences. By Michel Foucault. Translated from the French. Pp. xxiv+387. (Tavistock: London, November 1970.) 75s.

EVERY intelligent man must wish on many occasions to have been born French. The elegance and lucidity of the language match the iridescence of the thought. *The Order of Things* is translated (anonymously) to give this atmosphere, though—so far as I can tell—the grasp of technical terminology, certainly in economics, is not too hot. What has Foucault to say? At first sight, like Lévy-Strauss or Teilhard, it is one of those confections that dissolve within the steady breath of linguistic analysis, and the terminological imprecision is no help in that respect. Yet, behind it all, there is something that deserves serious concern, that is just not to be dismissed as another Bergsonian verbal fog or a sort of pointillisme of the intellect.

The book begins with an already classic verbal delineation of Velasquez's *Las Meninas* in the Prado, with its complex reflected images. The point he makes is that in the classical age—Renaissance to Romanticism—the controlling motive was one of order and balance, and a static view of human society and its ideas prevailed. For, according to Foucault, whereas the exact sciences are what they say they are, the social sciences are placed in that part of the atmosphere that lies between *terra firma* and the way that men view the world—their "facts" can only be perceived through a culturally coloured microscope. As the culture changes, therefore, so does the way we perceive and study it—hence the phrase "cultural archaeology" with its suggestion that as we dig back we come across artefacts of other ways of seeing the world.

Accordingly, the argument runs, man as a subject of study and man as an enduring historical thing is a recent post-classical—post-Mannerist one almost says—Romantic and Modern preoccupation. Those disciplines which we know as the social sciences—economics and psychology—represent a manifestation of this way in which the social world perceives itself, rather than a perception of the social world as it in fact is (as physics, say, is of the physical world). These disciplines, this way of looking at the question, are, according to this view, transient and indeed inconsistent; man as an object of his own study may be

passing. Why is this? But first let it be said that the radical distinction drawn between the physical and the social sciences is an attractive one, and it rings true, though one suspects that the place of mathematics in both has not been as centrally in Foucault's thought as it would be to an English-speaking writer on these fascinating topics. If the social sciences, like styles of art, are evanescent, both being ways of looking at the social world, both indeed being the social world, then the reason lies in the increasing formalization of the structure of knowledge—in, say, Russell and Frege—and the awareness of what in shorthand would be called the unconscious, as in Freud and Lévy-Strauss. Language itself, which is the mode of perceiving the social world, has (according to Foucault) changed its nature. Discourse has ended; a more fragmentary and in parts more formalistic series of languages has superseded it. Objectivity is over.

That, at least, is how I would read what is an exceedingly complex argument that seems to have structuralist connotations, though structuralism is indignantly rejected in the preface. "Western culture has constructed, under the name of man, a being who, by one and the same interplay of reasons, must be a positive domain of knowledge and cannot be an object of science" (pp. 366–367). In the struggle, the cry, the madness (the book appears in a series edited by R. D. Laing) a "return" to language is occurring (p. 384), which could be perceived as a return to discourse, though, as that cannot be, Foucault argues, it is man himself as the centre of preoccupation who is disappearing, and new forms of thought will appear to replace the social sciences and all that is implicit in their view of the social world. The argument is exciting and, up to a point, appealing, especially when it deals with the "thinness" of the philosophical content of the social sciences; yet, as so often in French thought, it is clear to an Anglo-Saxon that the elaborate structure of metaphor, embracing abstract nouns, is more rhetorical than analytical. JOHN VAIZEY

Teaching for Teachers

Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. By Ruth Beard. Pp. 222. (Penguin: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, October 1970.) 8s.

TEACHERS in higher education have been waiting for some time for a book on

teaching and learning especially written for them. And who better to write it than Dr Ruth Beard, who has been in charge of the London Institute of Education's pioneering University Teaching Methods Research Unit since its inception in 1965? It was therefore with warm anticipation that I began her book but, in the event, I found it dull and disappointing.

Essentially, the book is in four parts. One part deals with the psychology of learning, another with the planning of courses, a third with teaching techniques, and the fourth with assessment.

The psychology of learning is a diffuse and confused field. In one chapter Dr Beard manages to bring in eight varieties of learning, three types of learning theory and various situational and personality variables, and so it seems carping to complain that anything has been left out. But what is missing is any sustained attempt to relate all this to teaching. Bald statements like "lack of interest tends to follow passive listening" do not help very much.

This excursion into the psychology of learning is, however, only a digression from the principal theme, the development of the paradigm: objectives—activities—evaluation. On this view the curriculum is a contrivance for changing student behaviour; its objectives are statements of desired changes; its evaluation, measurements of changes which have taken place. The author rightly stresses the importance of clear intentions, but the examples which she gives of the application of the paradigm—and there are twelve pages of them—are disappointing. Too often the spelling out of objectives seems to have led to little more than: activity, "all parts of the course"; evaluation, "all forms of assessment". A detailed and critical appraisal of these attempts would have been very instructive.

From objectives, Dr Beard turns to activities. A large part of the book is given over to advice on lectures, practicals and other teaching methods. Most of this is sound, if sometimes banal (for example, ". . . consult the plant manager or the field-centre warden as to the most suitable time for the visit"). Detailed discussion of problems, such as the generality and specificity of teaching methods and their relationship to objectives, is avoided.

In considering evaluation, emphasis is laid on the important distinction between assessment to help students, "feedback" (which they want more of), and assessment for judgmental purposes (which