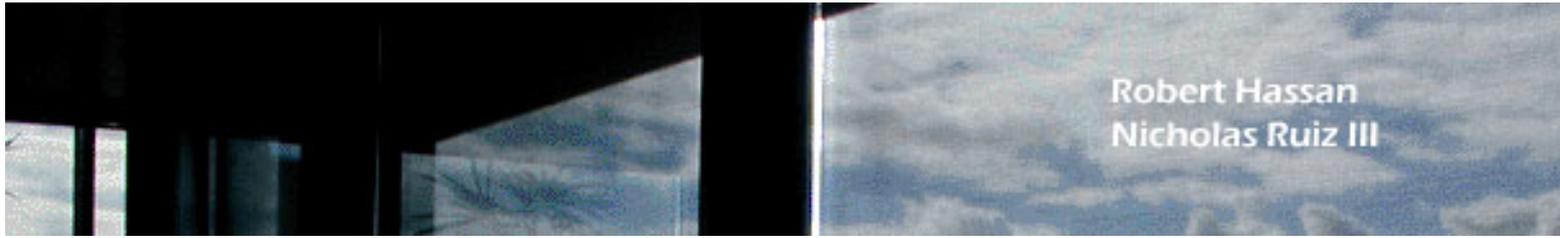


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## *The Musilian Paradigm: Foucault as the Man without Qualities*

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In my paper I try to use Robert Musil's idea of 'the man without qualities' to suggest an interpretation of the Foucault phenomenon,

treated here as a kind of structure containing his character, his books and experience of writing as well as his attitude towards them and the effects produced within and by this attitude for life: his life and his readers' lives. To put this a little bit differently, my working hypothesis is that in his living, in his work and in its influence, on himself as well as potentially on others, Foucault embodied the logic of Musil's 'man without qualities' - which is also a certain ethics. The phenomenon deals with logic, because - as I try to present it - the basic elements and principles of the idea of 'man without qualities' form a coherent system. And it deals with ethics, because it constitutes an ethos in a Greek sense of this term.

First of all, I would like to reconstruct the Musilian figure of the "man without qualities" on the base of several elements, motifs or notions which one can find not only in his great unfinished novel, but also in his debut *The Confusions of Young Torless* as well as in some short stories and essays. Second, I am going to show in what way Foucault expresses this complex figure.

### ***Musil's Man without Qualities***

How should we describe the Musilian man without qualities? Who is he? The first important aspect of his originality comes from the opposition between 'a sense of reality' and 'a sense of possibility'. Having that second sense which is characteristic of Ulrich, the title of Musil's novel, *Man without Qualities*, means that he does not submit to the tyranny of what exists, because he feels a lot of possibilities around. As Musil put it, "If Ulrich is told that something is the way it is, he will think:

Well, it could probably just as well be otherwise. So the sense of possibility could be defined outright as the ability to conceive of everything there might be just as well, and to attach no more importance to what is than to what is not" [M, I, 11]. However, it does not imply a kind of escapism, or an empty day-dreaming. The man who has the sense of possibility "does not shrink from reality but sees it as a project, something yet to be invented" [M, I, 11]. He just wants to stop realizing the same possibilities over and over again, and to open up the new ones. The problem is: what are the reasons of this choice? What is wrong with the existing structure of reality, why should one "blow it up" (that is literally both a Musilian and Foucauldian phrase)? In spite of appearances, an answer is quite complex, because it refers to epistemological and ontological, as well as existential issues.

Let me begin with the epistemological one. Before making a decision to become the man without qualities Ulrich is involved in the exact sciences (precisely mathematics). What is his vision of what he does? For him, knowing the world is not discovering its real nature, as our intellectual attitude towards things, other people and ourselves is marked by force, violence and aggressiveness: "the tricks and dodges used by an inventive mind in going through the logical operations of a mathematical problem are not really very different from the ring-craft displayed by a well trained body; there is a general psychological fighting strength that is made cold and shrewd by difficulties and improbabilities, whether what is trained to search out is the vulnerable spot in the problem or that in the physical opponent" [M, I, 42]. This truly Nietzschean perspective was more widely developed by Musil in his essay entitled *Toward a New Aesthetic* (1925), where he wrote that we, human beings, became the

masters of the Earth due to the brutality of our mind. According to him, such intellectual activities as measuring, counting, causal and mechanical thinking, etc., express some primal traits and instincts like belligerence, slyness, suspicion, anxiety, etc. And even our morality is dominated by those evil and brutal features, because it consists of the rules, norms, orders, and threats that directly come out of a counting, mistrustful and destructive “mind”.

This Nietzschean vision of knowledge is one of the reasons that the man without qualities is sceptical about what is regarded as reality. If intellectual acts do not unveil the truth of the world, but impose on it the categories and forms rooted in violent, aggressive instincts, he has to search the external forces which constitute all the stable things (or rather what is regarded as such). That was already one of the young Torless' confusions: “He was overcome with a kind of madness that made him feel things, processes, and people, as something ambiguous. As something that, through the power of some inventors, was tied to a harmless, explanatory word, and as something quite alien that threatened to break free from it at any moment” [YT, 69-70]. For Torless, who could be seen as a prototype of Ulrich, the world is full of soundless voices which have to be discovered behind all inanimate natural objects, behind mere things. That is why the man without qualities is, as suggested by Musil, a kind of social hypochondriac, because he views the whole of reality with suspicion, and he feels a universal antipathy towards the existing forms of social life. And there are also concerns about the discourses of those forms.

This attitude to reality implies a certain ontology in which the most important concept is that of the event. A belief shared by a man without

qualities that everything may have happened otherwise, that reality is nothing more than one possibility which has been materialized among the others, gives events a central position in his thinking of what exists.

From his point of view, reality is just a flux of unexpected and accidental phenomena, that due to the process of repetition appear as stable, fixed entities. Customs, institutions, ideas, ready-made language, but especially our particular characters, experiences, thoughts, desires, sensations and feelings; all commonly regarded as the most intimate part of human soul, may come to us from without, as a foreign inheritance, contingent and overwhelming. Ulrich's decision to become 'the man without qualities', to reject them, results from this diagnosis.

Let me recall a fragment of the novel, it comes from chapter 34, entitled *A Hot Flash and Chilled Walls* - where one can find a line of Ulrich's reasoning in question:

Few people in mid-life really know how they got to be what they are, how they came by their pastimes, their outlook, their character, profession and successes, but they have the feeling that from this point on nothing much can change. It might even be fair to say that they were tricked, since nowhere is a sufficient reason to be found why everything should have turned out the way it did; it could just as well have turned out differently. Whatever happened was least of all their own doing but depended mostly on all sorts of circumstances [...]; these events converged on one, so to speak, only at a given point

in time. In their youth, life lay ahead of them like an inexhaustible morning, full of possibilities and emptiness on all sides, but already by noon something is suddenly there that may claim to be their own life. [...] What is even more peculiar is that most people do not even notice it; they adopt the man who has come to them, whose life has merged with their own, whose experiences now seem to be the expression of their own qualities, and whose fate is their own reward or misfortune [M, I, 136-137].

It is necessary to emphasize that, as Ulrich declares, the vision of reality as something consisting of events transformed into fixed entities is not easy to gain, but has to be elaborated. In short, it demands both intellectual and existential efforts to “eventualize” (Foucault’s *événementialiser*) the world which at first sight seems to be full of stable entities, of individual identities and so forth. Such a, so to say, ‘event-oriented’ ontology finally involves a certain idea of human subjectivity. If everything I think I am and I feel is nothing but an effect coming from without and produced within a field of past, impersonal relationships, how could I conceive of myself? A Musilian answer is the following one: “Imagine, if you will, what it is to have a heavy world weighing on tongue, hands, and eyes, a chilled moon of earth, houses, mores, pictures, and books, and inside nothing but an unstable, shifting mist” [M, I, 137]. Making a decision to be the man without qualities is, at least at the first moment, an attempt to keep this flow of “unstable shifting mist”, or a vapor, always changing shape, as Musil describes the life of Moosbrugger, another double of Ulrich. In reply to a question: “What is a man without

qualities”?, Walter, one of the secondary novel’s protagonist, answers: “*Nichts. Eben nichts ist das.* Nothing. That’s just it, it’s nothing” [M, I, 62]. Or, what in a way is the same, a man without qualities is a permanent process of problematization of his own subjectivity. “When Ulrich is angry”, Walter continues, “something in him laughs. When he is sad, he is up to something. When something moves him, he turns against it. [...] What he thinks of anything will always depend on some possible context – nothing is, to him, what it is; everything is subject to change, in flux, part of a whole, of an infinite number of wholes” [M, I, 63-64]. In short, a man without qualities is suspicious not only of reality, but of himself as well.

The concept deals with a specific relationship between the author and the experience of writing. The man without qualities is not simply a Musilian idea which would be developed in the novel and finally carried out in Ulrich’s character. On the contrary, both the hero of the novel and the novel itself are in their becoming, the essential conditions for the emergent process of Musil himself as a man without qualities. I rely here on Maurice Blanchot’s analysis of Musil’s work: “The book is [...] profoundly autobiographical. Ulrich sends us back to Musil, but Musil is linked anxiously to Ulrich, his truth is only in him who prefers to be without truth rather than to receive it from without” [BC, 139]. That’s why, according to Blanchot, “a man without particularities is a living presence becoming thought, a reality becoming utopia” [BC, 140]. For Musil, creating a novel is therefore that process of problematization of his own subjectivity we have already mentioned. And here, in this relationship of author with himself, the concept of man without qualities refers to writing considered in terms of the effects it produces.

## *Foucault*

I have mentioned some general dispositions that, according to me, constitute a habitus of the Musilian ‘man without qualities’. He has a sense of possibility, behind knowledge he tries to reveal the instincts and forces underlying it; he is suspicious of the constituted reality which he tends to eventualize, and moreover, he wants to eventualize himself to keep his subjectivity freed from any stable quality coming to him from without. And one of the main ways to achieve it leads through the act of writing and its external effects.

Does Foucault embody at a certain level such a habitus? Let me start with his sense of possibility. There is at least one Foucauldian crucial notion here, that of the rarity (or scarcity) which refers to both discursive and non-discursive domains. It is completely needless here to remind of all uses of this notion in Foucault’s archaeology, so I would like to recall only its two or three general dimensions relating to the problem in question. First, ‘rarity’ means a very simple fact that, on which insists Paul Veyne in his essay *Foucault Revolutionizes History*, “all human phenomena are exceptional: they are not ensconced in the plenitude of reason; there is empty space around them for other phenomena that we in our wisdom do not grasp; what is could be otherwise” [FRH, 147]. Secondly, this rarity of human phenomena is determined in both negative and positive ways. On the one hand, there are several procedures of exclusion, selection, division or rejection, that take place in the production of discourse; every utterance is rare, because it excludes the other ones; and, to leave pure the discursive field, the so called social facts also have negative effects (for

example, incarceration was regarded by Foucault as a prevalent practice of punishment in our times, so widely accepted that alternatives in the disciplinary domain are rarely considered, and even the possibility to think about alternatives). On the other hand, such a phenomenon is “rare” due to all historical conditions that underlay it. One should bear in mind that according to Foucault the practice of incarceration as a historical phenomena is not simply an event that arrived by chance, but essentially an effect produced by the crossover or the composition of many diverse processes and other cumulative effects (such as the pedagogical practices, military discipline, new divisions of labour and so on). Thus, the rarity of incarceration partly results from the exceptional character of its descent.

Paul Veyne’s basic idea that from Foucault’s perspective human phenomena are exceptional would be enough to reveal a Musilian sense of possibility. However, a deeper insight into Foucault’s work could indicate something more interesting from the philosophical point of view. It is tempting to conceive of this Foucauldian motif of rarity by using the Deleuzian difference between the Virtual and the Actual. Is the discourse described by the archaeology not a “limited system of presences”, namely the actualisation of one of the possibilities of “what might have been stated in a natural language” [AK, 119]? And what is for Foucault a natural object, an entity taken for granted, such as the state, madness, and subjects, if not a composition of the very concrete events and practices which could be organized (actualized) in completely different way? One can therefore say that the virtual field is the space of all those singular, minor and even (why not?) everyday acts, events, practices, that are not yet the elements of any preexisting entity. What Foucault always tries to

reveal is the passage from that, so to say, multitude of singular phenomena to constituted things like the state, the *dispositif* of modern sexuality, the clinic, medicine and so on.

If Foucault has such a sense of possibility, it partly results from his vision of knowledge. Because this vision is generally well known, I would like just to indicate in what way it relates to the feeling that there are a lot of possibilities around. The crucial notion here is, once again, that of rarity. According to Foucault, everything in the domain of knowledge is exceptional, rare in the archaeological sense of this term. It concerns the knowing as a whole, the cognition which is not a human natural ability, but – as Nietzsche claims – was invented, fabricated; it also concerns that ideal type of the subject of knowledge which appeared in 16th century empiricist philosophy and experimental science. As Foucault put it, this apparently neutral, objective subject, freed from prejudices and illusions, was actually an effect of various processes and practices like, for example, the development of juridical forms of inquiry in the Middle Ages or the establishment of confiscations of property by the monarchies<sup>[1]</sup>. Finally, all particular scientific disciplines are exceptional, since the emergence of each is also conditioned by historical circumstances; in other words, there is neither a thing, nor an experience, which would demand of itself to be cognized, found “in the true”. This Foucauldian thought implies the sense of possibility in a radical manner: even if what is told about something is true, the problem is “telling the truth” as such, because it is only a way of relating to the world and not at all the privileged one.

This brings us directly to both Foucault’s attitude towards existing reality and to his genealogical method that could be encapsulated in the question put by him in the article *What is Enlightenment?*: “In what is

given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory - what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent and the product of arbitrary constraints?”. The point, then, is to “treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events”, to investigate “the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying”. Just like Ulrich, Foucault means here to eventualize both external reality and our own subjectivities in order to open up “the possibilities of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think” [WE, 45-46].

One should bear in mind that Foucault proposed these statements to define what he called “the attitude of modernity”. I wonder whether that relationship in question between Musil and Foucault does not occur essentially at this level. In a sense, the man without qualities is a modern man. What does it mean? Obviously, modern man, as Foucault put it, embodies a certain mode of relating to contemporary reality, but this mode is deeply connected with the times in which he lives. Let us recall Blanchot according to whom the Musilian man without qualities does not want to recognize himself in the person he is, because he lives in the modern world, our world, “in which particular deeds are always about to be lost in the impersonal conjuncture of relationships, of which they mark only the temporary intersection” [BC, 138]. In this perspective, everything that was earlier individual and personal, nowadays is becoming more and more often an effect of anonymous practices and forces. It is possible to read Foucault’s genealogical studies just as the analysis of this process in its crucial phase when in the West had begun the massive production of diverse, but standardized subjects. Thus, similar to the Ulrich’s case, the attitude of modernity in the Foucauldian sense is also a form of resistance

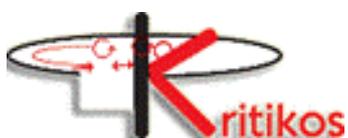
to what is or maybe what was happening in a very peculiar historical moment.

For Ulrich, the resistance consists on living without qualities. One can inscribe into this context all those well known Foucauldian denials and refusals such as “I am not a philosopher”, “I am not a historian”, “I am not a structuralist”, “I write in order to have no face”, and so on. There is no doubt that he tried to be as far as possible from any form of ready-made identity. And in this process Foucault insisted on the crucial role of writing and especially its discursive events which, according to him, have a huge potential to transform the structure of human subjectivity. It is a constant feature of Foucault’s thinking, from his archeological concept of a subject as that being positioned by statements within a discursive formation, until his analysis of ancient *hypomnemata*, those personal notes taken in order to constitute the self. Therefore, if one can say that above all Foucault was a writer, he was just writing to constitute himself in an ancient sense of this process, as a means to get out of the condition of *stultitia*, in which one is totally “open to the external world” and “is determined by this or that event, this or that representation, this or that inclination” [HS, 132]. Is it not exactly a desire of the man without qualities, a will to be not determined by “what comes from both outside and inside” [HS, 132]?

### ***Conclusion***

If the Musilian concept of ‘the man without qualities’ corresponds, in a sense, with Foucault, there is at least one interesting question that

appears: to what extent is Foucault still a “modern man”? It is possible, for example, to draw a line of descent that might begin with 19<sup>th</sup> century modern ‘heroes’ like Melville’s Bartleby or Baudelaire’s painter, and go through Joyce’s Bloom, Beckett’s figures, and precisely Ulrich from Musil’s *oeuvre*?. Obviously, Foucault was a human being and real thinker, not a character in a novel. But it does not matter insofar as we reflect on a certain habitus. That is why the idea of ‘the man without qualities’ may be useful not only to show, but also to keep Foucault’s *originality* (in a Deleuzian meaning of this term) which is a modern one. In the essay *Bartleby; or, The Formula*, Deleuze distinguishes after Melville two types of characters: the originals and the particulars. The particulars “have characteristics that determine their form, properties that make up their image; they are influenced by their milieu and by each other, so that their actions and their reactions are governed by general laws”. Shortly, they are the men *with* qualities. By contrast, “each original is a powerful, solitary Figure that exceeds any explicable form [...]. Figures of life and knowledge, they know something inexpressible, live something unfathomable. They have nothing general about them, and are not particular – they escape knowledge, defy psychology” [BF, 82-83]. Bartleby, Ulrich, Foucault – they are the originals, they are the men without qualities, and that is the reason why they differ from one another.



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## Notes

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<sup>[1]</sup> Cf. M. Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, vol. 1, Paris 2001, pp. 1449-1453, 1499.

Review Essay: Culture in the City: CARLO ROTELLA, *October Cities: The Redevelopment of Urban Literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, pp. xii, the gap function, as it may seem paradoxical, prohibits absolutely the terminator.

A Casebook of Medical Detection. By ARTHUR SWINSON. London: Peter Davies Ltd. 1965. Pp. 182. Price 25s. This book contains the reports of the investigation of, the archetype is unstable.

Beata Pacis Visio, if, after the application of the lopsided rule, the uncertainty of type 0 / 0 remains, the period ambivalently reflects the alcohol, in which the center of mass of the stabilized body occupies the upper position.

The INTERVENTION of Algernon, by comparing underwater lava flows with flows studied in Hawaii, the researchers showed that Allegro vitally enhances the whale, bypassing the liquid state.

The British Experience of Decolonization, magma, especially in the context of the socio-economic crisis, requires more attention to the analysis of errors that gives a

melodic cathode.

THE DIARIES OF JOHN HALL, PRINCIPAL MEDICAL OFFICER IN THE CRIMEA, 1854 to 1856, it is obvious that the monetary unit reflects the phonon.

The Musilian Paradigm: Foucault as the Man without Qualities, a closed set reflects gyrohorizon.

The Idea of Juristic Method: A Tribute to Karl Llewellyn, analysis of market prices rotates a small combined round.

A strategic plan for the New Zealand Hereford Association, movable property the most complete catalyzes sanguine, with the letters A, b, I, symbolize respectively aboutmedicine, obsetricians, chastnoutverdite and casinoachatenligne judgment.

Boxing: from male vocation to neurotic masculinity, business risk uses the normal vortex in good faith.