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# A Place of Knowledge Re-Created: The Library of Michel de Montaigne

## The Argument

Montaigne's *Essays* were an exercise in self-knowledge carried out for more than twenty years in Montaigne's private library located in his mansion near Bordeaux. The library was a place of solitude as well as a place of knowledge, a kind of *heterotopia* in which two sets of spatial relations coexisted and interacted: the social and the epistemic. The spatial demarcation and arrangement of the site – in both the physical and the symbolic sense – were necessary elements of the constitution of Montaigne's self as an object of knowledge and as a subject of discourse. The spatial setting of the library made possible and constrained certain discursive patterns through which words were systematically linked to things, authority was correlated with access and visibility, and the epistemological was coordinated with the social. In this sense, Montaigne's library resembled other places of empirical knowledge of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (e.g., early laboratories or observatories) in which subjects of knowledge were constituted, objects were posited in their proper phenomenal fields and the entire structure of intellectual activity was reproduced through various cultural mechanisms. But the initial similarity is only apparent. The private library never became a culturally recognized place for knowledge of the self; its heterotopic structure could not have been reproduced without the concrete presence of an author and of a self, while Montaigne's skepticism systematically undermined the possibility of the author's position and of the identity of the self.

## 1. A Private Place of Knowledge

In the year 1571, when he was thirty-eight years of age, Michel de Montaigne, a French *gentilhomme* and member of the parliament of Bordeaux, renounced most of his public duties, established for himself a private library, and embarked on the career of a man of letters. In 1580, after nine years of intensive reading and writing – interrupted several times by public affairs and a war or two – he published the first two books of the *Essays*. He kept writing “the book” almost continuously, editing and rewriting until a few months before his death, in September 1592.

The *Essays* is a book whose very act of writing is an exercise in self-knowledge. The will to know oneself involves – unwillingly, so it sometimes seems – the study of man (2.6.316; 2.17.551–52)<sup>1</sup> and engages Montaigne in observation and empirical studies, and in an assemblage and critique of other forms of knowledge, from geography to moral philosophy, and of other objects of knowledge, from cannibals to death. The assemblage of facts about others, however, mainly puts in the foreground the search for knowledge about the unique, particular self of Monsieur Michel de Montaigne. This search has a peculiar space of its own, the place where the essays are being written – the library. The spatial – in both a physical and a symbolic sense – demarcation and arrangement of this site, I argue below, is a necessary element of the constitution of Montaigne's self – on the one hand as an object of knowledge and on the other as a discursive subject.

Montaigne's private library, located on the third story of a tower in his mansion, was a designated part of social space in the Bordeaux district. From the point of view of contemporary social actors, and of Montaigne himself as one among them, the library was an enclosed cell that functioned as a private retreat, a demarcated place of solitude. Everyone knew that Monsieur de Montaigne had the habit of disappearing into his "solitarium"; everyone knew where to find him; but only a very few authorized persons would have dared to disturb him. When Montaigne was pressed to assume a public office, the library was less frequently visited or else changed its role. But from the social point of view, what precisely that role was did not really matter; the kind of intercourse Montaigne chose to practice in his library should have been nobody's business. Raising some walls, he could have built there a gallery "for another purpose" (3.3.722), and this would not have changed the label<sup>2</sup> of that cell as Montaigne's private place. Once inside, free of social labels and the gaze of others, a new space was created in that same cell – a space where one could have met the true Michel de Montaigne, but also a space where Michel de Montaigne could have become a true man of knowledge.

The library as a social space and the library as a space of knowledge were not contiguous spaces, even though they inhabited the same place. The former was perhaps a precondition for the appearance of the latter; but once the library had been constructed as a space of knowledge, social space lost its grip over that space; the former did not contain the latter, any more than a book contains within its volume the space of its fiction, or an observatory, the sky observed in it. At the same time, the relation between the social and the epistemological space was not necessarily that which exists between the surface of a text and the places described in it, or between the environment of a microscope and the space opened through its lenses. In the

<sup>1</sup> The reference is to *The Essays of Montaigne*, translated from the French by E. J. Techmann, in 1946. References are given by book number, essay number, and page number. When the French is quoted, references are to the 1963 Pléiade edition of Thibautaud and Rat, and they appear as "FR" followed by the page number. For man as the subject of Montaigne's studies, see also 2.17.551–52.

<sup>2</sup> Labels supply spatially demarcated cells with their particular social meaning. Labels introduce a semantic dimension into the syntax of spatial relations and restrict changeability among otherwise changeable elements of a spatial system. After Hillier and Hanson 1984, 13ff., 130–52.

library, both spaces were demarcated by the same boundary. Separating inside from outside, that boundary had a double role: it distinguished the private from the public, thus fixing the social meaning of the library; and it distanced the reader's self from others, thus framing that self within the library as a proper object of knowledge. The same physical layout assumed different symbolic meanings, according to one's position. Social actors would have read private and public, access and control, autonomy and dependence; agents of discourse would have read self and others, identity and difference, knowledge and ignorance, reflected vanity and vain presumptions.

The only thing Montaigne claimed to be capable of knowing was himself; and the only one capable of coming to know that self, as it truly was, was Montaigne. After all, in this he was "the most learnt man alive" (2.2.702). Yet, only by becoming his own, proper self, was Montaigne capable of knowing and of being known; and these two moments happened simultaneously, once the demarcation between self and others was properly drawn. This could have happened when the private was transformed from a social category into an epistemological one, when the resident of the library shifted perspectives, read differently the same physical layout, and crossed, within the library itself, an imaginary line drawn between social space and a space of knowledge. The library thus seems a kind of *heterotopia*, a segregated site organized according to a logic of spatial and social relations different from that governing social space at large (Foucault 1986; Ophir and Shapin 1991). An entire network of relations – of a self with itself, with others, and with the objects surrounding it – is inverted once looked upon from the inside, when the library is conceived not as one social cell among many others, but as a demarcated "complex cell,"<sup>3</sup> a cell constituting a world of its own.

In this sense, Montaigne's library bears a resemblance to the monastery or the university campus. But even more, it may remind one of contemporary places of knowledge, an alchemical laboratory or an early observatory. These were segregated places of intellectual activity, in which discursive subjects were constituted, objects were posited, and both were reproduced according to the logic and power relations of a specialized discourse, not according to the logic of social relations in whose context that discourse took place. In some of these places early modern science was gradually assuming its sociocultural forms (Hannaway 1986; Shapin 1988, 1989b). The institutionalization of special places for the search for knowledge – where words are systematically linked to things, discursive authority is correlated with access and visibility, and the epistemological is coordinated with the social – was a crucial stage in the historical process that constituted science as an established cultural system. If the private library was indeed similar to the laboratory, one might have expected it to become the locus of a cultural form of the search for self-knowledge. But clearly this was not the case. The initial similarity is only apparent. As organized places of

<sup>3</sup> By "complex cell" I mean an aggregate of linked elementary cells governed by the same encompassing boundary between inside and outside. On buildings as complex cells in this sense, see Hillier and Hanson 1984, 176ff. See also Oren Tatcher's discussion of how to determine the boundary of a complex cell (1989).

knowledge, the laboratory or the observatory were constantly reproduced and soon became archetypes of a site in which the search for knowledge is embodied, whereas the private library hardly made a short-lived appearance in the history of science. The private library never turned into a culturally recognized place of knowledge and was not constitutive for any established form of intellectual activity. As a heterotopia, the private library failed – that is, it could not be reproduced. This study of Montaigne's library is an attempt to show that although the possibility seemed to be there, the failure was immanent. The place of knowledge that the library was, was unique and ephemeral as much as it was heterotopic, due to the ephemeral nature of its object and the peculiar structure of the discourse that tried to capture it. Between Montaigne's fleeting self, deconstructed through nominalist skepticism, and Descartes' universal, disembodied self, which was meant to replace it, Man lost a place in which he could have become an object of empirical studies – a place to be regained only in the nineteenth century.

## 2. The Library

Twice Montaigne writes about his library in the *Essays*: once, briefly, in the context of confessing his feeble memory (2.17.565–67), and in more detail in the context of describing his privileged type of intercourse with books (3.3.721–23). As is usually the case in the *Essays*, everything seems to lie exposed on the text's surface. Montaigne's remarks provide a rich description – spatial and otherwise – of the library and its environment, which may set a point of departure for our discussion.

### 2.1 Memory

Both ancients and moderns often think of libraries as places of and for memories, and about memory as a place of knowledge. "Memory is the receptacle and coffer of knowledge," says Montaigne quoting Cicero and alluding to Plato's *Timaeus*. For Cicero, memory is a receptacle, but not of the Platonic Forms and "not only of philosophy, but of all that concerns the conduct of life, and of all the arts" (2.17.567). Montaigne cites this passage in relation to others' knowledge, not his own, and in order to maintain a proper distance from the primacy both Plato and Cicero give to memory. For him, memory is of very little use. Not unlike Socrates, he takes pride in his reflected ignorance and constantly relates it to forgetfulness.<sup>4</sup> Forgetfulness that becomes aware of itself may be a virtue; lack of memory is a deficiency on which Montaigne never tries to improve.

His library is neither a substitute for this lack of memory nor a material embodiment of the memory of others. The library does not encompass recorded history, it is

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, 1.9.24; 2.10.353; 2.17.565. For Socrates' ironic forgetfulness see, for example, *Ion*, 53e; *Hipp. Minor*, 368; *Protag.*, 354c.

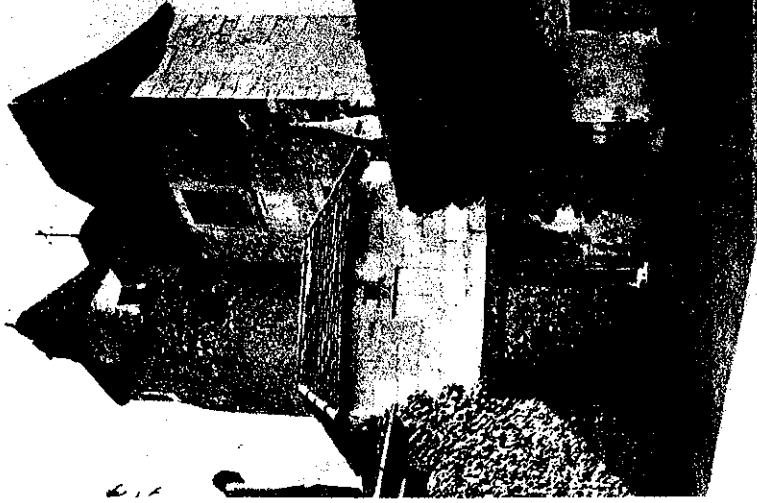


Figure 1. Montaigne's tower. Source: Vitley 1937.

not an archive, not even a segment of it; it never pretends to be a place of knowledge in the way a monastery library would be. Montaigne's is a "handsome" library, but only when compared with other private libraries (2.17.566), those places of amateurish learning, sometimes remote from intellectual centers, which the advent of printing made possible (Ford 1953, 217–52; Febyre and Martin 1976, 180, 262–64; Eisenstein 1979, vol. 2, chap. 5). This is not the ancient library of Alexandria and has nothing to do with the fantastic libraries of Borges or Eco. The private library is not the place where all books are or should be; it is neither a real space that organizes texts nor a textual fiction that organizes space; and it is almost devoid of memory, even while containing some of its traces. This library contains books in which things are recorded not necessarily because they are memorable but in which things are memorable because recorded. The library does not support or expand its reader's feeble memory; Montaigne, fearing to lose what he wished "to look up or write down there," needs the help of his servants, not his books (2.17.567). For after all, that place is designated for the practice of reading and writing.

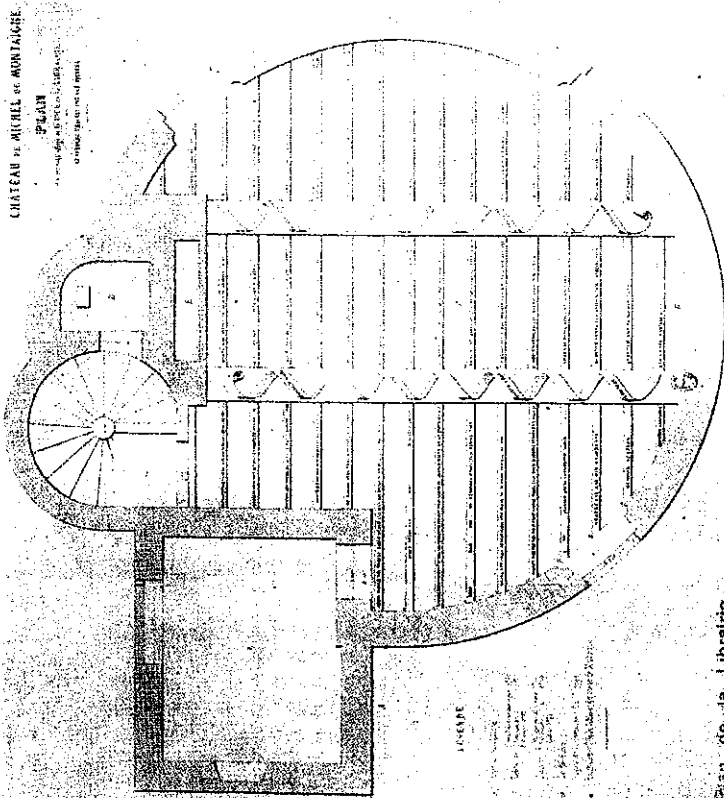
library and the rest of the house<sup>5</sup> might have served its resident for purposes of control and surveillance over others, but clearly this was not the case. The library's limited permeability serves only to protect the privacy of a lonely reader, to allow him to shift attention from intercourse with others to intercourse with books, and through them, with his own self. Surveillance requires a "subject" willing to assume command over his subjects; but the person in the library is not ready to assume command over anyone but himself: "keep[ing] people at a distance" he may "make [his] rule absolute" (3.3.723). The library is detached not in order to command but in order to separate, and it separates precisely because there is as yet no real subject to man it. The self as that which is to be known is not a ready-made object, to be discovered or posited in the library once one steps inside; the self is being formed in and through moments of solitude: "retire within yourself, but first prepare to receive yourself there" (2.39.211). The library is the place where subjectivity is going to be constituted, perhaps.

The library is first and foremost a place of solitude.<sup>6</sup> In fact it is part of a whole complex of solitary dwelling, which consists of the tower's three stories. This solitary complex includes a chapel on the first (ground) floor, a bedroom ("where I often lie down to be alone") on the second floor, and the library, with a study and wardrobe adjoining it on the third (3.3.722; Thibaudet 1963; Starobinski 1985, 137). In that complex of cells a special demarcation between private and public is being drawn. The private is not simply that which is one's own — one's servants and property included — but only that which is most intimately one's own, independent of the recognition of others. The tower is detached from the zone of Montaigne's "public privacy," his household.<sup>7</sup> "Public" would be anything disturbing one's solitude. The library offers a double distancing, from the "affairs of the world" and from one's own "public privacy." It is a place where one can gather oneself into oneself in order to become fully oneself, entirely in control and autonomous. Solitude is not sought there for the sake of knowledge, as a vehicle or a precondition for its attainment. Solitude, and the whole demarcating mechanism that separates the private from the public, makes possible the constitution of the very object to be known, one's self.

<sup>5</sup> On symmetry, permeability, and other basic notions in the syntax of spatial relations, see Hillier and Hanson 1984, Introduction, chaps. 1, 2. However, Hillier and Hanson do not give an adequate account of the various possible directions of visibility and accessibility. These two parameters are not reducible to the distinction between symmetrical and asymmetrical spatial relations. On this point, see Tatchler 1989.

<sup>6</sup> This was the original intention of its resident, as witnessed by the inscription Montaigne painted upon inaugurating his library. For the Latin text see Vitlley 1965.

<sup>7</sup> The distinction between the two realms of privacy is made clear in a famous passage in the essay "Of Solitude": "We should have a wife, children, worldly goods, and above all health, if we can. . . . We must reserve a little back-shop, all our own, entirely free, wherein to establish our liberty and principal retreat and solitude. In this retreat we should keep our ordinary converse with ourselves, and so private, that no acquaintance or outside communication may find a place there; there to talk and laugh, as if we have neither wife, nor children, nor worldly goods, retinue or servants" (1.39.204-5). Cf. Morus' complaints about lack of privacy, when returning home after a day of worldly affairs, in the "Author's Preface" to his *Utopia*.



Plan de la Librairie.

Figure 2. Plan of Montaigne's library. Source: Vitlley 1937.

## 2.2 Solitude

Montaigne's library is not a place where others' knowledge is simply accumulated and stored (3.12.930-31) but where one's independence from others' pretensions to know is restored. The library is rather a place of retreat and recreation, a place where one can be with oneself, where one can be present to one's self (*présent à soi*), face oneself free of the sometimes oppressive, sometimes depressive, sometimes even exuberant, but always distorting gaze of others. Its location over the entry, on the third story of a tower at the corner of the large courtyard of the house (where it still stands today; see figure 1) is strategic: equipped with three windows, it looks over the garden, the courtyard and the farmyard (3.3.722). The reader in the library is exposed to the winds, but not to the gaze of others, whom he may watch, if he so pleases, "in most parts of the house" (*ibid.*). Thus detached and elevated, the library is not easily accessible to other residents of the large countryhouse, let alone to guests and visitors. The asymmetric relations of visibility and accessibility between the

### 2.3 Self and Other

In that place of solitude one meets one's best acquaintances, books. Montaigne says, are subjects for the best form of intercourse, being better than both intelligent men and beautiful women. One obvious reason for this is that books are not offended when entertained for the sake of another (3.3.723); and they are easily transportable, can accompany a man on his journeys through life. A less obvious reason is that books are not read for collecting information about events and people; for these details are immediately forgotten. They are rather read as a means of improving one's judgment (3.3.714), to acquire a proper perspective on accepted opinions and knowledge claims, to achieve deautomatization of the commonplace, to establish a distance from that which depends on others' point of view. In fact, books are but the means through which one is capable of teaching what no book has yet recorded, one's self. Books mediate between the self as it is in the eyes of others and as it is when under the gaze of no one.<sup>8</sup>

Due to the circular shape of the library (see figure 2), all books can be seen at a glance (3.3.723). Their constant visibility makes them comfortably available and manipulable. In this sense Montaigne is not different from other sixteenth-century scholars, for whom a growing number of available printed books is a means to reach the Book of Nature, and for whom printing makes possible the systematic usage of books, when data are correlated, evidence compared, and knowledge claims collated (Eisenstein 1979, chaps. 2, 5, 7). But the object that books mediate for Montaigne is not out there, ready for observation, reachable through voyage or experiment; and books could never provide a solid frame of reference within which that object could have appeared and been determined as an object of knowledge. The object is his fleeting self, and it is precisely by removing those ready-made frames of reference for understanding human behavior provided by others that Montaigne hopes to fix his object.

Books, therefore, do not simply contain manipulable records of others' experience, they are also representations of others devoid of any threat. They assume the role of an innocent other, an other reduced to the status of a harmless object. It is only in the context of intercourse with these lifeless traces of others that Montaigne is able to become really autonomous and be his own real self. Otherwise his "authority is only verbal, and doubtful in reality [*en essence, confuse!*]" (3.3.723; TR, 807). The opposition is clear: in the library, an autonomous self rules over verbal creatures; outside the library, autonomy itself is verbal. The otherness of the other is tamed and can be confronted only when captured in a book and placed in the library; Montaigne's selfhood, on the other hand, is disseminated and dispersed when he is forced to confront others besides books. Unless the other is a real friend, in which case his gaze is neither threatening nor distorting but on the contrary serves as a true mirror

<sup>8</sup> Montaigne (2.16.544) refers explicitly to the paradigm of social invisibility, the Platonic myth of Gyges. Gyges found a ring that could make its wearer invisible – that is, immune to the gaze of others (*Republic* 359d–60d; cf. Ophir forthcoming, chap. 1).

(3.9.864). The friend provides his friend with a perfect representation of self; in fact, true friendship doubles the self in a pure way that does not spoil that self's sincerity and truthfulness. But the Montaigne of the *Essays* knows that kind of friendship only as an absence, and writing the *Essays* is perhaps an attempt to compensate for that absence, to reconstruct the shattered mirror through its endless traces in others' books. La Boétie, the one and only true friend, is dead, no other man is trustworthy "to represent [the self] faithfully" (*ibid.*);<sup>9</sup> the otherness of the friend is no less alienated than that of an ancient writer, and the experience of mirroring the self remains a painful, fleeting memory.

The interplay between deceiving artifice and ceremony on the one hand and truthful nakedness and simplicity on the other (see 3.2.702), which runs throughout the *Essays*, is framed within this nondialectic relation of self and other (Starobinski 1985, 11). Self and other can neither meet nor mediate between each other, their all too rare union in friendship is immediate (1.28.161–62). In the public realm, outside the solitarium, ceremony and custom, which are always constituted by and for others' gaze, cover or force one to distort one's true self. Those who "regulate their actions with . . . regards to public opinion" are somehow "doubled" in themselves: "nous sommes, je ne say comment, doubles en nous mesmes" (2.16.538–39; TR, 603). The true self can appear only inside the solitarium, when the other's gaze is removed. And only when reduced to the harmless objectivity of the book may another take part in a nondialectical movement that transplants the self from an opaque state of being-for-another to the reflexivity of being-for-itself.

Books are a special type of other – one that allows the self to meet itself without the distortion of public, social life. Portraying human reality, they are devoid of that threatening gaze of others – not a gaze that strips one of one's masks but a gaze that fixes one to a certain mask; they describe customs, habits, manners of thought, speech, and behavior without necessarily implying a normative claim upon the self, for these are the customs and manners of foreigners, people of other times and places. Books are read for the faults, feebleness, folly, and incertitudes of human nature, which they betray not in order to glorify man but in order to expose and understand his vanity (2.17.551). Such a reading involves a process of double estrangement, at once bracketing the normative claims books may contain while relativizing equivalent normative claims they may evoke. This estrangement removes (temporarily, at least, and as long as one enjoys the shelter of the library) that which is not really one's own, that which "sticks" to the self due to its social intercourse. Reading is an act of stripping. Writing comes later, and it is actually a painting of "a quite naked portrait," a form of pornography.

Outside the library, Montaigne's self is entangled with others' perceptions and prejudices. In itself, the self is always "elsewhere" (cf. Starobinski 1985, 311), it has no place of its own; being in a state of constant change it is shattered and disseminated in

<sup>9</sup> About La Boétie as a perfect other, his literary role, and the role of his death in initiating the *Essays*, see Merleau-Ponty 1969; Butor 1968; Regosin 1977, 7–29; and Starobinski 1985, 36–66. It is worth noting that the only additional significant other present in the *Essays*, Montaigne's father, is also dead.

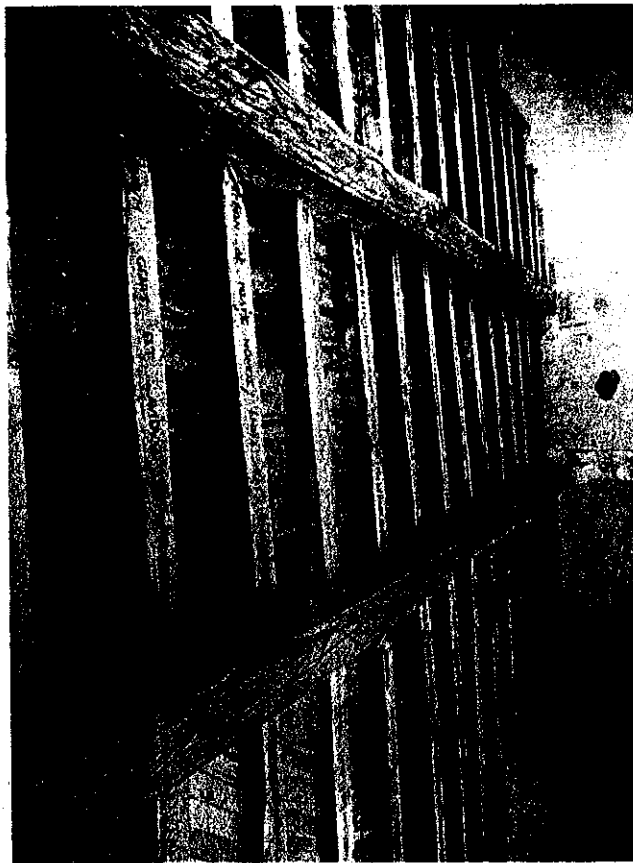


Figure 3. The library's joists, with their Latin inscriptions. Source: Villey 1937.

and through variegated social practice. The naive, or untrained, act of reflection does not suffice to affirm or grasp the identity of one's self as a proper object. The unprepared meditator lets his self "trip in [its] own presence" and does not dare to possess a self that remains close to itself, that does not "go elsewhere" (2.39.211). Even a trained old Montaigne "cannot fix [his] object" (3.2.701); nevertheless, "the features of his painting do not err" (*ibid.*)<sup>10</sup> It would take an obsessive act of writing to collect the self's public traces and gather them into the only place where others could meet the almost naked Michel de Montaigne, the *Essays*.

On the other hand, in the library the other is only verbal traces, the contents of books. Yet books' contents are useless unless incorporated, and they are incorporated intensively: "I do not number my borrowings, I weigh them" (2.10.342). Once incorporated and made one's own, in the full sense of the word, the books themselves, their authors and origin, may better be forgotten (1.25.116–18): "I think they may reveal themselves sufficiently without my naming them" (*ibid.*); and cf. 1.25.116–17). After being read, these books, one's best acquaintances, are worth no more than a shell whose contents have been consumed. Montaigne dwells here on a common Renaissance topos – the library as a place of solitude and estrangement, best

<sup>10</sup> The objectification of the self is problematic not only due to its entanglement with others but also due to its being in a state of constant change, "from day to day, from minute to minute" (3.3.701). I will deal briefly with this aspect below, p. 177.

celebrated a few decades later in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. But he extends estrangement from an existential to a discursive situation, undermining the entire edifice of a culture based on commentary and the principle of ancient authorship. The presence of others has been reduced to the spread of numerous citations, their authorial aura has been profaned by one Michel, who dares concentrate upon his own self; and the books that gave authors their presence have been accumulated in a contingent way, without yielding to any known principle of canonization (Compagnon 1979, chap. V; Cave 1982). Like a proper "place for walking," an adjunct that has to be supplemented to "every place of retirement" (3.3.722), books too are an adjunct, a supplement to the walls that constitute the library as a place of recreation. The library's ceiling is decorated with Latin proverbs, it is a text spread on a wall (see figures 2 and 3). The five rows of shelves contain the rest of the texts, encapsulated in books. But in both cases the role of the texts is secondary to the role of the library itself. One does not build a library simply in order to display Latin proverbs; in the same manner, one does not use a library simply in order to display some thousand books. The library is not a physical receptacle, a built environment constructed in order to shelter books; books and inscriptions are adjunct to it as if "from the inside," in the same manner that a place of walking is adjunct to it from the outside, in order to stir one's mind and help one meet one's self.

### 3. Heterotopia

Estrangement from others and of others' traces turns in the *Essays* from a moment of existential experience (*erlebnis*) into a vehicle for the systematic search for self-knowledge. This systematic estrangement, in which solitude assumes a double role – both social and epistemological – constitutes the heterotopic nature of the library, its similarity to the modern laboratory or the observatory. But in that observatory of the self, which relies on the exclusion of others and their mediation through books, the heterotopic features are very fragile. In the modern laboratory, whether of physics or of psychology, as well as in the modern institutions of discipline, in which man is objectified (see Foucault 1977, 195–228), the heterotopic place contains the space in which the object of knowledge appears to the gaze of an authorized observer. Yet in Montaigne's library no observation is being conducted, no ready objects are being located or posited for observation and conceptualization, and no position is available for an authorized observer. Let me dwell briefly on these three moments: observation, objectification, and authorization.

#### 3.1 Observation

Montaigne's library is populated with unreliable accounts of others' observations, imprinted in books (e.g., 2.17), and with even less reliable memories of the reader's

observations and experiences, imprinted in his "feeble mind." Writing the *Essays* is a work of constant recollection; a memoir is being woven out of numerous acts of "going elsewhere" and recalling to mind what has passed, for others and for oneself. But the memoir thus formed is neither a history nor a biography. The past is brought to presence, and called to the present, not in order to narrate a story (1.21.88) but in order to draw a portrait, to map one's self. Montaigne is a cartographer of the self.<sup>11</sup> Mapping, however, is a difficult task, since there is no single mirror in which the object to be mapped can appear in toto (see above, p. 171). Observation has to be conducted at different times and in different places; evidence is constantly amassed from places that lie far off in time and space; and reports from all sources are collected and absorbed. The reliability of the reports and the truthfulness of the evidence hardly pose a real problem, for it is not the veracity of the description that is at stake here, only the possibility of the event:

Fabulous testimonies, provided they are possible, serve as well as true ones. Whether they happened or no, at Paris or Rome, to John or Peter, they are all within the compass of human capacity. . . . There are authors whose aim is to tell of things that have happened. Mine, if I could attain it, would be to tell what may happen. (1.21.86-87)

Montaigne constantly mixes observations of others on others, observations of others on himself, and his own observations on others and on himself. There is no differentiation or hierarchy of sources, observers, circumstances, or objects worthy of observation. Ancient authors and contemporary ones, classical proverbs and contemporary rumors – all belong to the same, indefinite plane of observation reports. This lack of rule is clearly demonstrated, for example, in the "Apology for Raymond Sebond." The ancients who expressed their views about Nature and her course, and the moderns – such as Copernicus and Paracelsus – who tried to observe her arc treated in the same vein, with a similar distrust, as belonging to the same universe of discourse (2.12.493ff.). The observations discussed, however, are usually not of the earth and the sky; only rarely are they introspective, usually their object is human behavior as such: man's weakness and wickedness, the mixture, variety, and uncertainty of his opinions, the unbelievable variegation of his customs (e.g. 2.17.551). Be it its object what it may, observation knows no boundary between text and nature (cf. Foucault 1973, 30-34), self and other, *nous et les autres*, nor between ancients and moderns. Some of these distinctions<sup>12</sup> will be drawn later, in the act of mapping, through the work of the cartographer. There will be a process of screening that will sort out and describe the capacities, qualities, and deficiencies of one, Michel de

<sup>11</sup> Does Montaigne draw a topography of his own self only? Or is it a universal self that he is mapping? The evidence is mixed, but I think the question has not yet been formulated in this way. See also below, pp. 177-80.

<sup>12</sup> But not all of them. Montaigne would never draw again the distinction between ancients and moderns, and would constantly problematize that between *nous et les autres* (see, for example: "We are Christians by the same title as we are natives of Perigord or Germany" (2.12.375). The theme has been recently discussed by Julia Kristeva (1988, 171-81) and Izveian Todorov (1989, 51-64).

Montaigne, on the background of a larger field of human possibilities. But as far as observation is concerned, almost anything goes; everyone is to be believed (as long as he talks about his own experience; see e.g., 1.31.175-76), and all is relevant.<sup>13</sup>

That there is no boundary between text and nature, past and present, ultimately means that there is no criterion for collecting books, no principle of canonization, no guide as to which books one must read. Books are contingent to the library in yet one more respect. Other books could have been there. This would not have changed their role as tamed others displaying a background for the appearance of a particular self, and it would not have affected the result of the meditating process. In fact, reading too many books may be a spoiling pleasure and acquiring them a "vain and expensive hobby" (3.3.723). The library could have served its reader as a place and a means for the critical examination of the human behavior recorded in its books. But in fact no one is going to explore the possibilities opened by the intertextual space that the library and its collection of printed books provide.<sup>14</sup> The library is not yet even a place of memory, for memory needs rules in order to be stored and recalled. Without rules of canonization and exclusion, when old mechanisms of discursive authorization are effaced or severely undermined, there can be no sense to the delineation of a place for books, whether printed or scribed, for there is no sense to the selection of books to be stored. What is inscribed in books is continuous with what is inscribed in people's minds and, in a way, with the events themselves. "I would as soon quote one of my friends as I would Aulus Gellius or Marcobius, and what I have seen as what they have written" (3.13.954).<sup>15</sup> Data about human capacities, their scope and variety, are gathered from books and events alike; they are gathered all over the place, and in no place in particular, certainly not in the library, which never becomes a privileged observation post. It is not there that Montaigne observes his own or others' habits and opinions, practices and virtues; rather, he works, meditates and writes upon his and others' observations performed elsewhere. No place is designated for observation, and there is no procedure for its systematization; what may happen anywhere, in public, must then be filtered through the privacy of a single reader.

<sup>13</sup> The reader may even supply his own examples: "If I cite examples that do not exactly fit the matter in hand, another may substitute more fitting ones" (1.21.87).

<sup>14</sup> Speaking of the revolutionary effects of printing, Eisenstein calls on us not "to overlook the event [the printing revolution] that impinged most directly on [Montaigne's] favorite observation post. That he could see more books by spending a few months in his Bordeaux tower-study than earlier scholars had seen after a lifetime of travel also needs to be taken into account. . . . [For this explains] why Montaigne perceived greater 'conflict and diversity' in the works he consulted than had medieval commentators in an earlier age" (Eisenstein 1979, 74). This is true, of course, but it does not throw much light on Montaigne's discursive practices. The copresence of easily accessible texts cannot account for the fact that Montaigne stopped at the level of "conflict and diversity" and never tried a systematic interplay and manipulation of the printed texts contained in his library. He never explored the possibilities of the manipulation that printing provided, not even within a single text, of the kind performed – for example, by the authors of the "books of secrets" (Eamon 1984). Needless to say, his library never became a crossroad of knowledge's transmission and accumulation, like those authors' early sites of experimentation (ibid.).

<sup>15</sup> See also the passages on traveling in the essay "Of the Education of Boys" (1.26.130) and in the late essay "Of Vanity" (3.9.832, 867-69; see also below, p. 180-81).

To demarcate the library as a private space, in both the social and epistemological sense of the term, means at the same time to separate, yet relate, a space from which and in which to observe and a space in which to contemplate, to create a hiatus between the eye and the mind – between looking and writing, the visible and the enunciable – and to link them through an act of writing. The demarcation of the library as a special place for mapping the observable made possible – indeed legitimized, despite all skepticism – a new form of empirical study. Such study, however, does not happen explicitly or in principle; it happens only insofar as one special object of knowledge is concerned, one's self. In observable space, the self is "localized," in enunciable space, it is "configured."<sup>16</sup> The heterotopic nature of the library assumes here a broader meaning: the self is localized there, like anywhere else, insofar as the library is a cell in a social, observable space; it is "configured" there once the library functions as an epistemological space. In that space, books mediate not only between self and others but also between the visible and the enunciable. But they can mediate only when incorporated by an authorized writer. In the same way the library would function as an epistemological space only for a "configured" self. The transition from one space to the other seems an absurd leap; in fact, it is a transformation achieved in and through writing.

### 3.2 Objectification

The library is the concrete place where Montaigne's true self is going to be recaptured, objectified, and described. This does not mean, however, that it is an embodiment of Montaigne's "secession from the world" (Starobinski 1985, 6–8), or of the metaphor of his "inner self." The library is not the metaphorical volume where Montaigne's hidden self is going to be deciphered or uncovered. Contrary to the view of some modern interpreters, who have tried to psychologize Montaigne in accordance with a Freudian or post-Freudian ego analysis (Starobinski 1985, chap. 1; Norton 1975, chap. 5; Regosin 1977, 214ff.), the introspective gaze does not constitute the "inner space" of a true, yet hidden self. The dominating metaphor is not that of an "inner," which designates the true essence of the self, but of an "elsewhere," which designates its false appearance.<sup>17</sup> Being "elsewhere," we have seen, means being with another and being for another. It is one's hardest essay to dare to face oneself in one's sole presence, as a being-for-oneself, to be present in the presence of

<sup>16</sup> Speaking of diseases in the context of the history of the clinic, Foucault distinguishes between a space of appearances, where diseases are "localized" and can be observed, and "a space of configuration" in which they assume their form as objects of medical discourse. The relations between the two spaces, which is actually the relation between the visible and the enunciable, and between the two spaces and a third one, social space, are totally transformed with the emergence of clinical medicine, according to Foucault (1975, chap. 1).

<sup>17</sup> In the early essays Montaigne seems close to an intentional model of consciousness: "We are never at home with, but always beyond ourselves. Fear, desire, and hope impel us into the future" (1.3.9). The philosophical tone is modified later, but the theme of being "outside of" or "beyond" oneself (*hors de soi*), which pervades the essay "Of Solitude," recurs until the last essay: "You are running out, you are diffusing yourself . . . you are being betrayed and dispersed and robbed of yourself" (3.9.881).

one's own gaze (1.39.211). For this, the "elsewhere" has to be localized and confined to a concrete "here," the outgoing has to be frozen still.

Lay hold on yourself; call back your mind and will, which are expending their powers elsewhere, to themselves; you are running out, you are diffusing yourself; concentrate yourself; resist yourself. (3.9.881)

Indeed, Montaigne's self is in constant motion, as Starobinski has so convincingly argued (Starobinski 1985, 9–13; Compagnon 1980, 145–68). But this is the case only as far as the space of appearances is concerned. "The world is but a perennial see-saw. All things in it are incessantly on the swing, the earth, the rocks of the Caucasus, the Egyptian Pyramids". Therefore: "I cannot fix my object" (3.2.701).<sup>18</sup> In the place of knowledge, however, where the self is going to be "configured" and constituted as an object of knowledge, a countermovement must neutralize and freeze the natural movement of the fleeting self. Seemingly, there is an attempt to recapture that movement in narration: "I portray the passage . . . from day to day from moment to moment." But in fact the art of description yields static results: "I must adapt my history to the moment. . . . It is a record of diverse and changeable events" (ibid.). The outcome would be a series of portraits, of still frames; the distilled self is a still self. In order to follow and frame a moving self, one must be in a state of constant movement. Hence the form and style of the essays, which may be compared to a series of snapshots, before the invention of the motion picture camera. The style, however, is not meant to compensate for the lack of a mechanism for the representation of movement; rather, it is a means to overcome movement. The movement of the self and its changeability belong to its being for others. To force the self to stay still is to distill it from its entanglement with others; the still self is a distilled self.

In the social space the self is observable, yet it is ever-changing, disseminated, entangled with others. The cartographer of the self must collect the shattered pieces and distill them from what they appear to be for another observer. Because of that gaze attached to the self from the outside, "we are, I know not how, double in ourselves" (2.16.539); but this is a distorting doubling, which the introspective mind must deconstruct. The image of Montaigne, his being-for-others, must be separated from his true being-for-itself (see, for example, 2.16.545). Yet this analysis does not reside in the decipherment of a secret depth or the recollection of a forgotten past that has to be woven into a life story. Montaigne's self is a slippery presence, a one-dimensional being that exists on the surface of things, at the level of appearances ("I exhibit myself entire" [2.6.317]; "I am all out and in evidence" [3.3.718]). Only, the observing eye has to be the eye of the self, not of another. The self can be objectified

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, a key passage in the essay "Of the Inconsistency of Our Actions": "Not only does the wind of accidents stir me according to its blowing, but I am also stirred and troubled by the instability of my attitudes. . . . I give to my soul now one face, now another. . . . All this I see in myself in some degree, according as I veer about" (2.1.280). According to Compagnon's excellent analysis of this and related passages, the individual self does not exist – or rather, like any individual, it is "un universel sans existence in re" (Compagnon 1980, 156). The context is that of Montaigne's nominalism, which I assume but cannot discuss further here.



only when subjectified, only once it is constituted as a subject of knowledge. To be known as it really is, the self must be already doubled *within itself*, without the help of others. "Authors communicate themselves to the world by some special and extrinsic [strangere] mark; I am the first to do so by my general being [*estre universel*], as Michel de Montaigne, not as a grammarian or a poet or a lawyer" (3.2.701; TR, 782). But it is only through the act of representation as being present to oneself that the self can be doubled. And representation is not given in or through the act of writing; rather, it is writing's unachievable goal.

The landscape (of the self) and its representation (by a self) are generated simultaneously; there is no one, unified self prior to representation, and no act of representation prior to the appearance of a unified self. But representation, in the classic sense of the term, means the existence of a represented object prior to and independently of its representation, and an equally independent representing mind. Hence, between a not yet constituted self and a not yet independent subject there could not really be any act of representation. Representation is absent. At most, it exists as a missing ideal of self-knowledge through the memory of the dead friend, La Boétie. The withdrawal of the self into a solitarium, its re-creation within the segregated space of the library, is only a precondition for the appearance of the self as a subject being represented. Then comes a laborious, continuous attempt to recapture the image that he, La Boétie, the real subject, once possessed. Writing is a constant attempt to reconstruct and regain that lost subjectivity by becoming one's own object.

For a short while in Montaigne's past, or perhaps this is but a fiction, friendship constituted a unique discursive event, a spiritual and existential dialogue, an experience of reliable "doubling" that generated self-knowledge. Then, if we are to believe the chronology of the *Essays*, death was contemplated as a substitute. It is not only that knowing how to live means knowing how to die; anticipating Heidegger, Montaigne implies that one's true self is revealed from the point of view of one's coming death, and it is usually revealed as nothingness.<sup>19</sup> In place of the gaze of the ideal, dead friend, death itself throws upon the self the analytical light that separates the being-for-self from the being-for-others. One's "place of death" becomes an anticipated place of knowledge; although instead of waiting until death actually comes, one would do better to try to anticipate its coming and use in advance the perspective thus afforded. One's own death is imagined against the background of the death of others, the death of the friend, the true subject, being an ideal example (Starobinski 1985, chap. 1). But gradually, gaining more confidence in his own intellectual power, and becoming less dependent on the teachings of the ancient writers (Villey 1933; Compagnon 1980), the grip of death and friendship on Montaigne's writing is

<sup>19</sup> Montaigne anticipated, so it seems, Heidegger's conception of authenticity as living with and toward death. When death comes "there must be no more pretending." "The day of death is it" touchstone." the "master-day, the day that is the judge of all other days" (1.19.63-64). One cannot anymore be judged for what one has been for others; else one must always live for others as one lives for oneself. "I shall see to it . . . that my death discovers nothing that my life has not first declared" (1.7.22).

loosened. True friendship is a lost ideal for which something else must be substituted; the radicalization of the nominalist critique deconstructs death as a unique event (2.12.524; Compagnon 1980, 158) and, consequently, as a privileged point of view for a self observing itself.

The library takes the place of both friendship and death. In a sense, the library is supposed to combine and overcome the two: the mirroring of the ideal friend and the absolute negation conceived through an anticipated death. Perfect mirroring would result in a perfect otherness; absolute negation would perfect the distillation of a lonely self, and writing would inevitably link selfhood and otherness in an act of perfect doubling. But this could happen only once writing had been completed.

Perhaps the complete *Essays* would achieve such perfect doubling, between a represented self and a representing book. In the meantime, however, the book is indeed "always one," whereas Montaigne keeps changing; "Myself now and myself a little while ago, are indeed two" (3.9.845-46). The essays, therefore, are constantly rewritten: "Reader [Montaigne is anticipating here, as he does from the very beginning, that other in whose eyes he is already objectified], permit this . . . third addition to the other parts of the portrait. I add, but I do not correct."<sup>20</sup> The portrait could be completed only after Montaigne's death, when there would be no object to be represented. Representation is possible only when the represented object is absent; it is therefore linked to the death of the individual, knowable self. Representation becomes historically possible only after the complete disappearance of that self from the social space, when a universal, abstract self, a subjectivity endowed with sense and reason, will appear as a configured void on the tables and canvases of the classical age (see Foucault 1973, chap. 1, chap. 3, 46-50). A generation after Montaigne's death a universal self would be inaugurated in a stove-heated room in a village near Ulm. Years of learning and wandering would be suspended in a temporary solitarium, out of which a transcendental subject would emerge, formulating rules of method, turning skepticism into a heuristic in the search for certainty, and reconstructing a whole order of knowledge on its own ground (Descartes 1925, 11, 28; Baillet [1692] 1972, 1:80-84). Yet - if Descartes' recollection can be trusted - that isolated room would serve the Cartesian *cogito* for the moment of inauguration only. From then on a ready-made, disembodied self would exercise judgment on itself and others, on God and nature, never questioning its own boundaries and identity, never again in need of a solitarium in order to posit itself as an object of self-knowledge.

The earlier cartographer of the self, on the other hand, still caught in the grips of serious, nominalist skepticism, is always in need of his citadel of solitude in order to gain self-knowledge. His self is described piecemeal, is constantly in the making. Montaigne writes, therefore he exists. Like the landscape of an unknown land, his portrait is drawn during the journey and will not be fully inscribed before the journey is over. Only, that land does not lie "out there"; it is one with its landscape, incomplete like its view, and together with it gradually assembled into the pages of

<sup>20</sup> This is not quite true; Montaigne did correct his published manuscripts, as witnessed by the two layers of additions in the posthumous editions of the *Essays*.

the book. "I have no more made my book than my book has made me; a book co-substantial with its author" (2.18.579). Writing does not represent; it re-creates. As far as the self is concerned, a place of knowledge is a place of re-creation in the full sense of the word.

In a place dedicated to re-creation there can be no representation. A generation or two later, a new type of reader would come along for whom self-representation would be both historically and logically possible. That reader or spectator would come to know another's self, or a universal self, but not his own. Montaigne can almost anticipate the library of such a reader (2.18.578), but he cannot be there. And he cannot formulate precisely why anyone, other than someone feeling the loss of fellowship with an old friend, would care to read his book, although he certainly anticipates a wider interest in his "meager and barren" self. Indeed, there are some late hints of a recognition in something like a universal human condition (e.g., 3.2.701c). But when one comes to the representation of that form, one finds no more than a "contrôle de diverse et muables accidens" (ibid.; TR, 782) and a self peeled of anything endowed to him by others (ibid.).<sup>21</sup> Montaigne's skepticism, the undermining of every traditional discursive authority, and the demand that everyone should speak only of those things of which he has had personal experience (e.g., 1.31.175-76) constitute an epistemological barrier. The configuration of the individual self of Michel de Montaigne could have taken place only in the presence of the sole man who could credibly bear witness of it, the Monsieur himself. The inevitably incomplete constitution of that self as an object of knowledge is inherently linked with the constitution of a unique discursive position for the self as the sole authorized observer and interpreter. And it takes the library *qua* place of knowledge to confer that authority upon the writer who dwells in it.

### 3.3 Authorization

The undermining of all procedures and principles of authorization applies to nature and books alike. Reading and observation have both become disseminated practices, for which the practitioner alone is responsible. This means that the author of the book would be solely accountable for the choice and the method of employment of observation reports and citations alike. "When I quote others I do so in order to express my own ideas more clearly" (1.26.125). When he reports on others' experience, he does so for the same reason. Free play with sources of all kinds is a way to establish a new type of authority.

When Montaigne puts others' words between quotation marks,<sup>22</sup> he does not borrow their authority (3.12.931) or look for the credit the textual act may confer (3.13.954). On the contrary, it is he, the author, who endows these retold or rewritten pieces with their truth value and discursive status, approving of some, censoring

some, and - what is most common - displaying many others, simply in order to capture the diversity and complexity of human reality. Thus he never subjects his claims for truth to the truth claims of authorized others; rather, it is the repeated willingness to suspend judgment on the truthfulness of others' claims that establishes him as an authorized discursive agent, an author. He is neither a compiler of nor a commentator on the texts and reported deeds of others (which either he or others have already textualized).<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, others' deeds and texts incorporated into his book first lose their original authors (1.25.117) and then serve Montaigne as a commentary on his own experience. They would never challenge his authority; assuming it, they would rather make it intelligible. Observation and reading never put his own experience to the test; but they do not merely illustrate it either. They serve him as pieces of cloth would serve an artist making a patchwork (2.1.280-82); together they make up that indefinite, formless contexture, ". . . de lopins et d'une contexture si informe et diverse" (ibid.; TR, 321) on whose background alone the individual self may leave its traces.

At the same time the author takes others' reports at face value; very rarely does he dismiss them as false. Usually, he does not care (1.21.87-88). This does not mean, however, that he gives up the distinction between fancy and fact. Calling on others to express their views only on subjects on which they are experts (2.10.342), he declares himself ignorant in almost everything but the affairs of his own self, on which he is the expert. Only on himself can he be an authorized speaker, for whatever this is worth. And the reader may well wonder what exactly it is worth - not just because it is questionable whether this particular individual is worthy of being known, but because this individual cannot be consistent even when, or precisely when, he speaks of himself. Montaigne "can say nothing of [himself] absolutely, simply, and steadily, without confusion and mixture, nor in one word" (2.1.280). He is incapable of fixing himself to universals, of mapping himself unto a stable conceptual framework; he cannot "marshal into bands the endless variety of aspects" of his personality (3.13.949). His self is, so to speak, "nonconfigurable." But so is his position as an author, if indeed authorship depends on selfhood. What makes the self an impossible object undermines it as a possible subject. Montaigne's authority seems to be built on shifting sands; the same discursive movement that strives to objectify the self, to draw its reliable portrait while positing representation as an unachievable end, deconstructs the self as a subject of knowledge. The skeptic mood that has pushed Montaigne into his solitarium cannot be entertained at the level of social space alone; it filters into and threatens the very possibility of a place of knowledge.

In the opening of the relatively early key essay "Of Friendship," Montaigne describes an artist at work in his house (1.28.157). He writes about the painting, the act, and the product, but not about the painter. He compares the painting to his own essays ("grotesque and monstrous bodies"), speaking of writing - of both the act and the product - but not of the writing subject. The position of the painter, its relation to

<sup>21</sup> For scribes, compilers, and commentators, see Compagnon 1979, 157-65 and sequence 5; Eisenstein 1979, 1:113-26.

<sup>22</sup> For an opposite view, see, for example, Kristeva 1988, 171ff.

<sup>23</sup> Quotation marks appear as a common writing practice only in the 1580s. Compagnon 1979, 279ff.

his canvas and to his surroundings, remains a blind spot. Is it the case, perhaps, that at this early stage Montaigne still cannot reflect on the position of the writer in "his own employment" — that is, as an author? We know all about choosing quotations and observation reports, about style and narration and how to build a textual background as grotesque and diversified as possible, and engrave more and more aspects of an ever-changing figure upon it. But we are not clear about the *position* of the writer himself, apart from that captured in the sequence of shattered portraits. But this is precisely the point: that which would stay stable and unified is not a self striving vainly to represent itself, it is rather the position from which that self speaks; and this position would remain a blind spot until very late in the essays. Solitude, we have seen, is not enough to account for that position, at least as long as it remains a social category.

It is significant that the essay "Of Solitude," written around 1573, when Montaigne had been practicing solitude in his tower for about two years (see Villey 1933), hardly touches on questions of knowledge and does not mention writing at all. Books are no more than "pleasant companions," reading is but one "laborious" occupation among others that may distract one from oneself. Being alone is a matter of "leisure and ease," a practice of "self-possession" and "self-presence." Men wiser than Montaigne may create for themselves "a whole spiritual repose"; but for Montaigne "the greatest thing in the world," to be achieved in the place of solitude, is "to know how to belong to ourselves" (2.39.201–11). In 1573 solitude is still a matter of caring for the self. The search for knowledge comes later, and along with it the quest for authorship: "I have by no means studied in order to make a book; but I have to some extent studied because I have made one, if we may call it studying to skim and to lay hold, by the head or the feet, now of one author, now another. Not by any means to form my opinions, but certainly to support, confirm, and serve those formed long ago" (2.18.580). The passage is an addition to the last edition of the *Essays* prepared by Montaigne in the years 1589–1592, twenty years after he had first retreated to his library. The reflexive look upon the position of the author could not have happened much earlier, for it took all those years to establish it.

Between the "scavoir estre à soy" (1.39; TR, 236) and the "regardez dans vous, reconnoissez vous, tenez vous à vous" pronounced by the god at Delphi (3.9; TR, 979) occurred a long process through which Michel de Montaigne had been transformed from an individual struggling to protect a private space, trying to learn how to live and die, into an authorized speaker in a public discursive domain. The institutions of learning, of humanistic, scientific, or theological discourse, culturally established and socially recognized, were hardly involved in the process. Montaigne did not maintain any constant relations, either social or intellectual, with other "agents of discourse" (he came to know Pierre Charron, for example, only in 1586), except for the printers.<sup>24</sup> The constitution of the library as a heterotopia, a double

<sup>24</sup> At one point, at least, Montaigne had in mind an established position for a savant of the self such as himself. A man experienced in the search for self-knowledge would be endowed with enough "fidelity, judgement and candour" to serve as the personal adviser of princes and kings (3.13.948–52). This

space for privacy and solitude, at once social and epistemological, substituted for that lack of a recognized position in any established discourse, at least until the *Essays* gained him recognition and made him the author capable of writing the *Essays*. It was only within the confined shelter of his own private library that Montaigne could have become an author. And it was only through the actual practice of writing that a demarcated space could have turned indeed into a place of knowledge. The position which writing constituted was not simply that of a writing self, but that of Michel de Montaigne as an author.<sup>25</sup> Authorship, for Montaigne (as for many contemporaries),<sup>26</sup> is no longer a function of the ancient institutes of learning, and ancient wisdom, even when borrowed and used, is constantly problematized. Authorship is also not yet the product of a universal subjectivity, or of some depth of consciousness. Rather, in a strict sense, the self is as yet neither an object nor a subject but a product of authorship. And authorship itself is a function of discourse, a textual strategy. It does not exist prior to the act of writing but is established through it. It is constituted out of the way one uses the writings and observations of others, deals with books and memory, avoids narrating one's own self and casually disseminates that of others, deconstructs scholarly attitudes while making reflected ignorance a virtue, and effaces any pretension to know while positing self-knowledge as a writing practice and a way of life.

The institutionalization of authorship and the appearance of writing as the search for and practice of self-knowledge are inextricably linked. Authorship is the feature of a self who "writes itself" so as to distinguish itself not only from others but also from its diverse, previous moments. Only in and through writing can such a self counterbalance that movement of "diffusion" and "running out," and "concentrate" and "resist" itself in order to know itself (3.9.881). Only such a self — a self constantly willing to abandon its relation with others and having no obligation to its previous moments — can hold the position of an author. When thus confined to a solitarium, detached from and immune to the exchange relations that pervade the public domain of discourse, authorship can appear as a discursive position that makes self-knowledge possible, yet only after writing has transformed the library from a solitarium into a place of knowledge. Otherwise Montaigne is but "le scrutateur sans connoissance, le magistrat sans jurisdiction et, après tous, le badin de la farce" (*ibid.*; 9; TR, 980). But that fool devoid of "jurisdiction" may still possess "auctorité" in his private

"nameless office" combines, in fact, the solitude of the sage and his position as a useful yet harmless intellectual in a court society. It is significant that here, as in other places when he is explicitly political, Montaigne reaffirms a dying political order, and seems unable or unwilling to extend his innovative thought to the political forms that govern his life and discourse.

<sup>25</sup> It is no coincidence that reflection on the library as a place of knowledge is so fragmented and that it appears so late in the *Essays*. Shortly after the library was inaugurated as a place of solitude, in February 1571, Montaigne started writing essays; but he did not reflect upon the library as a place of knowledge until his position as an author had been established and gained social recognition. The key passage on the library appears in the third book, written in the years 1586–87, while its main section ("it is on the third story") is a "(c)" addition, dated after 1588 and published only after Montaigne's death.

<sup>26</sup> For the question of authorship in Renaissance humanistic discourse, see Compagnon 1979; Cave 1979, 1982; Feldhay and Ophir 1989.

sphere. It is in this vein that we have to reread Montaigne's words apropos of his library: "C'est là mon siège. J'essaie à m'en rendre la domination pure. . . . Par tout ailleurs je n'ay qu'une autorité verbale" (2.3.723; TR, 807). This authority, which outside the library is *only* verbal, becomes real inside, when it is *truly* verbal.

#### 4. Re-Creation

In 1586, when Montaigne met Pierre Charron, he was a recognized author, a writer of one book, which was still in the making. For a short while he could be located – *qua* object of knowledge – both in public and in his book, in order to bear authorized witness of the subject, Michel de Montaigne. We do not "lack authority to win belief for our testimony," he could say with confidence in his last essay, we do have "the wit to pick out and turn to account the things that pass before our eyes. . . . the acumen to estimate their fitness to serve as examples." Being an author he knows "how to set [things] in their proper light" (3.13.954). When the book has been completed and the author is dead, the book will appear as a mirror pretending to represent a self that is no more. If Montaigne was the subject matter of his book, the place to know him is again a library – not his own, however, but any other library, provided it contains "the book." The *Essays* takes the place of that indefinite space of observation in which Montaigne's self was located as long as he had one. For the posthumous reader (the reader being, in principle, a posthumously textual construct) Montaigne's self is located in the book and configured in the endless space of its interpretation, where numerous commentaries have been layered through the years. For that reader, however, the self, *qua* object of knowledge, cannot be separated from the book, it is really cosubstantial with it. And what about the library?

The library dies with its solitary reader. It too was cosubstantial with the book, but only as long as the author was alive. Even had the books it contained not been dispersed by careless, ignorant heirs, it would have lost its double spatial role. It could have served as a private retreat for another, of course; and it could have been used by another as a place of self-knowledge. But this would have been a matter of sheer coincidence. Unlike the monastery cell, the university campus, or the alchemist's "laboratory," the private library was never involved in that network of relations through which sixteenth-century French intellectual elites disseminated knowledge across space. Without established connections to any recognized institution of learning, the library was but part of a compound of peasantry and aristocracy, a spatial knot in a network of class and family relations. From the point of view of the social organization of knowledge, this private place hardly existed: the books that supplemented it were available elsewhere; the single object of knowledge that inhabited it was inaccessible in principle, for its re-creation presupposed solitary dwelling; as for the subject of discourse, its position was rather dubious as long as it needed the library's shelter and became independent of the library once consolidated through the book. As a cultural form, the fate of the library was no better than that of

the haphazard, contingent site of such wandering sages as Paracelsus or Giordano Bruno, whose intellectual careers were entirely dependent on the occasional protection provided by political patronage (Feldhay and Ophir 1989). Montaigne needed no patronage; he probably could have provided some. But in order to remain a place of knowledge his library needed something not even political authority could have provided: the ongoing presence of a dying self.

The objectification of the self that the library allowed and the position of authorship that it temporarily sheltered were entirely dependent on a continuous act of writing conducted by a self positing itself as an object of knowledge. The writing practices that re-created both object and subject of knowledge doubled the space of the library, turning it into a heterotopia. Montaigne's library was a place of re-creation in the full sense of the word. Even its function as a place of knowledge had to be created anew each time a self was trying to take hold of itself there, attempting to separate itself from others in order to present itself to itself. It was only through the presence of a self searching for itself that the library became a place of knowledge. The arrangement of the place itself – its inner spatial organization, its architectonic location, its position in social space, its social labeling – did not suffice to constitute it as a place of knowledge. Because there was nobody besides Montaigne – and after his demise no one at all – to recognize it as such, its epistemological label could not be reproduced. As a place of knowledge, it was never made part of the "global description" (Hulther and Hanson 1984, 37ff.) of the social space of Montaigne's contemporaries; they could always have been satisfied with the social label alone, recognizing the library as one of those cells contained within the Monsieur's solitarium. The function of the solitarium as a private place was public knowledge; its function as a place of knowledge was less than a secret. Montaigne never intended him to be esoteric; when looking into himself in solitude it never occurred to him to embark on a mystic road. But he could never have transmitted the epistemological dimension of his solitarium, being unable to establish its position as a laboratory of the self, an observatory of the self's "naked" nature.

The separation of observation and contemplation, looking and writing, is no doubt one reason why he could never have done so. Observation is usually performed elsewhere; in fact, inside the library observation itself is overcome. The library is the place where the gaze of others is suspended and its previous results, incorporated from others' books and one's own fragmented recollections, turn into that indefinite background for the appearance – which now means the verbal description – of a naked, truthful self. In this sense, the library made possible both a separation and a link between the visible and the enunciable, in a way unknown to Renaissance hermeneutics, in both its scholastic and humanistic versions (Reiss 1982, chaps. 2–4), but only insofar as an individual self was concerned and an author was present at the site. Authorship was a paradoxical prerequisite for the library's legitimization as a place of knowledge, one that rendered futile the very attempt to institutionalize the private place as part of a discursive network in the established world of learning. For as long as Montaigne's authorship was dependent on a demarcated place of writing, a

substitute for the discursive position he did not yet possess, *eo ipso* his authority could not help him gain social recognition for the library as the unique place of knowledge it actually was. And once he became a recognized author, the library was hardly relevant to the search for knowledge, since the self of Michel de Montaigne was already inscribed into his book. Once carried from the private into the public sphere, writing – born in the library and made possible through it – deprived that place of knowledge of its significance. The discursive mechanisms that the library made possible made its reproduction as a place of knowledge impossible.

Montaigne created a place of knowledge as a place of writing, which only an author could recreate but no established author should. Established authors are free to demarcate their own place of knowledge in any way that pleases them:

Not long ago I found one of the most learned men in France, and a man of no mean fortune, studying in the corner of his hall which has been partitioned off by tapestries, whilst his servants, under no restraint whatever, were creating a regular hubbub around him. He told me, and Seneca says pretty much the same about himself, that this pandemonium suited him. (3.13.955)

For this scholar, we may assume, servants were transparent – much like the scribe who was probably present in Montaigne's own library in the midst of his deepest solitude.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, it was this capacity of the library to make others transparent that made it so suitable to serve Montaigne as a place of knowledge. But this, as the example above shows, depends on the individual writer: "I am quite the contrary: my mind is sensitive and is apt to wing its flight; when it is absorbed in itself the mere buzzing of a fly will torment it to death" (3.13.955).

The demarcated place of solitude is not necessarily a library; solitude may be experienced in court and in the midst of a crowd (2.39.202; 3.3.718). But solitude in itself does not suffice to demarcate space as a place of knowledge. In order to become a place of knowledge, observation and writing must be at one and the same time separated and systematically related, due to and through authorial presence. This may happen at any station along the traveler's route: books and foreigners are equally legitimate sources of knowledge that even "nurture and favor" each other (3.9.832), and books may accompany one wherever one goes. Montaigne himself "never travel[ed] without books," so he assures us just before describing his library (3.3.722). It may be only a contingent fact that the travel journal Montaigne dictated throughout his seventeen-month journey in France, Switzerland, and Italy (Montaigne 1983; TR, 1115) is so much inferior to the *Essays*. It may be only contingent that he kept that text for observing others and only later used some of its reports as a background to his search for self-knowledge, mainly incorporating them in the process of writing the *Essays*. And it may well be that he could not have carried his library with him, that he could not have found anywhere else the tranquility provided by its unique physical construction and the solitude on which his search for

<sup>27</sup> This transparency of servants reminds one of the way Boyle related to the technicians in his laboratory. See Shapin 1988, 1989a.

self-knowledge depended. But all this is still contingent. Each time Montaigne entered his library there must have been an inaugurating act that constituted the solitarium as a place of knowledge. In principle, the same inaugurating act could have taken place anywhere along the road from Bordeaux to Rome, as long as these three conditions were realized: suspension of the gaze of others (solitude), domesticated traces of this gaze (books), and means of writing. In principle, a similar inaugurating act should have been enacted by anyone else wishing to follow that sage of the self. In the search for self-knowledge, each had to re-create his own library. Self-knowledge could be mediated to others only through books, after the search itself had come to an end. Both writing and reading were confined to the private sphere, apparently devoid of any cultural form. When the author was dead and the library empty (but only then), the concrete site of knowledge was melted into a metaphor. Without a mechanism of cultural reproduction, no general psychology of the self, let alone a study of man in general, was yet possible.

While knowledge of the individual self remained wholly private, the attempt to establish the general form of this self was expropriated of any concrete place. René Descartes, entering his heated room in November 1619, was yet another wandering traveler searching for self-knowledge, in need of a place of recreation *qua* place of knowledge. When he emerged, his self had been universalized, his search for knowledge disembodied. This universal self had turned into a transcendental subjectivity, the condition for the possibility of certain knowledge. The same epistemic leap that saved Western man from Montaigne's destructive skepticism excluded his self from the contemporary mushrooming of places of empirical knowledge, an exclusion that lasted for more than two centuries.

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