

# The Question of Believing

Luce Giard

For Michel de Certeau, believing was rooted in a foundational experience, situated in a Christian tradition where the relationship to scriptures is central. Now, in this immense inheritance, he chose as object of election and familiarity mystical texts, not 'mystical experience' but the writings of mystics, that is, a particular type of writings implying a mode of believing. He loved the mystics not because they would be 'elect' but because he saw in them the wounded and often the relegated to the margins of the social group, disgraced people, the monastery idiot in the patristic tradition (see chapter 1 of *la Fable mystique*), Surin long regarded as mad by his Jesuit brethren and whose writings were dispersed, corrected, partly lost. There, in shame and suffering, madness or defection, the 'corruption' that haunts President Schreber in Freud,<sup>1</sup> something essential is tied between believing and its defection. It seems to me, to take up an expression he employed about Foucault, that that is the 'black sun' of his thought and that it explains the turn to 'history of mysticism' as well as the turn to 'cultural anthropology of the present' in his work.

The platform that provided the force and originality of *l'Invention du quotidien* was the reflection on believing, beyond ecclesial institutions on every side. The disclosure of ordinary life as 'mystical', in the proper as well as figurative sense, inspired the analysis of practices. He hoped to complete volume 2 of *la Fable mystique* in 1986 and counted then on writing an *Anthropology of believing*, which he had already announced as the theme of his seminar at the Ecole des hautes études in 1985–86. Of this book which will never exist there remain some little fragments sketched on the occasion of conferences in Rome, at Urbino, in California, but the architecture of the projected book was never really worked out; it was still only on the stocks when time ran out.

1 *Histoire et psychanalyse entre science et fiction*, ed. Luce Giard, Paris, Gallimard, 1987, chap. 7: 'L'institution de la pourriture: *Luder*', pp 148-167, where one would underline this: 'In other words, the institution is not only the delusive epiphany of an ideal of the self which would allow the production of believers ... But this would also be the assignation-localization of the corruption within, by means of which the discourse is "grandiose"', page 166.

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