



Foucault and the shift from ideology to discourse

Key Question

- ♦ How does Foucault's notion of power differ from Marx?
- ♦ Key texts:
 - ♦ Foucault, M. 1975. *Discipline and Punish*
 - ♦ Barrett, M. 1992. Chapter 6.

How is Power Exercised?

Marx and Ideology

- ♦ Ideas of the ruling class in every epoch are the ruling ideas
- ♦ Ruling material force is the ruling intellectual force
- ♦ Material and mental production: if you rule one you rule the other

Marx and Ideology

- ♦ “The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships” Marx
 - ♦ Relates ideology to social class
 - ♦ Ruling class ideas are the ruling ideas
 - ♦ Ruling class rule control the means of ideological production

Foucault key concepts:

- ♦ Docile bodies
- ♦ Panopticism
- ♦ Discourse
- ♦ Surveillance

- ♦ Power enacted by bodies
- ♦ Key texts by Foucault: 1960s
 - ♦ *Madness and Civilisation*
 - ♦ *Birth of the Clinic*
 - ♦ *Order of Things*
- ♦ 1975 *Discipline and Punish*

- ♦ From Marx to Foucault: Move from ideology to discourse
- ♦ Movement from power as an absolute to power as a relation
- ♦ What is allowed, what is forbidden?
- ♦ How is this in tension with what we are obliged or forbidden to do?

Butler (1988) 'Conceivable Acts'

- ◆ Various acts, largely construed, produce and maintain oppressive conditions
- ◆ The relation between acts and conditions is neither unilateral nor unmediated.
- ◆ There are social contexts and conventions within which certain acts not only become possible but become conceivable as acts

Butler (1988)

- ◆ “The possibilities that are embodied are not fundamentally exterior or antecedent to the process of embodying itself. As an intentionally organized materiality, the body is always an embodying of possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention. In other words, the body is a historical situation, as Beauvoir has claimed, and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and reproducing historical situation” (1988: 521).

- ♦ Discourse

- ♦ Foucault

- ♦ System in which certain knowledge is possible—parameters are defined on the topic
 - ♦ What can and cannot be said?

TEXTUALITY

- Roland Barthes: all writing is text
- Barrett (1992) all forms of writing have a style
'Writerliness' like 'painterliness'
- Language is not the medium of the transmission of content
 - Doesn't transparently convey its contents without interference

Barrett (1992)

- ♦ Language is the producer of meaning
- ♦ Derrida takes this to a more radical conclusion
- ♦ Derrida argued: no such thing as a summary or translation merely another text

Barrett (1992)

- ♦ These arguments are subversive in terms of traditional knowledge claims
- ♦ Challenge conventional distinctions between academic and creative writing
- ♦ Between fact and fiction
- ♦ 'Linguistic turn' in history allied towards a greater emphasis on textuality

Barrett (1992)

- ♦ “Archives are examined as producers of historical and cultural meaning in their own right rather than sources of information about another more social reality that is the traditional goal of the historian’s labour”
- ♦ “Legal documents and medical records are scrutinised as texts in themselves rather than conduits to forms of knowledge that can be expressed in terms of a linear historical narrative for which sources give the evidence”

Barrett (1992)

- ♦ Derrida's philosophical works announce the performative aspect of writing
- ♦ Their textuality thus the contingent nature of any 'truth' contained within them
- ♦ Argues Foucault should be credited with the most original and important general concept of discourse as to why this theoretical lexicon is preferable to that of ideology, social formation, class and so on

Barrett (1992)

- ♦ Foucault's discourse very much linked to context:
- ♦ “The question posed by language analysis of some discursive fact or other is always: according to what rules has a particular statement been made, and consequently according to what rules could other similar statements be made’
- ♦ “The description of the events of discourse poses a quite different question: how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?”

Verbalisation

- ♦ Foucault: 'I try to make an archaeology of discourse about sexuality which is really the relationship between what we do, what we are obliged to do, what we are allowed to do, what we are forbidden to do in the field of sexuality and what we are allowed, forbidden, or obliged to say about our sexual behaviour. That is the point. It's not a problem of fantasy, it's a problem of verbalisation.'

FOUCAULT ON HISTORY

- Foucault opposes social structure present in Marxism
- Discourses he analyses: medical, legal, sexual
- History and Genealogy
 - 'Total' history was constituted around a set of linked, and mistaken, assumptions: that one could reconstitute the overall form of a civilisation or principle of a society; that all the phenomena of a period had shared significance with underlying laws accounting for their cohesion...

Power

- ♦ Power is enacted
- ♦ Power is embodied
- ♦ How is power operated in such contexts
- ♦ How is it important... the only way we can understand that 'who' is to understand the 'how'

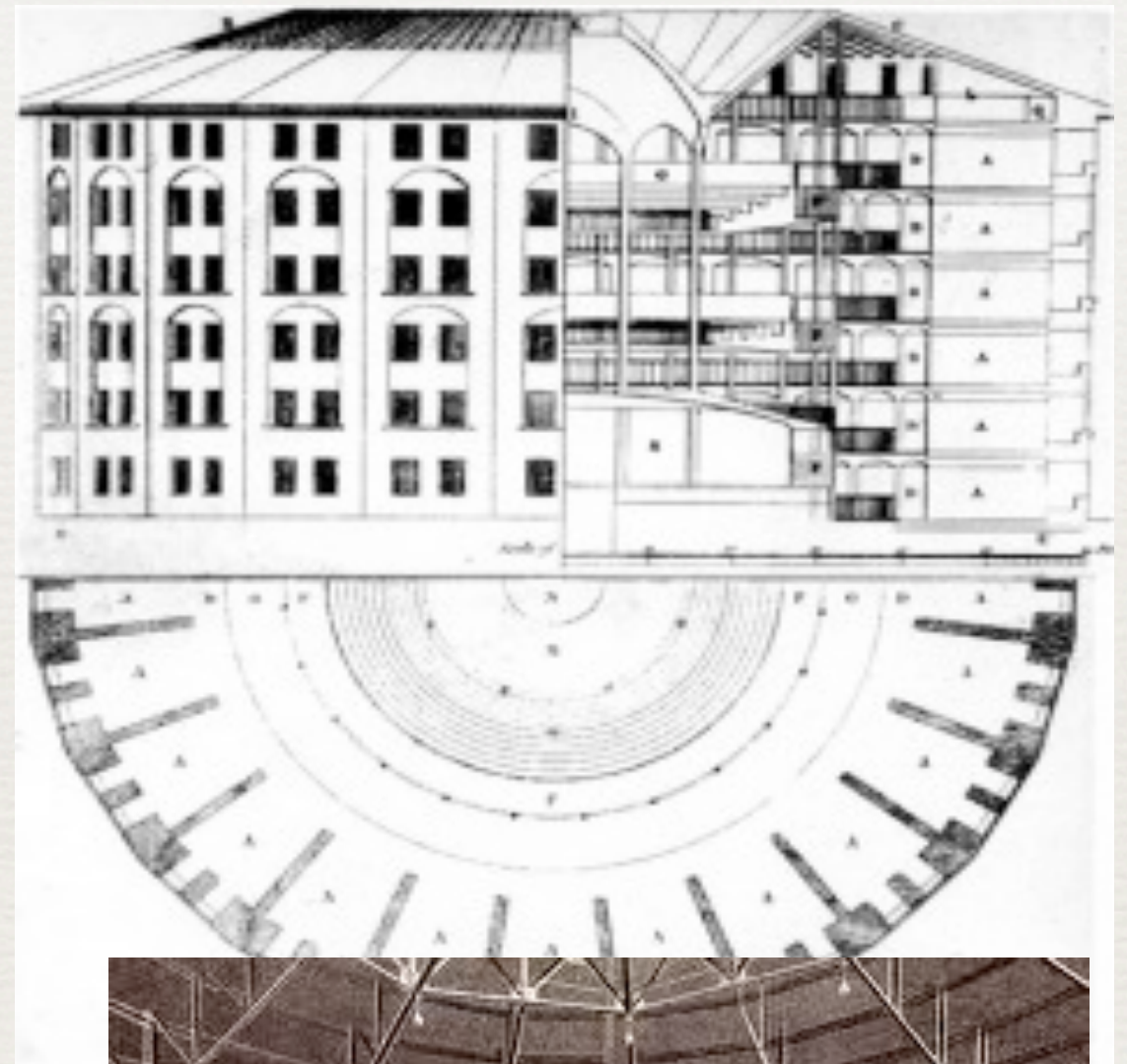
The 'How' of Power

- ◆ We are all regulated
- ◆ How power operates
 - ◆ Strategies, networks and mechanisms
- ◆ How major shifts in exercising power had occurred
- ◆ It is only by asking the 'how' of power, that we can get to the 'who'
- ◆ Bureaucracy, categorisation, discourse
- ◆ How is power dispersed?



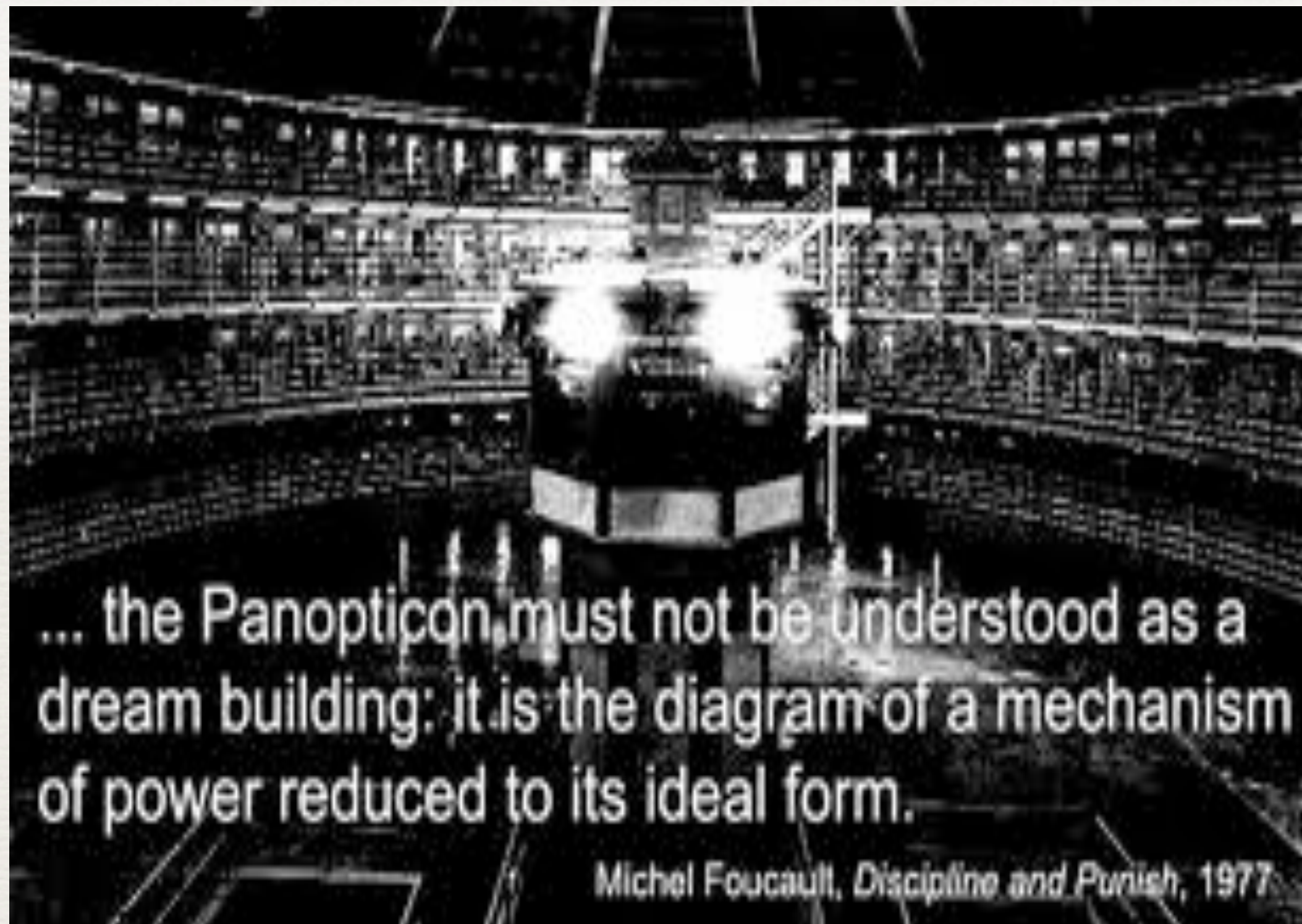
Bentham's Panopticon (1785)

- ◆ Metaphor for power relations
- ◆ All-seeing gaze
 - ◆ Marked yet masked
- ◆ Prisoners assume that they are being watched
- ◆ Begin to self-discipline
- ◆ Internalization
- ◆ 'Docile Bodies'



- ♦ Number of people controlled v decreasing number needed to operate it
- ♦ Disciplines are techniques that ensure the ordering of human masses
- ♦ Tactics of power economic and invisible





... the Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building: it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form.

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 1977

Foucault (1976)

- ♦ “The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we have the production of an important phenomenon, the emergence, or rather the invention, of a new mechanism of power possessed of highly specific procedural techniques, completely novel instruments, quite different apparatuses, and which is also, [were] incompatible with the relations of sovereignty”.



Foucault (1976)

- ✦ “This new mechanism of power is more dependent upon bodies and what they do than upon the Earth and its products. It is a mechanism of power which permits time and labour, rather than wealth and commodities, to be extracted from bodies”.

Foucault (1976)

- ♦ “It presupposes a tightly knit grid of material coercions rather than the physical existence of a sovereign. It is ultimately dependent upon the principle, which introduces a genuinely new economy of power, that one must be able simultaneously both to increase the subjected forces and to improve the force and efficacy of that which subjects them”.

Foucault (1976)

- ✦ “This new type of power, which can no longer be formulated in terms of sovereignty, is, I believe, one of the **great inventions of bourgeois society**.
- ✦ It has been a fundamental instrument in the constitution of industrial capitalism and of the type of society that is its accompaniment. This **non-sovereign power**, which lies outside the form of sovereignty, is **disciplinary power**.

Docile Bodies

- ♦ Foucault looks at:
 - ♦ Historical conditions
 - ♦ Create certain subjectivities
 - ♦ Power is not an external force
 - ♦ A set of relations that constitute the subject but do not fully determine the subject
 - ♦ Body is acted upon, regulated, supervised, arranged subject of political technology

Barad (2007, 2000)

- ♦ “In Discipline and Punish, Foucault explains that the proliferation of what he variously calls "apparatuses of observation," "apparatuses of production," and "disciplinary apparatuses" is related to the eighteenth-century development of new technologies. Of particular noteworthiness is the panopticon as an observing instrument for the new human sciences and its role in the **dispersion of power** through the shaping and disciplining of docile bodies. Through this technology of examination and individualization, this "political technology of the body," a new "microphysics of power" emerges: power evolves historically from acting as an external force on the individual to its more contemporary form, in which power is exercised through individual bodies. **Disciplinary power orders the body**, fixes and constrains movement. Foucault explains that "this technology is diffuse, rarely formulated in continuous, systematic discourse; it is often made up of bits and pieces; it implements a disparate set of tools or methods. In spite of the coherence of its results, it is generally no more than a multiform instrumentation" (Foucault 1977, 26). **Disciplinary power is exercised through various apparatuses**. It "link[s] them together, extending them and above all making it possible to **bring the effects of power** to the most minute and distant elements" (216).”

Barrett (1992, 139)

- ♦ Marx: a product of his time
- ♦ Foucault encourages us to recognise the historical conditions in which Marxism emerged as a discourse
 - ♦ This is subversive
- ♦ Sheridan: 'Marxist thought confined to an *episteme* that is coming to an end'

Summary

- ♦ Historical conditions that create certain subjectivities
- ♦ Power is not an external force
- ♦ Power is a set of relations that constitute but do not fully determine the subject

Summary

- ♦ Foucault's theoretical position opens up possibilities of resistance
- ♦ By asking the 'how' can get to the 'who'

- ♦ A few further points for you to consider...

Foucault & Regulatory Power

- ◆ Micro-operations and technologies of power
- ◆ As a critique of Marx and the dominance of economic power
- ◆ Not held by agencies
 - ◆ Power is exercised not possessed
- ◆ Incorporated into numerous practices
- ◆ Capillary network

Foucault

- ❑ Power is conceived as being continuously produced and everywhere engendered through a capillary network of relations.
- ❑ Power is productive and relational, instead of being held and asserted by some over others.
- ❑ Opens up the possibility for spaces of resistance, agency and contestation
- ❑ Knowledge plays a pivotal role as citizens are categorised in ways that facilitate, primarily state, intervention through a range of normalizing mechanisms