

ROUTLEDGE *Critical* THINKERS

Michel  
Foucault

Sara Mills

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# MICHEL FOUCAULT

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In texts such as *Madness and Civilisation* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault established himself as one of the most important figures in the theoretical revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. His influence only grew with later publications and even after his death in 1984, debate continues to rage around his work.

This volume is a refreshingly accessible guide to Foucault's most influential ideas, their contexts and the ways in which they have been put to use by a variety of critics. Examining such key concepts as power, discourse, knowledge, sexuality, subjectivity and madness, Sara Mills guides readers through the theoretical work that underpins so many disciplinary fields today. She also provides a work-by-work guide to Foucault's major texts and an annotated list of further reading, to fully equip those planning to engage with his work at a more advanced level. This volume, crucially, considers how readers new to Foucault's work might integrate some of his approaches to analysis and apply his work to their own studies.

*Michel Foucault* has been written with students of literature in mind, but its relevance, like that of Foucault's remarkable work, extends far beyond literary studies. For anyone seeking to understand Foucault and the complex debates engendered by his work, this volume is the essential first step.

**Sara Mills** is Research Professor at Sheffield Hallam University. She has published on feminism, post-colonial theory and linguistics and is the author of *Discourse*, a highly successful volume in Routledge's New Critical Idiom series.

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# MICHEL FOUCAULT

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TO JAN



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# SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

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The books in this series offer introductions to major critical thinkers who have influenced literary studies and the humanities. The *Routledge Critical Thinkers* series provides the books you can turn to first when a new name or concept appears in your studies.

Each book will equip you to approach a key thinker's original texts by explaining her or his key ideas, putting them into context and, perhaps most importantly, showing you why this thinker is considered to be significant. The emphasis is on concise, clearly written guides which do not presuppose a specialist knowledge. Although the focus is on particular figures, the series stresses that no critical thinker ever existed in a vacuum but, instead, emerged from a broader intellectual, cultural and social history. Finally, these books will act as a bridge between you and the thinker's original texts: not replacing them but rather complementing what she or he wrote.

These books are necessary for a number of reasons. In his 1997 autobiography, *Not Entitled*, the literary critic Frank Kermode wrote of a time in the 1960s:

On beautiful summer lawns, young people lay together all night, recovering from their daytime exertions and listening to a troupe of Balinese musicians. Under their blankets or their sleeping bags, they would chat drowsily about the gurus of the time. . . . What they repeated was largely hearsay; hence my

lunchtime suggestion, quite impromptu, for a series of short, very cheap books offering authoritative but intelligible introductions to such figures.

There is still a need for 'authoritative and intelligible introductions'. But this series reflects a different world from the 1960s. New thinkers have emerged and the reputations of others have risen and fallen, as new research has developed. New methodologies and challenging ideas have spread through the arts and humanities. The study of literature is no longer – if it ever was – simply the study and evaluation of poems, novels and plays. It is also the study of the ideas, issues and difficulties which arise in any literary text and in its interpretation. Other arts and humanities subjects have changed in analogous ways.

With these changes, new problems have emerged. The ideas and issues behind these radical changes in the humanities are often presented without reference to wider contexts or as theories which you can simply 'add on' to the texts you read. Certainly, there's nothing wrong with picking out selected ideas or using what comes to hand – indeed, some thinkers have argued that this is, in fact, all we can do. However, it is sometimes forgotten that each new idea comes from the pattern and development of somebody's thought and it is important to study the range and context of their ideas. Against theories 'floating in space', the *Routledge Critical Thinkers* series places key thinkers and their ideas firmly back in their contexts.

More than this, these books reflect the need to go back to the thinker's own texts and ideas. Every interpretation of an idea, even the most seemingly innocent one, offers its own 'spin', implicitly or explicitly. To read only books on a thinker, rather than texts by that thinker, is to deny yourself a chance of making up your own mind. Sometimes what makes a significant figure's work hard to approach is not so much its style or content as the feeling of not knowing where to start. The purpose of these books is to give you a 'way in' by offering an accessible overview of these thinkers' ideas and works and by guiding your further reading, starting with each thinker's own texts. To use a metaphor from the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), these books are ladders, to be thrown away after you have climbed to the next level. Not only, then, do they equip you to approach new ideas, but also they empower you, by leading you back to a theorist's own texts and encouraging you to develop your own informed opinions.

Finally, these books are necessary because, just as intellectual needs have changed, the education systems around the world – the contexts in which introductory books are usually read – have changed radically, too. What was suitable for the minority higher education system of the 1960s is not suitable for the larger, wider, more diverse, high technology education systems of the twenty-first century. These changes call not just for new, up-to-date, introductions but new methods of presentation. The presentational aspects of *Routledge Critical Thinkers* have been developed with today's students in mind.

Each book in the series has a similar structure. They begin with a section offering an overview of the life and ideas of each thinker and explain why she or he is important. The central section of each book discusses the thinker's key ideas, their context, evolution and reception. Each book concludes with a survey of the thinker's impact, outlining how their ideas have been taken up and developed by others. In addition, there is a detailed final section suggesting and describing books for further reading. This is not a 'tacked-on' section but an integral part of each volume. In the first part of this section you will find brief descriptions of the thinker's key works, then, following this, information on the most useful critical works and, in some cases, on relevant web sites. This section will guide you in your reading, enabling you to follow your interests and develop your own projects. Throughout each book, references are given in what is known as the Harvard system (the author and the date of a work cited are given in the text and you can look up the full details in the bibliography at the back). This offers a lot of information in very little space. The books also explain technical terms and use boxes to describe events or ideas in more detail, away from the main emphasis of the discussion. Boxes are also used at times to highlight definitions of terms frequently used or coined by a thinker. In this way, the boxes serve as a kind of glossary, easily identified when flicking through the book.

The thinkers in the series are 'critical' for three reasons. First, they are examined in the light of subjects which involve criticism: principally literary studies or English and cultural studies, but also other disciplines which rely on the criticism of books, ideas, theories and unquestioned assumptions. Second, studying their work will provide you with a 'tool kit' for informed critical reading and thought, which will heighten your own criticism. Third, these thinkers are critical because they are crucially important: they deal with ideas and questions

which can overturn conventional understandings of the world, of texts, of everything we take for granted, leaving us with a deeper understanding of what we already knew and with new ideas.

No introduction can tell you everything. However, by offering a way into critical thinking, this series hopes to begin to engage you in an activity which is productive, constructive and potentially life-changing.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Tony Brown for discussing Foucault's ideas with me, and remaining sufficiently sceptical about the grandiose claims of critical theory. Thanks are also due to undergraduate and research students at Sheffield Hallam University for approaching Foucault's work with great openness and critical awareness, and drawing attention to what is complex and what is useful in Foucault's work. Robert Eaglestone has been a thoughtful and attentive editor.

I know, considering how each person hopes and believes he puts something of 'himself' into his own discourse, when he takes it upon himself to speak, how intolerable it is to cut up, analyse, combine, recompose all these texts so that now the transfigured face of their author is never discernible. So many words amassed, so many marks on paper offered to numberless eyes, such zeal to preserve them beyond the gesture which articulates them, such a piety devoted to conserving them in human memory – after all this, must nothing remain of the poor hand which traced them, of that disquiet which sought its calm in them, of that ended life which had nothing but them for its continuation? . . . By speaking I do not exorcise my death, but establish it; or rather . . . I suppress all interiority and yield my utterance to an outside which is so indifferent to my life, so *neutral* that it knows no difference between my life and my death.

(Foucault 1991a/1968: 71)



# WHY FOUCAULT?

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Michel Foucault (1926–1984) continues to be one of the most important figures in critical theory. His theories have been concerned largely with the concepts of power, knowledge and discourse, and his influence is clear in a great deal of post-structuralist, post-modernist, feminist, post-Marxist and post-colonial theorising. The impact of his work has also been felt across a wide range of disciplinary fields, from sociology and anthropology to English studies and history. However, the iconoclastic and challenging nature of Foucault's theoretical work has meant that his ideas have not simply been accommodated. Instead, they have caused heated – and very productive – debate from the 1960s and 1970s, when he emerged as a key theorist, through to the present.

His work, in books such as *Madness and Civilisation* (1967) and *Discipline and Punish* (1975), can be seen as a historical analysis of social conditions; in the first book, for example, he analyses the development of the distinction between madness and reason, and in the second, he traces the changes that there have been in the way that societies punish those they consider to be criminals. However, his work is not simply concerned to analyse social conditions, but is, at the same time, an analysis of the bases on which we think about analysing social conditions. By that I mean that, because he thinks that the way we approach analysis determines, to a great extent, what we find out and what we



can know, in some sense, we must of necessity analyse the perspectives we take on the subject we are analysing, when we undertake an analysis of those social conditions. Thus, his work is not only, for example, an analysis of the difference between madness and reason, but it is also an analysis of the way that we think about insanity and the lengths to which each society goes to regulate the distinction and keep that conceptual distinction in place.

His work has proved disconcerting for many, since he does not offer a simple political analysis. In a way, he seems to be gesturing towards an emancipatory politics, at the same time as undercutting any possibility of such a position. As Charles Taylor puts it:

certain of Foucault's most interesting historical analyses, while they are highly original, seem to lie along already familiar lines of critical thought. That is, they seem to offer an insight into what has happened, and into what we have become, which at the same time offers a critique, and hence some notion of a good unrealised or repressed in history, which we therefore understand better how to rescue. But Foucault himself repudiates this suggestion. He dashes the hope, if we had one, that there is some good we can *affirm*, as a result of the understanding these analyses give us. And by the same token, he seems to raise the question whether there is such a thing as a way out. This is rather paradoxical, because Foucault's analyses seek to bring *evils* to light; and yet he wants to distance himself from the suggestion which would seem inescapably to follow, that the negation or overcoming of these evils promotes a good.

(Taylor 1986: 69)

Thus, Foucault critically analyses subjects such as: the differences in the way that societies administer punishment (in *Discipline and Punish* (1975)), the categorisation in the nineteenth century of certain women as suffering from hysteria (in *History of Sexuality, Vol. I* (1976)), or the way that homosexuality has been viewed in different societies and at different periods (in *History of Sexuality, Vol. II* (1984)). This critical analysis might lead us to assume that he is approaching analysis with a firm sense of critique, a fully worked out political manifesto, arguing for social change. However, his analysis does not offer us a simple position of critique and those who approach his work in the hope of finding a clear political agenda will be disappointed and will find that Foucault, instead, asks us to question more thoroughly our own sense of the solidity of our political position.

There are many other contradictions in Foucault's work, and it is not the intention of this book to minimise this difficulty in order to represent him as a great critical thinker. It is in the nature of critical thinking that there will be elements which are seen to be contradictions by future thinkers: these contradictions form the basis on which to ground new directions in theoretical work. In fact, Foucault himself was conscious of areas of difficulty in his work and often returned to these questions in order to try to think them through further. In an interview in 1983, he responds to the charge that his refusal to be restricted to one particular type of theoretical position detracts from his work, by saying: 'when people say "Well, you thought this a few years ago and now you say something else", my answer is "Well, do you think I have worked [like a dog] all those years to say the same thing and not be changed?"' (Foucault 1988b: 14). Thus, he sees the changing of a position, the rethinking of past work, as an essential part of the development of his thinking; he certainly does not consider that the progression of one's thought should follow a straightforward trajectory where the author moves from immaturity to maturity and develops and improves on his ideas in a linear fashion. But he does consider it important to be extremely critical of one's own position and not assume that one has ever reached a position where one has discovered the final 'truth' about a subject.

It is, perhaps, the contradictions in his work which have sparked off most debate and most productive critical thinking. For example, his complex and contradictory definitions of the term 'discourse', which will be discussed in Chapter 3, have forced many theorists to define their terms more carefully, and theorists drawing on terms such as 'ideology' have had to make their position clear on the relationship they perceive between discourse and ideology. However, Foucault cannot be reduced to his work on discourse, and it is his wide-ranging lateral thinking on subjects as diverse as the structural features and functions of institutions, the way that our conceptions of knowledge, sanity, madness, discipline and sexuality are maintained and kept in circulation by institutions and by society as a whole, which makes his work of interest to a large number of researchers and students. His iconoclastic approach to disciplinary boundaries and his refusal to be pigeonholed is very appealing to many. In an interview in 1983, he argues 'in France you ha[ve] to be, as a philosopher, a Marxist or a phenomenologist or a structuralist, and I adhere to none of these

dogmas' (Foucault 1988b: 8). Characterising these positions as constraining dogmas may be liberating for many who have found that adopting a theoretical position can be a little like joining a religious group or political party, which demands total and unthinking acceptance of a set of ideas or beliefs. We could, however, see this as an overstatement by Foucault, since these political and theoretical positions can be seen rather as simply productive frameworks and tools for creative critical thought. Nevertheless, it is this quality of always surpassing and pushing against the traditional disciplinary boundaries which makes Foucault's work interesting to a wide number of people who feel constrained by the notion of working strictly within the frameworks of their own subject area.

His work has also been drawn on by a wide range of readers because he has managed to attempt to theorise without using the notions of the *subject* and the *economic*: both terms which have been foundational for psychoanalytical theory and Marxist and materialist theory, which together dominated intellectual life at the time that Foucault was writing. The reliance on notions such as the subject or the economic, and also notions such as woman and man, has been seen by many as *essentialism*, an assumption that there are firm foundations for concepts or differences, for example, sexual or racial difference. Foucault has tried to move away from the notion of the subject, that is, he has attempted to think about the forms that human societies take without rooting his analysis in the examination of individuals. He has also tried to move away from the notion of the economic, in that he has analysed social forces without assuming that the ownership of property and the accumulation of capital are the most important elements in any analysis. He does not suggest that the subject and the economy do not play an important role in the way society is organised but, rather, he is interested in not reducing analysis to the importance of one particular feature, which it is assumed is stable. He wants to analyse without drawing on these concepts which have played such an important function in much previous theoretical work. What he is doing is focusing on the way that the subject or the self and the economic are both concepts which are, despite their seeming self-evident nature, in fact, relatively unstable. He argues that these concepts have changed over time, that whatever concepts that we use have a history and motivation for their use and that they must themselves be interrogated.

Perhaps the most interesting part of Foucault's work and one which approximates most closely to a consistent way of approaching analysis is his scepticism. In some senses, Foucault's radical scepticism is part of a more general philosophical and political querying, in the 1960s and 1970s, of those elements which had been taken to be common-sense and which began to be seen as profoundly ideological. While many Marxist critics at the time, such as Louis Althusser (1918–1990), analysed particular concepts and forms of behaviour in everyday life and subjected them to critical analysis, Foucault extended this type of enquiry to the human sciences themselves, the very tools and methods which were generally used in the analysis of everyday life. What appeals to many people in Foucault's work is this almost Zen-like pushing to the limits of what it is possible to say, challenging each element and concept within our theoretical frameworks which we use in order to think.

Together with this scepticism is a concern to think laterally about subjects; this often involves the use of radical reversals and a critique of that knowledge which can be characterised as common-sense. Thus, like many Marxist theorists, such as Louis Althusser, he questions the type of knowledge which we assume that everyone would accept as self-evidently true (Althusser 1984). So, rather than accepting the common-sense view that people who were classified as insane were incarcerated because of a fear that they might harm themselves or others, and in order that they could be treated and cured, in *Madness and Civilisation* (1967), Foucault focuses on the way that the notion of madness performed an essential role in the construction of reason. Rather than accepting that the repression of sexuality during the Victorian period induced a silence around questions of sexual expression, in fact Foucault shows in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I* (1976) that it brought about a proliferation of discourses about sexuality and brought about the 'transforming [of] sex into discourse' (Foucault 1986b). And finally, instead of considering that language simply reflects an underlying reality, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) he asserts that discourse determines the reality that we perceive. While many have seen these aphoristic reversals as a simplification of very complex problems, they have proved instructive to many people in trying to analyse the past without imposing on it our own concerns and stereotypical views. His work involves this, sometimes quite uncomfortable, change of view in relation to familiar notions. However, that is not to

say that it is impossible to say anything. Rather, Foucault tries to map out the type of analysis that it is possible to undertake once one has dispensed with all certainties and foundations.

Perhaps one of the more endearing elements in Foucault's work, and one which is singularly lacking in much other theoretical work, is his curiosity. One comes to feel that Foucault was a person driven to question why certain fields of experience are represented in the way that they are. When he tried to formulate what motivated him to write he said:

it was curiosity – the only kind of curiosity . . . that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy; not the kind of curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself. After all, what would be the value of passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another . . . in the knower's straying afield of himself? There are times in one's life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all.

(Foucault 1985: 8)

It is through this almost child-like compulsion to ask difficult questions that Foucault tries to discover more instructive ways of seeing those things which we often consider in our society to be self-evident.

In critical theory, there is often a sense that one has to adopt or align oneself with a particular theorist and, in the process of drawing on their work, one defines oneself as a particular type of person. Thus, using someone's theoretical work is not just a question of being interested in their ideas but also about representing oneself to others. From the 1970s onwards, Foucault has been very much the theorist who was adopted by those on the Left who wished to espouse a radical politics and also by those who wished to represent themselves as iconoclastic. Many theorists and critics have used Foucault's ideas as a way of approaching a subject rather than as a set of principles or rules; as the geographer Daniel Clayton states: 'there are thinkers who you think with to such an extent that they become part of you but are barely mentioned by name. For me that thinker is Foucault' (Clayton 2000: xiv). A further feature of his work which contributes to its popularity is the fact that he does not develop one, fully thought-out theory but,

instead, tries to think through ways of thinking without the constraints of a systematised structure. He encourages readers to make what they can of his work rather than feeling that they ought to follow what he has written slavishly; in an interview in *Le Monde* in 1975, he states:

a book is made to be used in ways not defined by its writer. The more, new, possible or unexpected uses there are, the happier I shall be . . . All my books are little tool-boxes. If people want to open them, to use this sentence or that idea as a screwdriver or spanner to short-circuit, discredit systems of power, including eventually those from which my books have emerged . . . so much the better.

(Foucault, cited in Patton 1979: 115)

There are obviously serious problems with this approach to theory, attractive though it is to many of us who would simply like an illustrative quotation from Foucault to justify our argument. Not least of these is the fact that, if his books can be used for anything, and if sentences can be taken out of context in order to support whatever argument the reader wishes, there is no sense in which Foucault's theoretical work is any different from any statement which could be made by anyone, without having considered a particular issue at a theoretical level, that is at a level of higher abstraction. Nor is there any reason why Foucault's work could not be used to justify fascism or to deny the existence of the Holocaust.

These remarks about the complexity and contradictory nature of his work should make us cautious about the possibility of 'using' Foucault in any simple way. As I argue more fully in the conclusion to this book, we need also to be careful about the notion of 'applying' Foucault's work. One potential problem is the fact that Foucault is a very androcentric, or male-oriented, thinker. This problem of a sexist focus in his work cannot be solved simply by adding women to his analysis; analysing his androcentrism means that the reader of Foucault's work is forced to fundamentally reconsider the way in which his focus on men alone skews some of the insights which he has to offer. Thus, we should not assume that Foucault has all of the answers to our own theoretical problems; we should draw on his work as a resource for thinking, without slavish adherence, and we should also be very aware of Foucault's weaknesses and theoretical blindspots.



# KEY IDEAS

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# FOUCAULT'S INTELLECTUAL AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

This chapter sets Foucault's intellectual and political development in the context of the wider developments in France during the early part of Foucault's career, since there is an interesting dialectical relationship between his ideas and the political and intellectual climate: the events of 1968 had a crucial defining impact on Foucault's thinking and Foucault played a major role in events and in the focus of theoretical work of the time. However, I imagine that taking the text of Foucault's life or the text of a history of the events of 1968 and bringing them to bear in the task of making sense of his theoretical texts would have seemed to Foucault to be a laughable endeavour. In his essay 'What is an author?', Foucault argues that: 'the task of criticism is not to bring out the work's relationship with the author, but rather to analyse the work through its structure, its architecture, its intrinsic form, and the play of its internal relationships' (Foucault 1986: 102). However, Foucault himself commented on the way that he focused on particular subjects, not simply because they were theoretically interesting to him, but because these subjects resonated with something from his personal experience: 'Whenever I have tried to carry out a piece of theoretical work, it has been on the basis of my own experience, always in relation to processes I saw taking place around me. It is because I thought I could recognise in the things I saw, in the institutions with which I dealt, in my relations with others, cracks, silent

shocks, malfunctioning . . . that I undertook a particular piece of work, a few fragments of autobiography' (Foucault, cited in Eribon 1991: 28–29). Therefore, in drawing on biographical material about Foucault, I do not wish to construct a solid figure of Michel Foucault and attribute to him 'a "deep" motive, a "creative power" or a "design"', almost as if he were a fully rounded character in a novel (Foucault 1986: 110). I recognise that in focusing on the details of his life as they have been reconstructed by others, 'these aspects of an individual which we designate as making him an author are only a projection, in more or less psychologising terms, of the operations that we force texts to undergo, the connections that we make, the traits that we establish as pertinent, the continuities that we recognise, or the exclusions that we practice' (Foucault 1986: 110). Nevertheless, there are instances where, for pedagogic and explanatory reasons, using certain biographical details and details of social history can help to make Foucault's work accessible and can help us to understand his work better, without reifying this collection of events which we have labelled 'the life of Michel Foucault'. I, therefore, endeavour in this section to avoid imposing a simple cause-and-effect relationship on events in Foucault's life and the emphases of certain of his texts but, rather, I try to present Foucault's works as emerging from a relationship with, and reaction to, a complex series of tendencies and conflicts in intellectual and political life in France at this period. For those studying Foucault who are not familiar with the events of 1968, there are elements within his work which may seem troubling or difficult to understand, (for example, his relation to Marxism, his own political position and his relation to his own homosexuality). By examining the social context of intellectuals in Paris at this time, it is possible to understand what was 'available' to Foucault as possible forms of behaviour and possible forms of thinking with which he could negotiate and which he could also challenge. But first it is useful to bear in mind a brief outline of Foucault's career from the outset.

He was born in Poitiers, France in 1926. Although most of his academic training was in philosophy, after his first degree he trained for a higher degree in psychology and a diploma in pathological psychology. He was employed as a university lecturer in philosophy and in psychology and also as a teacher of French literature and language when he worked overseas. He worked at universities and cultural centres in Uppsala, Sweden (1954); in Warsaw, Poland (1958) and in Hamburg,

Germany (1959). In the same year he became the head of philosophy at Clermont-Ferrand University, France. He completed his doctorat-d'état (PhD) on madness and reason and published it as *Madness and Civilisation* in 1961. In the following year, he published a book on the work of the poet Raymond Roussel, and in 1963 he published *The Birth of the Clinic*. In 1966, he moved to Tunisia to teach, returning to France to become the head of philosophy at Vincennes University. In 1969 he published *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and in 1970 he became chair of the History of Systems of Thought at the Collège de France. In 1975 he published *Discipline and Punish* and in 1976 he began the publication of the three-volume *History of Sexuality*; he died in 1984. As can be seen from the wide-ranging subjects which Foucault analysed, his work is not easy to pin down. His work reflects the background of intellectual and political activism against which it developed, but it also played a significant part in the process of transformation.

The 1960s and 1970s was a crucial period for Foucault and other radical intellectuals in France and Europe as a whole. It is therefore necessary to describe the events which took place at this time and throughout the 1970s to set Foucault's thought and his political activities in context. It is also important to consider the context of Foucault's ideas in order to see that, in many cases, Foucault acted as a conduit for anti-authoritarian and radical ideas. The Marxist historian, Chris Harman, stresses that 1968 was not, as is often thought, simply the year in which a series of student demonstrations took place in Paris, nor was 1968 simply a year when 'hippie' fashions and ways of living and thinking became especially prominent; instead:

1968 was a year in which revolt shook at least three major governments and produced a wave of hope among young people living under many others. It was the year the peasant guerrillas of one of the world's smaller nations stood up to the mightiest power in human history. It was the year the black ghettos of the United States rose in revolt to protest at the murder of the leader of non-violence, Martin Luther King. It was the year the city of Berlin suddenly became the international focus for a student movement that challenged the power blocs which divided it. It was the year teargas and billy clubs were used to make sure the US Democratic Party convention would select a presidential candidate who had been rejected by voters in every primary. It was the year Russian tanks rolled into Prague to displace a 'Communist' government that had made concessions to popular pressure. It was the year that the Mexican

government massacred more than 100 demonstrators in order to ensure that the Olympic Games would take place under 'peaceful' conditions. It was the year that protests against discrimination in Derry and Belfast lit the fuse on the sectarian powder keg of Northern Ireland. It was, above all, the year that the biggest general strike ever paralysed France and caused its government to panic.

(Harman 1998: vii)

In many other countries, Chile, India, Brazil and Palestine, the events which took place in France had a profound effect in political terms in the following years. Although this characterisation of 1968 may be seen by some as overly Marxist and internationalist, it does reflect the real impact of the events on political thinking and activity globally.

During the early 1960s, there was an anti-authoritarian tendency in much political thinking of the time among those who found themselves opposed to the status quo or to the current political regimes, and these ideas gained currency among a wider group of people and began to be drawn on in a general critique of American neo-imperial policy abroad and profound racism in Europe and America. This critique also made its presence felt in terms of the analysis of the more mundane, but perhaps equally important, events of everyday life, such as who lectures to whom in universities and who does the washing up at home, where the personal becomes the political. Foucault sees this shift towards a widening of the definition of politics as significant and he states in 1969 in an interview: 'The boundary of politics has changed, and subjects like psychiatry, confinement and the medicalisation of a population have become political problems' (Foucault, cited in Macey 1994: 217). All of those who protested, even in a minor way, against repression of political activism in the French universities were categorised as being part of this sub-culture or counter-culture which the beatniks and hippies represented with their open rejection of bourgeois values and materialism. There were many anti-war protests, most notably against the American presence in Vietnam. It is against this background of intellectual questioning and political activism that Foucault's work developed, informed by the same radical thinking about common-sense categories, values, policies and forms of behaviour. Foucault's works were bought by large numbers of students and academics, since they seemed to articulate this radical thinking, taking issue with all

established ways of thinking and behaving and they provided a framework for thinking about questions of power which were the focus of this larger scale political interrogation.

One of the questions which often dogs critics is about Foucault's political position, partly because Foucault's writings on the subject are so contradictory. Foucault joined the French Communist Party in 1950, like many intellectuals at the time. However, he left the party soon after, along with many others who were disillusioned by the party's doctrinaire stance and also by its support for the Soviet regime after its invasion of Hungary in 1956. The Party also condemned homosexuality as a bourgeois vice. From the moment he left the Party, Foucault became violently anti-Communist.

Foucault's relation to Marxism is complex and should be disentangled from his largely antagonistic and critical relations with the French Communist Party. Indeed, what Foucault argues for is 'an unburdening and liberation of Marx in relation to party dogma which has constrained it' (Foucault 1988c: 45). At many times, Foucault acknowledges his debt to Marxist thought and there are many elements within his work which suggest the profound influence of Marxist analyses of power relations and the role of economic inequality in determining social structures. But equally, just as strong is the sense of Foucault reacting against much Marxist thought. Fundamentally, it is the purely economic and State-centred focus which Foucault distanced himself from, stressing that power needs to be reconceptualised and the role of the State, and the function of the economic, need a radical revisioning. He should, perhaps, best be seen as negotiating with a Marxist framework of analysis which could no longer be applied in any simple way to the more complex social structures of France in the 1960s and 1970s; as he said: 'Marxism exists in nineteenth century thought as a fish exists in water; that is, it ceases to breathe anywhere else' (Foucault 1970: 274).

There has been a great deal of discussion among theorists about the nature and extent of Foucault's political engagement. He himself does not seem to have felt it necessary to have a fully worked-out political position, since in some ways it was precisely this sense of having to hold to a party line which he was reacting against: 'I think I have, in fact, been situated in most of the squares on the political checkerboard, one after another and sometimes simultaneously: as anarchist, leftist, ostentatious or disguised Marxist, explicit or secret

anti-Marxist, technocrat in the service of Gaullism, new liberal, etc. . . . It's true, I prefer not to identify myself and that I'm amused by the diversity of the ways I've been judged and classified' (Foucault, cited in Macey 1994: xix). Such a sceptical apolitical stance is easily criticised on the grounds that it is simply radicalism pushed to the extreme of nihilism: Walzer has categorised Foucault's political activity as that of 'infantile leftism . . . that is less an endorsement than an outrunning of the most radical argument in any political struggle' (Walzer 1986: 51). Bartky also criticises Foucault for the essentially negative critical position which he adopts, which she suggests comes close to pessimism (Bartky, cited in Sawicki 1998: 97). However, in a journal article in 1968, Foucault describes his notion of a progressive politics in contradistinction to other forms of politics (such as, one might assume, Marxism):

A progressive politics is a politics which recognises the historical and specified conditions of a practice, whereas other politics recognise only ideal necessities, univocal determinations and the free interplay of individual initiatives. A progressive politics is a politics which defines, within a practice, possibilities for transformation and the play of dependencies between those transformations, whereas other politics rely upon the uniform abstraction of change or the thaumaturgic presence of genius.

(Foucault, cited in Macey 1994: 195)

Thus, rather than seeing a politics as being centred around individual great leaders who have utopian visions of the future, which entail the adoption of a set of beliefs by their followers, Foucault is more concerned to develop and describe a politics which takes account of the transformative possibilities within the present.

It is clear from this attempt to formulate a progressive politics that he is not apolitical but simply committed to seeing politics from a broader perspective than that which sees politics as solely concerned with party politics. Indeed, the nature of a progressive politics is something which exercised Foucault greatly; he asks:

Is progressive politics tied . . . to the themes of meaning, origin, the constituent subject, in short to all the themes which guarantee in history the inexhaustible presence of a Logos, the sovereignty of a pure subject, the deep teleology of a primeval destination? Is progressive politics tied to such a form of analysis

– rather than to one which questions it? And is such politics bound to all the dynamic, biological, evolutionist metaphors that serve to mask the difficult problem of historical change – or on the contrary, to their meticulous destruction? And further: is there some necessary kinship between progressive politics and refusing to recognise discourse as anything more than a shallow transparency which shimmers for a moment at the margins of things and of thoughts, and then vanishes?

(Foucault 1991a: 64–65)

Here, Foucault seems to be trying to establish a basis for productive political activity without necessarily having to agree with a whole range of problematic assumptions about progress and the role of individuals in bringing about political change. It could be argued that a theorist who is interested in the analysis of the anonymous discontinuities in historical and political change is effectively downplaying the role of individuals in transforming society. However, Foucault should not be seen as completely negating the role of the individual in political change; all that he is trying to stress is that humans are not ‘the universal operator of all transformations’ (Foucault 1991a: 70).

What Foucault is attempting to do in his analysis of the political is to move away from abstract notions of the political and to ground the political more in local acts and interactions. However, this move does make the analysis of the operation of power relations more complex: ‘To say that “everything is political” is to recognise [the] omnipresence of relations of force and their immanence to a political field; but it is to set oneself the barely sketched task of unravelling this indefinite tangled skein’ (Foucault 1979c: 72). In a sense, what he is urging us to analyse is what we mean by the political; within his reconceptualisation of what constitutes the political ‘one can no longer accept the conquest of power as the aim of political struggle; it is rather a question of the transformation of the economy of power (and truth) itself’ (Patton 1979: 143).

While many have criticised Foucault for undermining the possibility of a grounded political position in his theoretical work, they acknowledge that during the 1960s and 1970s he was politically active (although some of them call into question the nature and effectiveness of his political interventions). At the end of 1968 he was appointed head of philosophy at the new experimental University of Vincennes, which became a hotbed of student political activity. Foucault seems to



have taken a rather active role in the unrest; his biographer, Didier Eribon, states: 'he had been seen with an iron rod in his hands, ready to do battle with militant Communists; he had been seen throwing rocks at the police' (Eribon 1991: 209). By 1970, the teaching in the philosophy department was criticised by the Minister of Education, since many of the titles of the courses taught contained the words 'Marxist-Leninist'. The Minister decided that the students from Vincennes would not be eligible to become secondary school teachers. The department was then criticised because it did not seem to be holding examinations in the conventional sense. After two years at Vincennes, Foucault left to go to the prestigious Collège de France.

The importance for him of those in dominated positions taking control is particularly evident in Foucault's involvement in setting up the Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons during the 1970s. This group, which consisted of intellectuals, activists and ex-prisoners from a broad political spectrum, tried to draw attention to the inhumane conditions within French prisons. In a classic Foucauldian aphorism, he argues in a press conference: 'They tell us that the prisons are overpopulated. But what if it were the population that were being overimprisoned?' (Foucault, cited in Macey 1994: 258). He wanted to bring about change in the prison structure, not by campaigning on behalf of prisoners as many liberal reformist groups had done before, but by opening up channels of communication for prisoners, so that they could speak for themselves. The group organised demonstrations, discussed conditions with prisoners' families outside prisons and circulated questionnaires to inmates and their families, publishing the results in reports. Foucault was arrested outside La Santé prison when he was distributing leaflets in 1971. The group ceased its activities once it seemed that prisoners' groups were sufficiently well organised. (This concern with punishment and incarceration is further explored in Foucault's book *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and also in his publication of *I, Pierre Rivière* (1973), the 'confession' of a murderer who admitted having killed members of his family.)

In addition to these political activities, he also supported a variety of political campaigns; when he lived and worked in Tunisia he expressed solidarity with the students who were on strike there in 1966 (Macey 1994: 191, 205). Foucault was in Tunisia at the time of the events in Paris in 1968, but he took a keen interest in the events. He returned to France to a teaching post at Vincennes in 1969 and

was arrested during one of the student occupations of the university (Macey 1994: 209). During 1971–1973, he took part in a large number of demonstrations against racism and the war in Vietnam and he signed numerous petitions. He also flew to Spain in 1975, as part of a delegation protesting against the execution of two members of the Basque separatist movement by the Spanish government; and he, along with other members of the group, was expelled from Spain. He also took part in campaigns on the treatment of Soviet dissidents and the Solidarity movement in Poland, and wrote about the revolutionary situation in Iran (unfortunately praising, as it turned out, the ‘wrong’ side) (Foucault 1988f). His acts of political critique did not only extend to those in power or those on the Right as, after his brief membership of the Communist party, he was vehemently anti-Communist.

While Foucault saw sexuality as a profoundly political issue and did write on homosexuality, particularly the sexual practices of males in ancient Greek society, many people have criticised Foucault for not being open about his sexuality and for not taking part in any of the gay rights struggles (Foucault 1978). This reluctance to admit to being homosexual is not surprising given that Foucault was forced to leave Poland because of a homosexual relationship, and was probably not offered a number of high-ranking posts because of his sexuality (Eribon 1991). However, it should be noted that in 1979 Foucault gave a lecture to a gay congress in Paris, and in 1982 he took part in a Gay Pride march in Toronto. There is a sense, however, in which, although engaged in the gay culture of the time, (he had a long-term male partner for the last 25 years of his life), he was also very critical of certain tendencies within gay culture. He wanted gay culture to invent ‘ways of relating, types of existence, types of exchanges between individuals which are really new and are neither the same as, nor superimposed on, existing cultural forms. If that’s possible then gay culture will be not only a choice of homosexuals for homosexuals. It would create relations that are, at a certain point, transferable to heterosexuals’ (Foucault, cited in Macey 1994: 367). He died of an AIDS-related illness in 1984 and has been frequently criticised for not being open about his illness; indeed a number of vicious rumours about Foucault’s sexual activities after he discovered he was HIV positive have circulated, notably that he wilfully infected others with HIV. (These stories do seem to be simply part of a fictional backlash response to homosexuality and bear little resemblance to reality.) It is very easy to judge

others' actions in the light of a change in the attitudes and actions of those suffering from AIDS-related illnesses, since coming out has become a much more common approach to the disease than it was in the 1980s. And this reluctance may well have had theoretical foundations: when he was criticised by Paul Aron for not 'coming out' about having AIDS, Didier Eribon asks 'was it not precisely the idea of "confession" that Foucault loathed? This loathing left its mark in all the effort expended in his last books to reject, refuse and defuse the order to say, to speak, to make someone speak' (Eribon 1991: 29–30).

It is interesting that, at the same time that Foucault seems to have adopted the classic role of the French intellectual involved in political struggles, he also advised the government on educational policy, sitting on the Fouchet Commission reviewing secondary and higher education in 1965–1966, and he was also invited to serve on a government commission on the reform of the penal code in 1976. At one time, Foucault was considered for appointment as assistant director of higher education in the Ministry of Education, but was turned down because of his homosexuality. It was also suggested that he could be the director of ORTF (Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision Française), the State-run television network. Thus, while he was considered to be a political radical, he was also very much developing his career and being considered for high-ranking administrative positions. He frequently used his position of authority within French society to bring to light political struggles. His engagement seems to be very much that of the 'specific intellectual', a term he developed to describe a new view of political activity whereby, rather than the intellectual assuming that s/he will lead the workers into revolution, the intellectual works within their own field of expertise to undermine oppressive regimes from within (Foucault 1977a). Foucault gives the example of nuclear scientists who criticise government policies in developing nuclear arms. Kritzman describes this form of activism in the following way: 'the analysis of political technologies – in which the intellectual works inside of institutions and attempts to constitute a new political ethic by challenging the institutional regime of the production of truth. Political activism therefore becomes the critical analysis of the conflicts within specific sectors of society without allowing the intellectual to engage with the charade of ideological hermeneutics' (Kritzman 1988: xix). He also drew attention to the intervention made by Dr Edith Rose, a medical psychiatrist, working in the prison at Toul, where there had been

revolts in the 1970s. She protested about the conditions in prisons; Foucault comments: 'She was inside a power system and rather than criticise its functioning, she denounced what has just happened, on a particular day, a particular place, under particular circumstances' (Foucault, cited in Eribon 1991: 231). Thus, Foucault exemplified this type of political activity of the 'specific intellectual', using his public position to draw attention to particular political campaigns, while rejecting the utopianism and constraining ideologies of most political parties.

As well as considering the political situation in France in the 1960s and 1970s it is also important to consider the intellectual climate. Macey argues that 'Foucault's life was also the intellectual life of France. There are few changes that are not reflected in his work, and there are few developments that he did not influence' (Macey 1994: 1). One of the things that is striking about French intellectual life of this period, and perhaps even now, is how much more receptive French culture is to philosophy: philosophy is an integral part of the secondary school syllabus and it plays a major role in general intellectual discussions. Philosophy books are published in print runs which can only be dreamed of in Britain. For example, in 1966, when Foucault published *The Order of Things*, the first print run of 3,000 was sold out within a week, the second print run of 5,000 sold out within six weeks, and the book was at the top of a non-fiction best-seller list (Macey 1994: 160). So far, 110,000 copies of this densely argued philosophical work have been sold (Eribon 1991: 156).

At the time that Foucault began to write, the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) still played a major role in French life and culture. Sartre was a politically committed philosopher who was a very active public figure, writing not only philosophical treatises, but also newspaper articles, novels and plays. In many ways, Sartre defined the parameters within which a politically motivated academic could act and influence public opinion. The philosophical position developed by Sartre, existentialism, is concerned with stressing personal experience and responsibility in a seemingly meaningless universe. Foucault was part of the generation who reacted against Sartrean existentialism, and who always, on a personal, political and philosophical level, had great difficulties coming to terms with Sartre. Foucault reacted to what he termed Sartre's 'philosophy of consciousness', since he characterised his own work as concerned to developed

a ‘philosophy of the concept’ (Macey 1994: 33). He also suggested that Sartre was concerned with the analysis of meaning while he was concerned with the analysis of system (Macey 1994: 170).

Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow see Foucault’s philosophical career as taking four stages: a stage where he was exploring the possibilities of Heideggerean thought; an archaeological or structuralist phase; a genealogical stage and, finally, a stage where he was concerned to develop a new model of ethics (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982). Foucault has been variously categorised as a structuralist, a post-structuralist, a post-modernist, a New Philosopher and also as someone who fits none of these categories easily – being rather a ‘non-historical historian, an anti-humanist human scientist, a counter-structuralist structuralist’ (Geertz, cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: iii). He is, thus, not someone who is easily pigeonholed in terms of his academic and theoretical concerns. Furthermore, Foucault’s relation to the intellectual conditions of his time are characterised far more by dissent and scepticism than by any passive notions of influence. However, I would like to consider the stages in the development of Foucault’s thought as this might help you to have an overall framework for understanding Foucault’s ideas, which I deal with in more detail in the individual chapters which follow.

The idea of discussing the development or progression of his career would have horrified Foucault, since he tried to make clear that these evolutionary concepts are fictional elements which one imposes on events within an author’s life after the fact. Human lives are far more random and lacking in cohesion. He argued in his essay ‘The death of the author’ that ‘the author is the principle of a certain unity of writing – all differences having to be resolved, at least in part, by the principles of evolution, maturation or influence. The author serves to neutralise the contradictions that may emerge in a series of texts’ (Foucault 1984: 111). I feel sure that he would have hated the notion that the disparate texts which he published were united under his name, since he argues: ‘how can one attribute several discourses to one and the same author?’ and he asserts on several occasions, in interviews, that books should be published anonymously (Foucault 1984: 110). He prefers, instead, to talk about the ‘author-function’ – that principle which unites the works of an author – rather than talking about the author as a person. Furthermore, in his work on the author he tried to move away from the notion of the oeuvre, seeing the very notion

of a completed set of ideas or concerns as fictional and primarily as a concept which is used by critics, commentators and educational institutions to make teaching, examining and critical commentary more manageable and easier to think about.

For these reasons, it is difficult to describe Foucault, perhaps more than any other theorist, within a developmental framework, progressing from a pre-structuralist to a structuralist and then a post-structuralist phase, for example. But we can see a certain focus in Foucault's work which he continually addresses and readdresses, circling back to consider issues which have surfaced in earlier works. From the point of view of readers of his work, this notion of a set of concerns which he circles around is important, not in order to impose on Foucault's work an imaginary cohesion, but to give some sense of larger discursive frameworks within which we can try to understand his work.

As I argued above, we can see that the political and social changes of the 1960s and 1970s had a major impact on Foucault politically and this marked also a major transition in his work. Before the 1960s his work was mainly focused on the analysis of the anonymous production of knowledges and discourse, for example in works such as *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, but after the 1960s, in works such as *The History of Sexuality*, (1976–1984) the internal structures of knowledge and discourse are seen to be produced through inter-relations of power and the effects of those power relations on individuals (see Chapters 2–4). It is at this point in his work that Foucault becomes more profoundly concerned with history. He turns from philosophy and psychology to historical analysis, or perhaps we can see that he tries to combine historical analysis with philosophical/psychological analysis, because, as Donnelly puts it, he sees the focus of history as a way of 'cleansing thought of its transcendental narcissism', and thus as a way of thinking about the present and the past without focusing on the progress of the liberal individual (Donnelly 1986: 16). Foucault's turn to history has not necessarily been applauded by historians, since he makes a very cavalier use of historical records and he is notoriously lax with his documentation and with his references. Furthermore, we might think that conventional history's aim is to offer an explanatory framework for events in the past, an aim which Foucault rejects. He uses historical methods to analyse the development of academic disciplines themselves and to show the triumphalism of their accounts of their own history: 'instead of treating the past as a prologue, as part

of an easily comprehensible, continuous series of events unfolding into the present, he tried to establish its radical otherness, its difference' (Donnelly 1986: 17). Thus, for Foucault, the past is not seen as inevitably leading up to the present, a view of history which renders the past banal; it is the very strangeness of the past which makes us able to see clearly the strangeness of the present.

This transition in Foucault's work from the analysis of impersonal, autonomous discourse to one focused on the workings of power is marked by a shift from a type of analysis which he terms 'archaeology' to one characterised as 'genealogy': his earlier works can be seen to be more concerned with archaeology and his later ones with genealogy. These terms, archaeology and genealogy, are the ones most associated with Foucauldian analysis. Archaeology can be regarded as the analysis of the system of unwritten rules which produces, organises and distributes the 'statement' (that, is the authorised utterance) as it occurs in an archive (that is, an organised body of statements). Foucault describes the archive as 'the general system of the formation and transformation of statements' (Foucault 1972: 130). (These terms 'statement' and 'archive' will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, as will the distinctions between archaeology and genealogy.) Kendall and Wickham describe archaeology in the following terms: 'Archaeology helps us to explore the networks of what is said, and what can be seen in a set of social arrangements: in the conduct of an archaeology, one finds out something about the visible in "opening up" statements and something about the statement in "opening up visibilities"' (Kendall and Wickham 1999: 25). In this sense, archaeological analysis can be seen as a historically-based study of what the discourses within the archive allow to be stated authoritatively. This archaeological analysis is a description of regular patterns within a discourse and is concerned to describe the way that statements are transformed into other statements and the way that they are considered to be distinct from others. Thus, this type of analysis is concerned with the relation between different statements, the way that they are grouped together and the conditions under which certain statements can emerge. Archaeological analysis is not interpretative; that is, it does not offer explanations of what happened in the past – it simply describes what happens and the discursive conditions under which it was possible for that to happen. As I show in the final chapter of this book, this lack of interpretation is another element of Foucault's

work which many find disconcerting and unsettling, and which many consequently simply ignore.

Genealogy is a development of archaeological analysis which is more concerned with the workings of power and with describing the 'history of the present'. It is a form of historical analysis which describes events in the past but without explicitly making causal connections: as Donnelly states: 'It may not satisfy a certain longing for explanations but that is exactly Foucault's intention, to starve that longing and provide only "documentation"' (Donnelly 1986: 24). Foucault's concern with genealogical analysis is not to focus on an 'analytics of truth' which he argues many philosophers in the past have done, that is, to analyse the conditions under which we might consider certain utterances or propositions to be agreed to be true. Rather, his concern is with an 'ontology of ourselves', that is, to turn that analytic gaze to the condition under which we, as individuals, exist and what causes us to exist in the way that we do (Foucault 1988a: 95). Kendall and Wickham argue that 'taken to its extreme, genealogy targets us, our "selves": it seems we are meant to see beyond the contingencies that have made each of us what we are in order that we might think in ways that we have not thought and be in ways that we have not been; it is a tool we might use on a quest for freedom' (Kendall and Wickham 1999: 30). Smart takes a slightly different slant on the differences between archaeological and genealogical analysis; he argues that: 'the archaeological investigations are directed to an analysis of the unconscious rules of formation which regulate the emergence of discourses in the human sciences. In contrast, the genealogical analyses reveal the emergence of the human sciences, their conditions of existence, to be inextricably associated with particular technologies of power embodied in social practices' (Smart 1985: 48).

There are theorists who argue that genealogy and archaeology are simply two aspects of one type of methodological approach. However, I feel that they can be usefully distinguished as, if not separate methodologies, then distinct perspectives. Kendall and Wickham argue that the distinction between these two approaches can be seen in the following terms: 'where archaeology provides us with a snapshot, a slice through a discursive nexus, genealogy pays attention to the processual aspects of the web of discourse – its ongoing character' (Kendall and Wickham 1999: 31). Foucault argues that: 'if we were to characterise it in two terms, then "archaeology" would be the appropriate



methodology of [the] analysis of local discursivities, and “genealogy” would be the tactics whereby, on the basis of the descriptions of these local discursivities, the subjected knowledges which were thus released would be brought into play’ (Foucault 1980a: 85).

As well as moving from an archaeological perspective to a genealogical form of analysis, from a focus on the workings of largely impersonal forces to the analysis of the intricate working-out of power relations, Foucault can also be seen to have moved from a structuralist to a post-structuralist phase. In his structuralist phase, Foucault was associated with many members of the *Tel Quel* (a literary theory journal) group, which included among others Roland Barthes (1915–1980), Julia Kristeva (1941– ), and Philippe Sollers (1936– ). Macey describes the *Tel Quel* group as that ‘literary Maoist group of thinkers who, perhaps more than any others, radicalised the role of literary and philosophical studies in the academy’ (Macey 1994: 151). With Barthes and Kristeva, he became part of that moment of intellectual questioning labelled structuralism, where theorists attempted to move away from concentrating on the genius of the individual creative writer to analyse the underlying structures of literary and non-literary texts. Rather than analysing the intentions of the writer in shaping the text, and assuming an exceptional creative power on the part of the author, structuralist critics turned away from the author, proclaiming that the author was dead. In her/his place, they argued that critics should focus on the text itself and the impersonal forces of discursive structures such as narrative which shaped the text, or critics should turn to the role of the reader in the process of making sense of texts (Barthes 1968; Foucault 1984). Indeed, humanism (that is, the belief that each individual is in essence distinct from others, and that the individual is the key to ways of making sense of phenomena), is one of the main focuses of Foucault’s theoretical ire. In an interview, Foucault argues that: ‘our task at the moment is to completely free ourselves from humanism and in that sense our work is political work . . . all regimes, East and West, smuggle shoddy goods under the banner of humanism . . . We must denounce these mystifications’ (Foucault, cited in Macey 1994: 171).

Thus, Foucault focused not on literary texts and the creativity of their authors, but rather on the anonymous underlying structures and rules of formation of discourse in general. As he says in his introduction to *The Order of Things*, where he analyses the discursive shifts

that have occurred through history and which manifest themselves in the regularities in particular types of interpretations across a range of sciences:

What I would like to do . . . is to reveal a positive unconscious of knowledge: a level that eludes the consciousness of the scientists and yet is part of scientific discourse, instead of disputing its validity and seeking to diminish its scientific nature. What was common to the natural history, the economics and the grammar of the Classical period was certainly not present to the consciousness of the scientist; of that part of it that was conscious was superficial, limited and almost fanciful . . . but unknown to themselves, the naturalist, economists, and grammarians employed the same rules to define the objects proper to their own study, to form their concepts, and objects of study, that I have tried to reveal, by isolating, as their specific locus, a level that I have called, somewhat arbitrarily perhaps, archaeological.

(Foucault 1970: xi)

Foucault moves away from the individual, towards the discovery of the ‘death of Man’, towards an analysis of the impersonal determining forces inherent in discourse itself, within what could be labelled his structuralist period. (We must be tentative when suggesting that Foucault was a structuralist, since his relationship with structuralism was always rather tenuous, and theorists such as Louis Althusser, Jacques Lacan (1901–1981), Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva and Michel Foucault who are generally taken to be structuralist can perhaps be seen as held together only by their negative relationship with liberal humanism rather than being united by a common philosophy.)

The anti-humanist work which Foucault engaged with in this period of structuralism is concerned not to trace the motivations and intentions of individuals but to uncover the workings of discourse over long periods of time. He traces through history the breaks in thinking or ‘discontinuities’ which occur at particular historical conjunctures; thus, he is not concerned with charting the importance of certain great thinkers, or trends in the history of ideas, but rather the moments when there are radical and shocking changes in direction in the way that phenomena are thought about and the ways that events are interpreted. In order to describe this global way of thinking about events and the general way in which discourse is organised, in *The Archaeology*

of *Knowledge* (1972), he developed the term ‘épistémé’, that is, the body of knowledge and ways of knowing which are in circulation at a particular moment. Foucault suggests that there is a significant break at the inauguration of the Classical and the modern periods, where he claims new ways of classifying and ordering information developed. Thus, like many other theorists at this time, Foucault is trying to develop a way of describing events and interpretation without drawing on humanist ideas of the individual. Many other theorists within psychoanalysis focused on the fractured self, rather than the cohesive self of humanism; others influenced by Marxism examined wider social groupings and institutions rather than the individual, since they considered focus on the individual to be a bourgeois concern. Foucault, however, tried to theorise without reference to the individual or subject, focusing at this phase of his thinking on the workings of anonymous discourses which he saw as operating largely under their own momentum and their own system of rules, outside the influence or control of mere humans.

For many theorists who worked within structuralism, the problems inherent in such a position which viewed events and phenomena as autonomous and as governed by internal rules and mechanisms, posed serious theoretical problems. The group of theorists, including Foucault, who found difficulty with structuralist ideas, is generally labelled post-structuralist. Post-structuralism consists of a diverse group of theorists, most notably the deconstructionist, Jacques Derrida (1930–) (who was Foucault’s student), Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan and Foucault, who reacted against structuralism and the whole notion of inherent structures. Post-structuralism was not united by any particular common theme or beliefs but rather simply by a reaction to the notion of the structure. In fact, Foucault and Derrida engaged in quite violent arguments, which resulted in Foucault dismissing Derrida’s work as ‘a minor pedagogy’ which privileged the authority of the critic (Foucault, cited in Eribon 1991: 121). In some ways, post-structuralism can be seen as the move to theorise without the notion of a centre, core or foundation. In this sense, Foucault’s work can be seen to move from a structuralist focus to a more post-structuralist phase, but in many ways, he cannot be seen as wholeheartedly adopting either of these theoretical positions.

## IMPACT OF FOUCAULT'S THINKING

Marxist and materialist thinking have changed immeasurably since the 1960s and since the disintegration of the Soviet regime and such events as the fall of the Berlin Wall during the 1980s. Furthermore, the criticism by many post-modernist thinkers of the notion of grand narratives (that is, the notion that it is possible to propose a utopian future which will be achieved by political action) has forced such models as Marxism, which have clear political goals and models of historical progress, to be reconceptualised. However, Foucault's thinking about the theoretical problems of models used by Marxism are of interest in order to be able to reconstruct a model of socialism which can be used to analyse the political problems of the twenty-first century. Foucault's thought 'enlarges the scope of rethinking many of the parameters of socialist struggles and their objectives – the "ends" of socialism – and this in a non-utopian way' (Minson 1986: 107).

Foucault has also been tremendously influential within the fields of post-colonial theory and feminist theory (Mills 1991; 1997). The latter is perhaps rather surprising since Foucault has often been thought of as a misogynist (Morris 1979: 152). However, many feminist theorists have found that Foucault's critical thinking is of use since:

Both [feminism and Foucault] identify the body as the site of power . . . both point to the local and intimate operations of power rather than focusing exclusively on the supreme power of the state. Both bring to the fore the crucial role of discourse in its capacity to produce and sustain hegemonic power and emphasise the challenges contained within marginalised and/or unrecognised discourses, and both criticise the ways in which Western humanism has privileged the experience of the Western masculine elite as it proclaims universals about truth, freedom and human nature.

(Diamond and Quinby 1988: x)

Thus, both Foucault and feminist thinkers have found it necessary to rethink the conceptual frameworks which underpin much of what is characterised as common-sense within society. The feminist Dorothy Smith, for example, in her work on the discursive construction and negotiation of both femininity and mental illness has used Foucault's thinking about discourse in order to examine the way that individuals negotiate with structures rather than simply submitting to them (Smith 1990).

Post-colonial theory, primarily because Edward Said used Foucault's thought in his extremely influential book *Orientalism*, (1978) has consistently drawn on and reacted to Foucault's work and, in some instances, has tried to make it more profoundly political or materialist and even compatible with psychoanalytical thought (Said 1978; Bhabha 1994; McClintock 1995). The value of his work in this context has been primarily in the reconceptualisation of power relations. As I show in Chapter 2, power is seen by Foucault not as something which is imposed on another but as a network or web of relations which circulates through society (Foucault 1978). Thus, within post-colonial theory, colonialism no longer has to be thought of simply as an imposition of power relations on a passive indigenous population, but can be seen as the enactment through violence and invasion, but also through the production of knowledge and information, of a very fragile hold on another territory, constantly challenged and constantly needing to be asserted and reasserted in the face of opposition (Guha 1994).

Perhaps it is this analysis of power which has most profoundly influenced political thinking, so that rather than simply thinking of power as an imposition of the will of one individual on another, or one group on another, we can see power as a set of relations and strategies dispersed throughout a society and enacted at every moment of interaction.

To summarise then, Foucault should be seen as intervening in political and philosophical debates at a time when there were major shifts and changes taking place both in France and throughout the rest of the world. He was profoundly affected by the events of May 1968 and he made a major impact, both through his writing and through his political actions, on subsequent political changes. He helped to develop theories which could analyse the complexity of the political and philosophical scene after 1968 and, perhaps more importantly, he forced intellectuals to think about the very building blocks of thought that they used to analyse social conditions.

## **STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK**

Rather than devoting particular chapters to Foucault's major theoretical texts, I have decided to focus chapters of this book to particular concerns of Foucault's which he discusses at different times in his career, in interviews and essays, as well as in books. In Chapter 2, Power and institutions, I examine Foucault's work on power and resistance

particularly as it relates to social structures and institutions. His theorising here is important since he takes issue with many of the assumptions that we have about governance and the role of individuals and marginalised groups in resisting oppression by regimes. In Chapter 3, *Discourse*, I discuss Foucault's work on the autonomous rules and functionings of discourse. In Chapter 4, *Power/knowledge*, I examine Foucault's work which challenges the common-sense status of knowledge and truth and also his theoretical work which considers the way that these two concepts are held in place by a vast array of mechanisms whose purpose is to exclude other information. In Chapter 5, *The body and sexuality*, I focus on his theorising of the way that power is enacted and resisted on the site of the body, through an examination of his work on sexuality. His concern with charting the history of sexuality has sparked off a wide range of research primarily within gay, lesbian and feminist theorising. This work has implications for theoretical work on sexuality but also on the nature of the individual and the representation of individual characters in literature. In Chapter 6, *Questioning the subject*, I analyse Foucault's work on the subject or individual particularly as it relates to notions of madness and sanity. In the concluding chapter, *After Foucault*, I examine ways of using and reading Foucault's methods and sketch out the ways that Foucault can be used without feeling that one has to adhere strictly to everything he has written. I suggest here that a truly Foucauldian reading or method is one which moves beyond Foucault's writing and thinking.



## POWER AND INSTITUTIONS

Foucault's work is largely concerned with the relation between social structures and institutions and the individual. Although, as I mentioned in the previous chapter and will discuss in more detail in Chapter 5, the notion of the individual is problematic for Foucault, nevertheless, it is in the relationship between the individual and the institution that we find power operating most clearly. Throughout his career, in works such as *The History of Sexuality* (1978), *Power/Knowledge* (1980), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973) and *Discipline and Punish* (1977), he focused on the analysis of the effects of various institutions on groups of people and the role that those people play in affirming or resisting those effects. Central to this concern with institutions is his analysis of power. His work is very critical of the notion that power is something which a group of people or an institution possess and that power is only concerned with oppressing and constraining. What his work tries to do is move thinking about power beyond this view of power as repression of the powerless by the powerful to an examination of the way that power operates within everyday relations between people and institutions. Rather than simply viewing power in a negative way, as constraining and repressing, he argues, particularly in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (1978), that even at their most constraining, oppressive measures are in fact productive, giving rise to new forms of behaviour rather than simply closing down or censoring certain forms of behaviour.



Foucault, unlike many earlier Marxist theorists, is less concerned with focusing on oppression, but rather in foregrounding resistance to power. Much of this work has provoked a critical debate among critical theorists and political theorists, as the exact mechanics of resistance to power relations is not necessarily clearly mapped out in Foucault's accounts, but his work has, nevertheless, occasioned a very favourable response from a number of feminists and other critical theorists who have found in his work a way of thinking about the forms of power relations between men and women which do not fit neatly into the types of relations conventionally described within theorisations of power which tend to focus on the role of the State, ideology or patriarchy (Thornborrow 2002).

Marxist theory generally uses the term ideology to describe the means whereby oppressed people accept views of the world which are not accurate and which are not in their interests. Ideology, for Marxists, is the imaginary representation of the way things are in a society, and this fictive version of the world serves the interests of those who are dominant in society. Thus, an ideological view of society might be one where the middle classes are portrayed as naturally more intelligent than the working classes, rather than a Marxist economic view which would focus on the fact that schools with a majority of middle class pupils have better facilities.

Marxist theorisations, such as that of Louis Althusser, of the State's role in oppressing people, have been found to be largely unsatisfactory since they focus only on a one-way traffic of power, from the top downwards (Althusser 1984). Althusser is interested in the way that the State oppresses people and the way that ideology constitutes people as individuals. In his model, individuals are simply dupes of ideological pressures. Foucault's bottom-up model of power, that is his focus on the way power relations permeate all relations within a society, enables an account of the mundane and daily ways in which power is enacted and contested, and allows an analysis which focuses on individuals as active subjects, as agents rather than as passive dupes.

## **POWER RELATIONS**

Power is often conceptualised as the capacity of powerful agents to realise their will over the will of powerless people, and the ability

to force them to do things which they do not wish to do. Power is also often seen as a possession – something which is held onto by those in power and which those who are powerless try to wrest from their control. Foucault criticises this view, arguing in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I* (1978) that power is something which is performed, something more like a strategy than a possession. Power should be seen as a verb rather than a noun, something that does something, rather than something which is or which can be held onto. Foucault puts it in the following way in *Power/Knowledge*: ‘Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain . . . Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation . . . Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application’ (Foucault 1980: 98). There are several important points to note here: first that power is conceptualised as a chain or as a net, that is a system of relations spread throughout the society, rather than simply as a set of relations between the oppressed and the oppressor. And, second, individuals should not be seen simply as the recipients of power, but as the ‘place’ where power is enacted and the place where it is resisted. Thus, his theorising of power forces us to reconceptualise not only power itself but also the role that individuals play in power relations – whether they are simply subjected to oppression or whether they actively play a role in the form of their relations with others and with institutions.

As I mentioned earlier, Foucault tends to see power less as something which is possessed but rather as a strategy, something which someone does or performs in a particular context. Power needs to be seen as something which has to be constantly performed rather than being achieved. Indeed, he argues that power is a set of relations which are dispersed throughout society rather than being located within particular institutions such as the State or the government; in an interview entitled ‘Critical theory/intellectual theory’ he states: ‘I am not referring to Power with a capital P, dominating and imposing its rationality upon the totality of the social body. In fact, there are power relations. They are multiple; they have different forms, they can be in play in family relations, or within an institution, or an administration’ (Foucault 1988c: 38). Because he is portraying power here as a major force in all relations within society, he seems to have been influenced by the work of Louis Althusser, his teacher at the *École Normale*, who focuses his analysis of power more on what he terms Ideological State

Apparatuses (that is, the family, the Church, the educational system) rather than the Repressive State Apparatuses, (that is, the legal system, the army and the police) (Althusser 1984). In an interview entitled 'Power and sex', Foucault argues that these multiple power relations are not necessarily easy to observe in play: 'the relations of power are perhaps among the best hidden things in the social body . . . [our task is] to investigate what might be most hidden in the relations of power; to anchor them in the economic infrastructures; to trace them not only in their governmental forms but also in the intra-governmental or para-governmental ones; to discover them in their material play' (Foucault 1988d: 119). Thus, rather than simply locating power in a centralised impersonal institution, such as the army or the police, as earlier Marxist theorists had done, he is interested in local forms of power and the way that they are negotiated with by individuals or other agencies. This concern with the materiality of power relations at a local level can be seen to have influenced many feminist theorists, such as Judith Butler, who have tried to develop models of the relation between gender and power without assuming that power is simply located in institutions and who have tried to see gender identity as something that one performs in particular contexts, not something that one possesses (Butler 1993; Salih 2002).

Foucault's view of power is directly counter to the conventional Marxist or early feminist model of power which sees power simply as a form of oppression or repression, what Foucault terms the 'repressive hypothesis'. Instead, he sees power as also at the same time productive, something which brings about forms of behaviour and events rather than simply curtailing freedom and constraining individuals. He argues in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I*: 'if power was never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really believe that we should manage to obey it?' (Foucault 1978: 36). Implicit in this quotation is the sense that there must be something else, apart from repression, which leads people to conform. To give an example, he describes in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I* (1978) the concern that developed in the nineteenth century about male children's masturbation, and the way that this led to the publication of numerous advice manuals on how to prevent or discourage such practices which, in turn, led to a full-scale surveillance of boys. Rather than seeing this as simply the oppression of children and the control of their sexual desires and practices, Foucault argues in *Power/Knowledge*, that this 'was

the sexualising of the infantile body, a sexualising of the bodily relationship between parent and child, and a sexualising of the family domain . . . sexuality is far more of a positive product of power than power was ever a repression of sexuality' (Foucault 1980b: 120). Thus, the discussion of the sexuality of children and the watching, advising and punishment of children in relation to sexual practices actually brought into being a set of sexualised relations and the construction of a perverse sexuality – the very sexuality which it was designed to eliminate.

This positive, productive view of power led Foucault to analyse popular uprisings, where individual groups of people take power into their own hands, for example in his interview with a Maoist group where he discusses popular justice in *Power/Knowledge* (1980) and his article on the Iranian revolution entitled 'Iran: the spirit of a world without spirit' (1988f). It is not surprising that Foucault focuses on the analysis of revolution and times of great upheaval, given that the 1960s and 1970s were a time when there were many people who argued that one should try to escape, challenge and overthrow oppressive regimes and cast off all of the rules and trappings of bourgeois capitalist society, as I argued in the previous chapter. In much earlier Marxist thinking the overthrow of the State and the liberation of the working classes through revolution was seen as a fundamental aim of political action. However, in his article 'Truth and Power', Foucault does not argue that revolution is necessarily a simple freedom from oppression, a complete challenge to bourgeois power, and an overturning of power relations, since 'the State consists in the codification of a whole number of power relations which render its functioning possible, and . . . revolution is a different type of codification of the same relations' (Foucault 1980b: 122). Thus, the State should not be seen as possessing power but as constructing a range of relations which tend to position people in ways which make the political system work; as we can see from the example of the French Revolution, a revolution may change certain aspects of the way that society is run, but it will tend to position people in much the same way, imprisoning or executing those who disagree with its policies, taxing people in much the same way as the old regime, and trying, through a range of different methods, to force citizens into conformity with its political programmes. Thus, the notion of liberation from oppression through revolution for Foucault is one which should be treated with extreme caution.

Foucault also analyses, in his essay 'The subject and power', what he terms 'anti-authority struggles' which he sees as something which had developed relatively recently and which he characterises in the following terms: 'opposition of the power of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over the mentally ill, of medicine over the population, of administration over the ways people live' (Foucault 1982: 211). All of these struggles are characterised by him as being 'local' or 'immediate' struggles, since they are instances in which people are criticising the immediate conditions of their lives and the way that certain people, groups or institutions are acting on their lives. He sees these struggles as constituting a refusal of analysis of the wider forces of power: 'the main objective of these struggles is to attack not so much such and such an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class, but rather a technique, a form of power' (Foucault 1982: 212).

Many theorists find extremely problematic Foucault's work on popular justice, for example the interview referred to above (1980). It should be stated that he says on several occasions that we must ask ourselves difficult questions about whether the campaign we are aligning ourselves with is the 'right' one, for example in an interview on 'Power and sex' he states 'to engage in politics – aside from just party politics – is to try to know with the greatest possible honesty, whether the revolution is desirable' (Foucault 1988d: 122). However, this honest approach to the support of political action does not always extend to the analysis of lynch mobs and popular justice: for example, he argues that 'it may be quite possible that the proletariat will exert towards the classes over which it has just triumphed a violent, dictatorial and even bloody power. I can't see what objection one could make to this' (Foucault, cited in Gane 1986: 86). This view of popular justice was fairly common in the 1960s and 1970s and, given his political engagement in various campaigns, can be seen as perfectly consistent. However, when questioned in an interview about the French women who had their heads shaved and who were publicly shamed by mobs, because they had allegedly had relationships with Germans during the Second World War, while the real collaborators escaped public retribution, Foucault suggests that 'it is necessary to find forms through which this need for retribution, which is in fact real among the masses, can be developed, by discussion, by information' (Foucault 1980c: 29). This is a very difficult statement since it seems to suggest that with adequate information people will turn away

from lynch mobs and retribution. This certainly is not borne out, for example, in the actions of certain sections of the British population during 2001 who waited outside courts where suspected paedophiles were being tried, in order to attack them, and attacked the houses of those suspected of having been convicted of paedophilia. There were several cases of mistaken identity. For those who were mistakenly accused of paedophilia but still attacked by the mobs, Foucault's blasé attitude to retribution must be rather difficult to take. However, Foucault is at least willing to think seriously about popular acts of retribution without condemning those people as unthinking and brutish, as many commentators in the popular press have done.

Furthermore, Foucault, together with a group of researchers, published *I, Pierre Rivière, Having Killed My Mother, My Sister and My Brother*, which is the confession of a 20-year-old Norman peasant who was convicted in 1836 of murdering three members of his family (Foucault 1978). Foucault organised a seminar to study the 40-page confession detailing Rivière's life, motives, relations with his family, and published the confession along with the reports by contemporary psychiatrists, reporters and reports of the legal proceedings. Even here, in the commentary on the text, Foucault is at pains to be non-judgemental; he describes the confession as 'a strange contest, a confrontation, a power relation, a battle among discourses and through discourses' (Foucault 1978: 12). This dispassionate stance is essential for the type of analysis he does, but it does mean that the systematic nature of male violence towards women is erased. Furthermore, the rights of Rivière's mother, brother and sister, who were brutally murdered, do not seem to figure very large in Foucault's analysis. By the very fact that Foucault has chosen to work on this case, Pierre Rivière is, in a sense, championed. There is a certain risk that one takes in working on problematic topics like this, but for theorists such as Foucault, it seems to add to the daring of his work that he is prepared to work on even those whom society rejects the most. While the analysis of homosexuals, the insane and women seems to be perfectly laudable, since they have not chosen to be socially stigmatised, it seems a very different matter to focus on those who have intentionally acted to disrupt society and deprive others of their rights or their lives. This championing of the power of proletarian groups, lynch mobs and murderers is highly problematic and has been much challenged by other theorists, not only conservatives, but also those on the Left.

## POWER AND RESISTANCE

In Volume I of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault states that ‘where there is power there is resistance’ (Foucault 1978). This is an important and problematic statement for many reasons. It is productive in that it allows us to consider the relationship between those in struggles over power as not simply reducible to a master–slave relation, or an oppressor–victim relationship. In order for there to be a relation where power is exercised, there has to be someone who resists. Foucault goes so far as to argue that where there is no resistance it is not, in effect, a power relation. Thus, for him, resistance is ‘written in’ to the exercise of power. However, if we assume that resistance is already ‘written in’ to power, then this may be seen to diminish the agency of the individuals who do resist oppressive regimes, often at great physical cost to themselves. Given that resistance to oppression is much more difficult than collaborating, (one has only to read the reports contained in Amnesty International briefings or news reports about the Palestinian uprising to realise this), given Foucault’s model of power, it is difficult to account for the fact that these individuals have chosen to oppose and challenge oppression, rather than to simply acquiesce. However, perhaps what Foucault is trying to argue in this model of power is that we should not see the way that power relations operate to be simply about the oppression of individuals by an institution or a government. Rather we should see that resistance to oppression is much more frequent than one would imagine; in this way he manages to move away from viewing individuals as only passive recipients.

Certain theorists have worked with Foucault’s ideas on power and have tried to capture the complexity of relations of resistance and flesh out Foucault’s ideas more. For example, James Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* has concerned himself with the way that both the powerful and the powerless are constrained in their behaviour within the power relation (Scott 1990). He shows that in their behaviour with each other they may behave as master and slave, maintaining the linguistic rituals for this type of encounter, while when out of each other’s presence they behave quite differently. For example, when with his/her peers, the less powerful person will mock the powerful person, invent demeaning nicknames and tell stories of ways in which the powerful person will be humiliated. The powerful person, on the other hand, will tell his or her peers about the difficulties of maintaining

control over the powerless and about the strain of maintaining the steely exterior demanded by his/her role. Scott asks: 'How do we study power relations when the powerless are often obliged to adopt a strategic pose in the presence of the powerful and when the powerful may have an interest in overdramatizing their reputation and mastery? If we take all of this at face value we risk mistaking what may be a tactic for the whole story' (Scott 1990: xii). Thus, Scott suggests that what we need to add to the analysis of the behaviour of the powerless and powerful in each other's presence is an analysis of their behaviour when they are with their equals. There, he suggests, they develop a 'hidden transcript' that is a 'critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant' (Scott 1990: xii). The powerful also develop a hidden transcript which consists of the claims of their rule which cannot be openly avowed in front of other people. Thus, Scott suggests that at the same time that, for example, Black American slaves might obey their white masters and smile in their presence, among themselves they would critique that power in folktales, gossip, songs, and in actions such as poaching, petty pilfering, foot-dragging and general non-compliance in their work. Thus, in order to analyse a power relation, we must analyse the total relations of power, the hidden transcripts as well as the public performance.

Theorists have found difficulties in Foucault's method in the analysis of power in that it is, in essence, non-interpretive, and non-evaluative, and yet the situations where Foucault's work is most useful, and where he has done most of his work, are precisely those where there is popular resistance, and where the resistance is one which one feels that Foucault is implicitly supporting. This resistance needs to be charted because of inequalities in access to resources. Take for example, the Subaltern Studies research group in India who have focused on the analysis of the actions of those whom the imperial producers of information and knowledge would largely ignore or categorise only as trouble-makers or rioters (Guha and Spivak 1988; Guha 1994). The sociologists Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham suggest that 'the task of [a Foucauldian] analysis . . . is to describe the way in which resistance operates as a part of power, not to seek or promote or oppose it' (Kendall and Wickham 1999: 51). However, it might be argued that the very choice of the object of analysis suggests a particular position in relation to which side in a conflict one is supporting. For, as the feminist linguist Deirdre Burton argues, not making one's



political position clear and attempting to appear ‘objective’ in one’s analysis often leads one to an analysis which simply supports the status quo (Burton 1982). When the Subaltern Studies group produces information about peasant insurrection, it is not a disinterested account, nor should we necessarily wish it to be so. The production of information for its own sake is a delusion, as Foucault’s analyses of the relation between power and knowledge clearly show (see Chapter 4).

## **DISCIPLINARY REGIMES AND THE DISCIPLINARY SOCIETY**

Foucault is also interested in the way that power operates through different forms of regime at particular historical periods. In his work *Discipline and Punish* (1977), he describes the way that power has been exercised in different eras in Europe, moving from the public spectacle of the tortured body of the individual deemed to have committed a crime to the disciplining, incarceration and surveillance of those convicted of crimes in the present day. The book opens with the following description: ‘On 2 March 1757 Damiens the regicide was condemned to be . . . “taken and conveyed in a cart, wearing nothing but a shirt, holding a torch of burning wax weighing two pounds” . . . and then “on a scaffold in the Place de Grève the flesh will be torn from his breasts, arms, thighs and calves with red-hot pincers, his right hand holding the knife with which he committed the said parricide, burnt with sulphur and on those places where the flesh will be torn away poured molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, wax and sulphur melted together and then his body drawn and quartered by four horses and his limbs and body consumed by fire, reduced to ashes and his ashes thrown to the winds”’ (Foucault 1991a: 3). After several pages of detailed description of the difficulty of ensuring that the prisoner is in fact executed according to this plan, Foucault juxtaposes a passage from a list of rules for the regulation of the time of criminals in prison written only a century later. By this simple juxtaposition he shows the tremendous change that has taken place – from public execution and public spectacle to confinement and surveillance. However, he argues that this change constitutes a difference in kind rather than a progression or necessary improvement, as in the present day: ‘it is the certainty of being punished and not the horrifying spectacle of public punishment that must discourage crime’ (Foucault 1991a: 9). The shift in

punishment from inflicting intolerable pain to present-day executions in America by lethal injection where no pain is experienced is a shift in the mechanisms of power and punishment and should not be seen to reflect progress or evolution. Nor should the current methods of controlling those considered to be criminals in Britain, such as electronic tagging, be seen as necessarily more humane.

Correlating with this shift in punishment, for Foucault, there is a corresponding shift in forms of power circulating within society, for example, from a system where the king or queen is seen as the embodiment of the nation and power is dispensed from above, to a system where power is exercised within the social body. The meting out of extensive torture and execution in public was a way of publicly displaying the power of the sovereign. Rather than seeing the move away from absolute monarchical power as a result of greater democracy, Foucault argues, in an interview entitled 'Prison talk', that: 'it was the instituting of new, local capillary forms of power which impelled society to eliminate certain elements such as the court and the king' (Foucault 1980d: 39). This is a paradoxical yet challenging view of political change whereby the monarchy becomes redundant because of changes within power relations within the social body as a whole which then make their influence felt from below.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), he also examines the way that discipline as a form of self-regulation encouraged by institutions permeates modern societies. His work on disciplinary regimes is of great interest, since rather than simply seeing regimes as being oppressive, he analyses the way that regimes exercise power within a society through the use of a range of different mechanisms and techniques. He analyses a range of different institutions such as the hospital, the clinic, the prison and the university and sees a number of disciplinary practices which they seem to have in common. Discipline consists of a concern with control which is internalised by each individual: it consists of a concern with time-keeping, self-control over one's posture and bodily functions, concentration, sublimation of immediate desires and emotions – all of these elements are the effects of disciplinary pressure and at the same time they are all actions which produce the individual as subjected to a set of procedures which come from outside of themselves but whose aim is the disciplining of the self by the self. These disciplinary norms within Western cultures are not necessarily experienced as originating from institutions, so thoroughly have they been internalised by

individuals. Indeed, so innate and 'natural' do these practices appear that we find it hard to conceptualise what life would be like without this constant checking of appetites and whims, and the constant instilling in children of the need to control their behaviour and their emotional responses, both by the educational system and through parental pressure. Paul Patton suggests that this view of discipline has interesting implications for the analysis of the way that capitalism works: 'It is not perhaps capitalist production which is autocratic and hierarchised, but disciplinary production which is capitalist. We know after all that disciplinary organisation of the workforce persists even when production is no longer strictly speaking capitalist' (Patton 1979: 124). This can clearly be seen to be the case in the forms of disciplinary structures developed within the Soviet system under Communism, where the society as a whole was subject to the most extreme of disciplinary regimes, and while many of these restrictions on personal freedom and self-expression were possibly the result of the practices necessary for intense industrialisation, there is a sense in which it is important to analyse carefully the relation between Communism and extreme forms of restriction of individual liberty.

For Foucault, discipline is a set of strategies, procedures and ways of behaving which are associated with certain institutional contexts and which then permeate ways of thinking and behaving in general. Developed within the setting of the prison, disciplinary regimes now permeate the workplace, the army, the school, the university. Although Foucault suggests that the disciplinary structures of the prison in some ways invade and determine the structures in other institutional settings, he does not describe the process whereby these practices were diffused into other contexts. It is this which is most disturbing in his account and which seems contradictory for some critics. Donnelly comments that: 'Foucault rejects the notion that there is any calculating class of agents behind the scenes pulling the disciplinary strings. But what impersonal force then allows Foucault to talk of discipline univocally, as a strategy by which a whole people are ordered?' (Donnelly 1986: 29). A further problem which can be seen in the description of disciplinary regimes is that the individual subject is seen to be subjected to the point where resistance to these practices and procedures is futile, so ingrained are they in the individual themselves. This seems to conflict with Foucault's ideas developed in *The History of Sexuality* (1978), where he states that where there is power there is resistance.

The feminist critic, Sandra Bartky, argues that 'Foucault seems sometimes on the verge of depriving us of a vocabulary in which to conceptualise the nature and meaning of those periodic refusals of control that, just as much as the imposition of control, mark the course of human history' (Bartky 1988: 79). We need to take Foucault's argument here further than he himself took it, and perhaps see that feminists and other critical theorists have tried to provide us with precisely that vocabulary of resistance.

One of the disciplinary structures which has been most often drawn upon by theorists using Foucault's work is the Panopticon, which he discusses in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and also in an interview entitled 'The eye of power' (1980f). The Panopticon is an architectural device described by the eighteenth-century philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, as a way of arranging people in such a way that, for example, in a prison, it is possible to see all of the inmates without the observer being seen, and without any of the prisoners having access to one another. Foucault describes it in the following way in 'The eye of power':

A perimeter building in the form of a ring. At the centre of this a tower, pierced by large windows opening on to the inner face of the ring. The outer building is divided into cells each of which traverses the whole thickness of the building. These cells have two windows, one opening onto the inside, facing the windows of the central tower, the other, outer one allowing daylight to pass through the whole cell. All that is then needed is to put an overseer in the tower and place in each of the cells a lunatic, a patient, a convict, a worker or a schoolboy. The back lighting enables one to pick out from the central tower the little captive silhouettes in the ring of cells. In short the principle of the dungeon is reversed; daylight and the overseer's gaze captures the inmate more effectively than darkness, which afforded after all a sort of protection.

(Foucault 1980f: 147)

From this analysis of a particular way of organising the spatial arrangements of prisons, schools and factories to enable maximum visibility, Foucault argues that a new form of internalised disciplinary practice occurs: one is forced to act as if one is constantly being surveyed even when one is not. Thus, this form of spatial arrangement entails a particular form of power relation and restriction of behaviours.

In the twenty-first century, an example of Panoptical vision might be the use of Closed Circuit televisions in Britain's town centres, where

the mere presence of CCTV cameras in the streets, and the knowledge that the videos from these cameras can be viewed by the police, is supposed to be enough to deter petty crime in these areas. The notion of disciplinary structures needing visibility to operate effectively is important. The critic, Barry Smart, argues that 'it is important to remember that the power exercised through hierarchical surveillance is not a possession or a property, rather it has the character of a machine or apparatus through which power is produced and individuals are distributed in a permanent and continuous field' (Smart 1985: 86). The individual within the Panopticon is forced to internalise the disciplinary gaze so that '[s/]he who is subjected to a field of visibility and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; [s/]he makes them play spontaneously upon [her/]himself; [s/]he inscribes in [her/]himself the power relation in which [s/]he simultaneously plays both roles; [s/]he becomes the principle of [her/]his own subjection' (Foucault 1991a: 202–203). Thus, a new form of power relation develops where rather than power being exercised very materially on the body through torture, by someone with authority, someone in power on someone who is powerless, the individual herself now 'plays both roles': the oppressor may well be absent, but the prisoner has internalised the behavioural code of the oppressor, and will behave as though the prison guard were still watching. Using the Panopticon as almost a symbolisation of spatial relations and, at the same time, a new form of power relations has led to productive work within the post-colonial analysis of the description of the colonial landscape since, for example, a particular surveying gaze by the British traveller or colonial official can be seen to be both a place of observation and discipline, as well as the locus for the production of knowledge about future colonial development (Pratt 1992). Thus, the British traveller who produces a description of a colonial landscape, usually from a position of elevation on a hilltop, often in providing an account of an empty landscape stretching off to the horizon may be interpreted as providing an account of a landscape which is ripe for colonial exploitation. Thus s/he can, as in the Panopticon, see all of the people in the landscape below and survey all of the land, and at the same time, she can take up a position of authority over it. However, sometimes the use of this device of the Panopticon can be over-extended, so that the Panopticon can be traced in the design of the shopping mall, the university lecture theatre, the gym and so on (Kendall and

Wickham 1999). However, even if over-enthusiastic Foucauldian analyses have traced the figure of the Panopticon as a disciplinary structure excessively, the notion that architectural arrangements lead to certain configurations of power relations is important.

Foucault is also concerned to describe what he terms governmentality: the analysis of who can govern and who is governed but also the means by which that shaping of someone else's activities is achieved (Foucault 1991c). The critic, Colin Gordon, argues that 'Foucault saw it as a characteristic (and troubling) property of the development of government in Western societies to tend towards a form of political sovereignty which would be a government of all of each and whose concerns would be at once to "totalise" and to "individualise"' (Gordon 1991: 3). Thus, this type of study and focus leads us away from a focus solely upon the State and the government when we analyse governmentality. Perhaps the most productive element in Foucault's analysis of power is the fact that he sees power relations as largely unsuccessful, as not achieving the goal of total domination. If power is relational rather than emanating from a particular site such as the government or the police; if it is diffused throughout all social relations rather than being imposed from above; if it is unstable and in need of constant repetition to maintain; if it is productive as well as being repressive, then it is difficult to see power relations as simply negative and as constraining. At the same time as downplaying human agency in resisting oppressive power relations, through his concentration on the diffusion of power, Foucault also provides the means to formulate resistance. This notion of the diffusion of power and hence the diffusion of resistance has been exploited by resistance groups such as Globalise Resistance, the broad-based alliance of radical anti-capitalist, peace and environmental groups set up around 2000. They have found that diversifying resistance to global organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and to the globalisation of the economy through the growth of multinational organisations, by bringing together protesters from a wide range of backgrounds and with a wide range of agendas, is most effective. Rather than just demonstrating on single issues or writing petitions to the government, the anti-globalisation movement has used a range of different methods, from the conventional petition to the more innovative mass e-mail networks; they have put on protests ranging from occupying sections of a city outside summit meetings of government leaders from the

powerful nations, to boycotting and protesting outside Shell garages and McDonalds' restaurants. Thus, if we assume that the government of the country is not the only source of influence and power, then protest will need to be directed at other targets than the government and will need to find other forms of expression than simply the conventional petition to the Prime Minister. The downside of such a diffuse set of resistance strategies is that with such a broad-based agenda and diversity of aims it is difficult to co-ordinate resistance or even to know, still less agree on, what aims everyone is trying to achieve. But perhaps Foucault would argue that strategies to counter the complex power relations within a globalised economy and society need not be unitary and unidirectional.

## **INSTITUTIONS AND THE STATE**

Foucault attempts to shift the emphasis of analysis away from a simple analysis of institutions as oppressive. The Marxist stress on the centrality of the State in all political analyses is one which Foucault rejects, but perhaps it can be seen as one which had a profound effect on Foucault's thinking, since it seems to be most notable by its absence in Foucault's works. He states that he refrained from producing a theory of the State 'in the sense that one abstains from an indigestible meal' (Foucault, cited in Gordon 1991: 4). What he argues is that theorists often assume a solidity and permanence to the State and institutions which leads them to focus less on the potential for change, the fragility of the maintenance of power: he states in an article on 'Governmentality':

overvaluing the problem of the state is one which is paradoxical because apparently reductionist: it is a form of analysis that consists in reducing the state to a certain number of functions, such as the development of productive forces of the reproduction of relations of production, and yet this reductionist vision of the relative importance of the state's role nevertheless invariably renders it absolutely essential as a target needing to be attacked and a privileged position needing to be occupied. But the state, no more probably than at any other time in its history, does not have this unity, this individuality, this rigorous functionality, nor to speak frankly, this importance: maybe after all, the state is no more than a composite reality and a mythicised abstraction, whose importance is a lot more limited than many of us think.

(Foucault 1991c: 103)

Thus, he wants to move away from the idea that the State can be discussed as if it were a super-human agent with the same wills and intentions as individuals. To illustrate this we might analyse the complexity of the notion of the State, composed as it is of diverse elected representatives of the people, the MPs, (each with their own personal and political agenda, needs and ambitions, negotiating with the demands of the Party policy as a whole and the Cabinet's discipline) led by the Cabinet and the Prime Minister who are informed and led by the Civil Service which itself is staffed by people and departments each with their own personal agendas. This system is overseen and regulated by the House of Lords which again is staffed by people with their own personal agendas. If we only analyse the government, and obviously the government is only one very small section of the State, since the notion of the State takes in such entities as the police, legal system and all the services provided by the government, then we see clearly quite how difficult it is to see the State as having a single unitary aim. That is not to deny the power that is exercised over individuals by the State, through its various agencies, but rather to suggest that we must recognise the multiple and conflicting agencies involved in the notion of the State.

However, Foucault does not simply want to dispense with the notion of the State in all of his work or to argue that the State is not important; rather, in analysing the relations of power, it is necessary to extend that analysis beyond the limits of the State (Foucault 1979). He argues in an article entitled 'Truth and power' that 'the State, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations' (Foucault 1980b: 122). Thus, relations between parents and children, lovers, employers and employees – in short, all relations between people – are power relations. In each interaction power is negotiated and one's position in a hierarchy is established, however flexible, changing and ill-defined that hierarchy is. The feminist linguist Joanna Thornborrow draws on Foucault's work in order to make a crucial distinction between institutional status, (that is the status one is accorded because of one's position within an institution, for example as a doctor, or police officer) and the status which one manages to negotiate for oneself within particular interactions with others, which she terms local status (Thornborrow 2002). These two statuses interact with, and inform, one another, but they are usefully analysed separately, since while it



is often possible to change one's local status, for example by using linguistic strategies more commonly associated with those who have higher institutional status, it is more difficult to change one's institutional status by such means.

Thus, Foucault is keenly aware of the role of institutions in the shaping of individuals, although he does not wish to see the relations between institutions and individuals as being one only of oppression and constraint. Rather, he has led to a focus within much critical theory on the resistance which is possible in power relations.

## INTENTIONALITY AND WILL

An important element in Foucault's work on the power of institution is his theorising of the disjunction between intentionality and effect, which he discusses, for example, in his interview 'Power and sex' (1988d). Corporate bodies might present themselves as having a set of intentions, for example in their mission statements, where they claim to have a clear set of aims and guiding principles. However, there is often a crucial disjuncture between those explicit intentions and what actually happens. The notion that complex bodies have intentionality, analogous to individuals, often forces our thinking about the operation of social structures into reductionism. Foucault argues that 'capitalism's *raison d'être* is not to starve the workers but it cannot develop without starving them' (Foucault 1988d: 113). Thus, poverty may be an inevitable effect of capitalism, as Marxist theorists have argued, but Foucault suggests that this cannot be seen as an aim or intention of capitalism. Thus, capitalism cannot be seen to be operating with an overarching plan; capitalism itself as a system, may be made up of a range of conflicting and contradictory forces and institutions each with their own agendas, ways of operating and plans. Thus, in an analysis it is necessary to look at the way in which institutions operate and the way that they are constrained also by the demands and resistance of individuals within the organisation as well as individuals and groups outside it. If we take, as an example of the complexity of organisations and the difficulty of assuming an intentionality, the management of National Health hospitals, we will see that hospitals are constrained in what they can do by government policies and government targets; the amount of money and resources which the government allows the hospitals and their relation to private

hospitals. They are also constrained by community groups and health watch-dogs and individuals who have now become influenced by the current notion that it is possible to be compensated financially for medical errors. Although it is clear that hospitals have a management structure and the managers make decisions about their current direction, they can only do so within the constraints imposed by other agencies, and also within the constraints of the previously established procedures for managing hospitals. The managers may intend that the hospital will provide the best service possible to the community, but their policies may have to be modified by forces beyond their control, such as financial constraints; their decisions may have unforeseen consequences, and they may be involved in crises not of their making. Thus, although the manager of a hospital has ultimate responsibility for the way the hospital is run, s/he is not the only person involved in the formulation of management policy. This move away from attributing intentions to institutions in a simplistic way, forces us to reconceptualise the way that we theorise power relations in society.

As I discuss in the final chapter of this book, 'After Foucault', Foucault is interested in a form of analysis which focuses on contingencies rather than simple relations of cause and effect. By this I mean that he argues that when we analyse events in the past, we tend to try to attribute simple, clear causes for those events; for example, it is often argued that the Nazi invaders of the Soviet Union in the Second World War suffered defeat because of the harshness of the Soviet winter for which they were ill-prepared. However, this attributing of cause and effect in this simplistic way masks the fact that there were myriad contingent contributory factors which led to the defeat of the German army: the provision of winter uniforms to the Russians and the lack of such uniforms by the Germans, the use of non-German troops by the Germans in front-line positions, the lack of involvement of German Generals in the planning of the invasion, the overconfidence of Hitler, and so on: no one of these contingent factors being more or less important than the other in bringing about a particular outcome (Beevor 1999). Thus, although finding simple cause-and-effect relations makes thinking and writing about the past much easier, Foucault suggests that we should, rather, try to analyse the complexity and indeed the confusing nature of past events. This notion of analysing contingency instead of a simple cause-and-effect relation is extremely important in the analysis of power relations, since it enables the

Foucauldian analyst to focus more on the way that power is dispersed throughout a society in all kinds of relationship, event and activity; focusing on contingent factors enables us to examine the way that power operates.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Foucault analyses the relations between the individual and the wider society without assuming that the individual is powerless in relation to institutions or to the State. He does not minimise the restrictions placed on individuals by institutions; in much of his work he is precisely focused on the way institutions act upon individuals. However, by analysing the way that power is dispersed throughout society, Foucault enables one to see power as enacted in every interaction and hence as subject to resistance in each of those interactions. This makes power a much less stable element, since it can be challenged at any moment, and it is necessary to continuously renew and maintain power relations. Thus, his analysis of power has set in motion an entirely new way of examining power relations in society, focusing more on resistance than simple passive oppression.

## DISCOURSE

Discourse is one of the most frequently used terms from Foucault's work and, at the same time, it is one of the most contradictory. Foucault himself defines it in a number of different ways throughout his work and, in this chapter, I will explore the way he uses the term in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) and in 'The order of discourse', (1981). He says in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that he has used 'discourse' to refer to 'the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements' (Foucault 1972: 80). By 'the general domain of all statements', he means that 'discourse' can be used to refer to all utterances and statements which have been made which have meaning and which have some effect. Sometimes, in addition, he has used the term to refer to 'individualizable groups of statements', that is utterances which seem to form a grouping, such as the discourse of femininity or the discourse of racism. At other times, he has used the term discourse to refer to 'regulated practices that account for a number of statements', that is the unwritten rules and structures which produce particular utterances and statements. For example, there is no set of rules written down on how to write essays, and yet somehow most students at university manage to learn how to write within the framework of the essay. For Foucault, this set of structures and rules would constitute a discourse, and it

is these rules in which Foucault is most interested rather than the utterances and text produced.

A discourse is a regulated set of statements which combine with others in predictable ways. Discourse is regulated by a set of rules which lead to the distribution and circulation of certain utterances and statements. Some statements are circulated widely and others have restricted circulation; thus, within the West, the Bible is a text which is always in print; there are copies of the Bible in many homes. Many political commentators use quotations from the Bible to illustrate points that they have made. There are university theology departments which are devoted to the study of the Bible. Journals are devoted to its analysis, and there are always new interpretations and commentaries on it. In this way, the Bible itself, and statements about it, can be seen to constitute a discourse which is kept in circulation within our society. However, there are other religious texts which are not given such wide circulation and which do not seem to have the type of structural 'supports' that the Bible has. The notion of exclusion is very important in Foucault's thinking about discourse, particularly in 'The order of discourse' (1981). Rather than seeing discourse as simply a set of statements which have some coherence, we should, rather, think of a discourse as existing because of a complex set of practices which try to keep them in circulation and other practices which try to fence them off from others and keep those other statements out of circulation.

The reason that many people find the term discourse to be of use is that Foucault stresses that discourse is associated with relations of power. Many Marxist theorists have used the term ideology to indicate that certain statements and ideas are authorised by institutions and may have some influence in relation to individuals' ideas, but the notion of discourse is more complex than this notion of ideology in that, because of Foucault's ideas on power and resistance which I outlined in the previous chapter, a discourse is not simply the imposition of a set of ideas on individuals. In the *History of Sexuality, Vol. I*, Foucault states that:

discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and

a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.

(Foucault 1978: 100–101)

What I find interesting about this quotation is that, in Marxist theorising, ideology is always assumed to be negative and constraining, a set of false beliefs about something; whereas here Foucault is arguing that discourse is both the means of oppressing and the means of resistance.

In considering the term ‘discourse’ we must remember that it is not the equivalent of ‘language’, nor should we assume that there is a simple relation between discourse and reality. Discourse does not simply translate reality into language; rather discourse should be seen as a system which structures the way that we perceive reality. In his essay ‘The order of discourse’, Foucault argues that: ‘we must not imagine that the world turns towards us a legible face which we would only have to decipher; the world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscursive providence which disposes the world in our favour’ (Foucault 1981: 67). He goes on to argue that ‘we must conceive of discourse as a violence which we do to things, or in any case as a practice which we impose on them; and it is in this practice that the events of discourse find the principle of their regularity’ (Foucault 1981: 67). For example, within Western European languages, there tends to exist a wide range of terms for colours; yet not all languages distinguish between colours in the same way and parcel up the spectrum into blue, red, green and so on as English does. For example, some languages make no lexical distinction between green and blue. This does not mean that speakers of that language cannot tell the difference between blue and green, but that this distinction is not one which is especially significant within that culture. Thus, the regularities which we perceive in reality should be seen as the result of the anonymous regularities of discourse which we impose on reality. Foucault argues that, in fact, discourse should be seen as something which constrains our perceptions.

Although discourse seems to encompass almost everything, there does exist a realm of the non-discursive. Foucault has often been interpreted as saying that there is no non-discursive realm, that everything is constructed and apprehended through discourse. For example, the body, while it is clearly a material object – our body feels pain, it is

subject to gravity, it can be harmed in accidents – nevertheless, the body can be apprehended only through discursive mediation, that is, our understanding of our body occurs only through discourse – we judge the size of our body through discourses which delineate a perfect form, we interpret feelings of tiredness as indicative of stress because of discourses concerning the relation between mental and physical well-being, and so on. So Foucault is not denying that there are physical objects in the world and he is not suggesting that there is nothing but discourse, but what he is stating is that we can only think about and experience material objects and the world as a whole through discourse and the structures it imposes on our thinking. In the process of thinking about the world, we categorise and interpret experience and events according to the structures available to us and in the process of interpreting, we lend these structures a solidity and a normality which it is often difficult to question. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe discuss this question of the non-discursive insightfully in the following quotation:

The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought . . . An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of 'natural phenomena' or expressions of 'the wrath of God' depends on the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence.

(Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 108)

Thus, in Laclau and Mouffe's view, objects exist and events occur in the real world but we apprehend and interpret these events within discursive structures and we are not always aware of the way that discourse structures our understanding. If we return to the example of the body, we can see that we experience our body in what seems like a fairly immediate way – we feel pain, we experience tiredness and hunger – but all of these sensations are filtered through discursive structures which assign particular meanings and effects to them.

When Foucault discusses discourse, he focuses on constraint and restriction; he is aware that we could potentially utter an infinite variety

of sentences, but what is surprising is that, in fact, we choose to speak within very narrowly confined limits. He argues that discursive practices are characterised by a 'delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories' (Foucault, in Bouchard 1977: 199). Thus, in deciding to say something, we must as speakers focus on a particular subject, we must at the same time make a claim to authority for ourselves in being able to speak about this subject, and we must, in the process, add to and refine ways of thinking about the subject. It is difficult, if not impossible, to think and express oneself outside these discursive constraints because, in doing so, one would be considered to be mad or incomprehensible by others. Foucault alluded to this difficulty of expressing oneself in discourse when he started his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1970: he said: 'I think a good many people have a . . . desire to be freed from the obligation to begin, a . . . desire to be on the other side of discourse from the outset, without having to consider from the outside what might be strange, frightening or perhaps maleficent about it' (Foucault 1981: 51). It is for this reason that Foucault suggests that there are rituals at the beginnings of discourse; to give a banal example, when people begin a conversation in English they will generally begin with 'small talk' that is non-serious talk about the weather or health, before they begin to discuss seriously; on the telephone, there are a series of ritualised openings and closing routines, which help to get conversation going. We do not often think about these ritualised utterances; we only notice them when someone does not use them.

What interests Foucault in his analysis of discourse is the way that it is regulated: 'in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality' (Foucault 1981: 52). It is this sense of the structure of discourse and the control which this exercises on what can be said which interests Foucault. He describes, in his article 'The order of discourse', the procedures which constrain discourse and which lead to discourse being produced: the first set of procedures, he suggests, consists of three external exclusions, and they are taboo; the distinction between the mad and the sane; and the distinction between true



and false. Taboo is a form of prohibition since it makes it difficult to speak about certain subjects such as sexuality and death and constrains the way that we talk about these subjects. The second external exclusion is the distinction between the speech of the mad and the sane, as Foucault has shown in his book *Madness and Civilisation* (1967), since the speech of those people who have been considered to be insane is not attended to; it is treated as if it did not exist. To give an example, those people in Britain who have been certified as mentally ill and who have been prescribed certain drugs to help their condition, now, because of changes in the legislation, are not able to state authoritatively that they do not wish to take such medication. They may well state that they do not want to take the drugs but it is now possible that the authorities will ignore their statements and force them to take the medication. In this sense, only the statements of those considered sane are attended to. The division between true and false is the third exclusionary practice described by Foucault; those in positions of authority who are seen to be 'experts' are those who can speak the truth. Those who make statements who are not in positions of power will be considered not to be speaking the truth. The notion of the truth must not be taken as self-evident; he shows in his work how truth is something which is supported materially by a whole range of practices and institutions: universities, government departments, publishing houses, scientific bodies and so on. All of these institutions work to exclude statements which they characterise as false and they keep in circulation those statements which they characterise as true. For Foucault, only those statements which are 'in the true' will be circulated: in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), he argues that 'it is always possible one could speak the truth in a void; one would only be "in the true" however if one obeyed the rules of some discursive "police" which would have to be reactivated every time one spoke' (Foucault 1972: 224). Thus, even if we are asserting something which as far as we know it is 'the truth', our statements will only be judged to be 'true' if they accord with, and fit in with, all of the other statements which are authorised within our society.

In addition to these external exclusions on the production of discourse, Foucault also asserts that there are four internal procedures of exclusion and these are: commentary; the author; disciplines; and the rarefaction of the speaking subject. These procedures are all concerned with classifying, distributing and ordering discourse, and

their function is ultimately to distinguish between those who are authorised to speak and those who are not – those discourses which are authorised and those which are not. The first internal exclusion, commentary, is writing about another's statements. Thus, literary criticism can be considered to be commentary. Foucault suggests that:

there is in all societies, with great consistency, a kind of gradation among discourses: those which are said in the ordinary course of days and exchanges, and which vanish as soon as they have been pronounced; and those which give rise to a certain number of new speech acts which take them up, transform them or speak of them, in short, those discourses which, over and above their formulation, are said indefinitely, remain said, and are to be said again.

(Foucault 1981: 57)

Most people would consider that a text is commented on and discussed because it is more interesting or of more value than others; for example, Charles Darwin's text *On the Origin of Species* (1859) has been commented on, challenged and interpreted by endless other scientists. But, Foucault, rather than assuming that this is due to a quality within the text, asserts that it is a question of a difference in the way the text is analysed. In the process of commenting on a text, the text itself is given a different and primary status, it is assumed to have a richness, but at the same time the commentary's role is paradoxically to put into words what the text cannot say; as he puts it: 'the commentary must say for the first time what had, nonetheless, already been said, and must tirelessly repeat what had, however, never been said' (Foucault 1981: 58). Thus, commentary on Darwin's work not only keeps Darwin's texts in circulation as ideas which are 'in the true', but also confers status on the author of the commentary, because it demonstrates that they have mastered Darwin's ideas and can even refine those ideas and express them more clearly than Darwin, or relate those ideas more appropriately to the twenty-first century. The second internal exclusionary practice is the author. This may seem quite a paradox, since the author may be seen by many to be simply the person who self-evidently writes a text. However, for Foucault, although he recognises that authors exist, for him the notion of the author is used as an organising principle for texts, and can be considered to be a way of providing a cohesion to diverse texts which have been published by

him/her. For example, if we consider the writings of the novelist Kazuo Ishiguro, it is clear that he has produced a wide range of books which vary greatly in terms of their style and subject matter, from *The Unconsoled*, a very stylistically experimental book, to *The Remains of the Day*, a far more conservative book in terms of style and content. It would be difficult to pin him down to a particular way of writing or focus. Yet, because we know that these texts are all published by the same person, we tend to group these very different texts together and we can even begin to assert that there are relations between the books, for example, seeing one book as a reaction to the style or subject matter of another. Yet these books are so different that Foucault would argue, both in 'The order of discourse' and in 'What is an author?' (1986a) that it is we as readers who are using the notion of the author to unite these very diverse texts. Foucault prefers to use the term the 'author-function' rather than focusing on the real author, since it is this organisational aspect of the author-function which interests him. Foucault is very critical of such notions as the progression of an author from immaturity, early works to maturity or later works. If we discuss the 'early' works of Shakespeare, we should interrogate why it is that we are using such a metaphor, implying as it does that these works are less developed than his later texts, and we should simply analyse these texts in their own terms, rather than according to a fictional schema which we have of Shakespeare's life. The third internal exclusion on discourse is the disciplinary boundary, that is, the limits which we place on subject areas. For example, if we work within sociology, we will generally examine a certain range of subjects and we will approach them drawing on a particular range of methodological and theoretical tools. If we approach the same subject from the perspective of another discipline, for example linguistics or psychology, we will approach them and delimit those subjects in different ways and approach them using different tools. Disciplines work as a limit on discourse, because they prescribe what can be counted as possible knowledge within a particular subject area. Because they each have strict methodological rules and a corpus of propositions which are considered to be factual, disciplines allow for the production of new propositions but within extremely tightly defined limits. Thus, academic journals have editorial boards and referees who are responsible for evaluating whether articles which have been sent to them to be published 'fit in' with the disciplinary rules for discussing a particular

subject and what it is possible to say within that discipline. They reject those articles which do not. Thus, for Foucault, these practices which are an integral part of disciplines constitute the subject area through rigorously excluding knowledge which might challenge them. The final internal exclusion on discourse discussed by Foucault is what he terms 'the rarefaction of the speaking subject': by 'rarefaction' he means the limitation placed on who can speak authoritatively, that is, some discourses are open to all and some have very limited access. Speaking authoritatively is hedged around by rituals and takes place within particular societies of discourse, where discourses circulate according to prescribed rules. For example, at universities, only certain people can give lectures; these are generally held in specially designed halls where the lecturer is positioned at the front. Only the lecturer speaks for the duration of the lecture. Students do not generally speak to the lecturer or to the rest of the lecture group. Because of the unwritten regulations on who can speak during a lecture, when a student does speak, it is often seen by others as aberrant, or potentially disruptive of the status quo, or if a student is called upon to speak by the lecturer, s/he may well feel nervous or self-conscious and find speaking difficult. Thus, rather than a university simply being an institution in which knowledge is dispassionately circulated, Foucault argues that 'any system of education is a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the knowledges and powers which they carry' (Foucault 1981: 64). Universities have many unwritten rules about who can speak at certain times (witness the efforts which tutors make to force students to speak in seminars) and whose statements are considered to be authoritative (consider the force of tutors' comments on essays which determine how a particular student is assessed and ultimately the grade that they are given). Indeed, a Foucauldian analysis of the university would focus less on the circulation of knowledge and more on the way certain types of knowledge are excluded, the rigorous process whereby students' ideas are brought into line with the type of knowledge which is considered to be 'academic'. Thus, this whole seemingly self-evident system of silencing and forcing to speak, of commenting on and assessing that work in relation to fixed standards is less about imparting knowledge and is more about the institutionalisation of discourse and the mapping out of power relations between lecturers and students. Thus, this complex system of multiple constraints acts both internally and externally on

the production and reception of discourse and it is these constraints which bring discourse into existence.

To sum up, discourse should therefore be seen as both an overall term to refer to all statements, the rules whereby those statements are formed and the processes whereby those statements are circulated and other statements are excluded. Within the theorising of discourse, Foucault also uses some other terms: *épistémé*, archive, discursive formation, and statement, which have become important for those drawing on his work and which help us to outline the structure of discourse. I will define these briefly.

Foucault analyses the groupings of discursive formations and the relationships between discourses at any one time. This ensemble of practices he terms an '*épistémé*'. The *épistémé* of a period is not 'the sum of its knowledge, nor the general style of its research, but the divergence, the distances, the oppositions, the differences, the relations of its various scientific discourses: the *épistémé* is not a sort of *grand underlying theory*, it is a space of *dispersion*, it is an open and doubtless indefinitely describable field of relationships' (Foucault 1991a: 55). Thus, it is not the sum of everything which can be known within a period but it is the complex set of relationships between the knowledges which are produced within a particular period and the rules by which new knowledge is generated. Thus, within a particular period we can see similarities in the way that different sciences operate at a conceptual and theoretical level, despite dealing with different subject matters. For example, Foucault, in *The Order of Things* (1970), analyses the conceptual frameworks, theoretical assumptions, and working methods which certain sciences, natural history, economics and linguistics, have in common; he states:

what was common to the natural history, the economics and the grammar of the Classical period was certainly not present to the consciousness of the scientist; or that part of it that was conscious was superficial, limited and almost fanciful, but unknown to themselves, the naturalists, economists and grammarians, employed the same rules to define the objects proper to their own study, to form their concept, to build their theories.

(Foucault 1970: xi)

To give an example of the types of 'ways of thinking' that underlie various sciences it is worth considering Foucault's analysis of the *épistémé* of the Classical period; he states:

it was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organised the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible and controlled the art of representing them. The universe was folded in upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars and plants holding within their stems secrets that were of use to man. Painting imitated space. And representation . . . was positioned as a form of repetition; the theatre of life or the mirror of nature, that was the claim made of all languages, its manner of declaring its existence and of formulating its right of speech.

(Foucault 1970: 17)

He also describes the way that events in the world were interpreted as being signs of the supernatural world: crop-failure, storms, disease and, in fact, any event judged to be exceptional were seen to be indicative of God's anger. Within all natural sciences within the Classical period, diverse scientists shared certain presumptions about the nature of the world and about knowledge which underpinned their scientific work. One of Foucault's biographers, Didier Eribon, describes the *épistémé* in the following way: 'every period is characterised by an underground configuration that delineates its culture, a grid of knowledge making possible every scientific discourse, every production of statements. . . . Each science develops within the framework of an *épistémé*, and therefore is linked in part with other sciences contemporary with it' (Eribon 1991: 158). Thus, in his analysis of general grammar, economics and the analysis of wealth and natural history in *The Order of Things*, Foucault aims to analyse the shared presuppositions and theoretical frameworks which organise thought, representation and categorisation.

In analysing an *épistémé*, Foucault argues: 'I do not seek to detect, starting from diverse signs, the unitary spirit of an epoch . . . a kind of *Weltanschauung* [world-view] . . . [rather] I have studied ensembles of discourse . . . I have defined the play of rules, of transformations, of thresholds, of remanences. I have collated different discourses and described their clusters and relations' (Foucault 1991a: 55). Thus, what Foucault is trying to analyse is not a unified body of ideas or 'spirit of the age' but a set of conflicting discursive frameworks and pressures which operate across a social body and which interact with each other, and these condition how people think, know and write. Rather than there being a smooth transition from one *épistémé* to another, with scientists building upon the work of others so that there is progress,

Foucault argues that the move from one *épistémé* to another creates a discursive break or discontinuity. He suggests that these breaks between *épistémés* are sudden, rather than, as they have generally been characterised, an evolution or reaction to previous periods. He asks ‘how can it be that there are at certain moments and in certain orders of knowledge these sudden take-offs, these hastenings of evolution, these transformations which do not correspond to the calm and continuist image that is ordinarily accepted?’ (Foucault 1979: 31). We can see that Foucault is trying to react against the notion of evolution and progression of traditional historians, whereby it is asserted that knowledge and life in general improve until they reach the highpoint of the present day. Foucault’s aim in describing the discursive limits of the *épistémé* is to force us to see the strangeness of our current state of knowledge and to question the way that we think, and the conceptual tools which we use to think with.

Foucault’s archaeological analysis (discussed in Chapter 1) is focused on the description of the archive, that is ‘the set of rules which at a given period and for a given society define . . . the limits and forms of the sayable’ (Foucault 1991a: 59). The term ‘archive’ is used by Foucault to refer to the unwritten rules which lead to the production of certain types of statements and the sum total of the discursive formations circulating at any one time. The term ‘discursive formation’ is used by Foucault to refer to the regular associations and groupings of particular types of statements; these are groupings of statements which are often associated with particular institutions or sites of power and which have effects on individuals and their thinking. Discursive formations seem to have a solidity about them and yet they are subject to constant change.

Discourses, or discursive formations, are groups of statements which deal with the same topic and which seem to produce a similar effect; for example, they may be groups of statements which are grouped together because of some institutional pressure or association, because of a similarity of origin, or because they have a similar function. They lead to the reproduction of other statements which are compatible with their underlying presuppositions. Discourses should not be seen as wholly cohesive, since they always contain within them conflicting sets of statements; for example, the discourse of masculinity cannot be seen as a simple unitary whole. Within the discourse, or should we say discourses, of masculinity there are sets of statements concerned with

the description of machismo (for example, Right-wing statements which extol manly virtues such as strength and confidence), and others which describe the New Man (for example, Left-wing statements which value nurturing and caring). However, these statements, although they have different political intentions and effects, aim to try to characterise men and women as fundamentally different. The effect of these statements is to downplay the similarities between men and women. While the function of asserting these similarities and differences varies, the effect of asserting that men and women are essentially different usually has some advisory function, for example, discourses of masculinity are aimed at describing a situation which an author would like to bring about, (men *should* be tougher as they were in the past, or men *should* be more caring). Thus, discourses should be seen as groups of statements which are associated with institutions, which are authorised in some sense and which have some unity of function at a fundamental level.

The statement can be seen as an authorised proposition or action through speech (Mills 1997). The statement is not simply a sentence because, for example, a map or image could be taken as a statement. The critics, Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, argue that 'Maps can be statements, if they are representations of a geographical area, and even a picture of the layout of a typewriter keyboard can be a statement if it appears in a manual or as a representation of the way the letters of a keyboard are standardly arranged' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: 45). Not everyone is able to make statements, or to have statements taken seriously by others. Some statements are more authorised than others, in that they are more associated with those in positions of power or with institutions. What Foucault wants to analyse is 'the law of existence of statements, that which rendered them possible . . . the conditions of their singular emergence' (Foucault 1991a: 59). Thus, rather than assuming that statements simply exist self-evidently, he wants to analyse the process whereby they are brought into being. What makes Foucault's analysis of statements unique is that he tries to analyse statements: 'without referring to the consciousness, obscure or explicit, of speaking subjects; without referring to the facts of discourse to the will – perhaps involuntary – of their authors; without having recourse to that intention of saying what always goes beyond what is actually said; without trying to capture the fugitive unheard subtlety of a word which has no text' (Foucault 1991a: 59). Thus, he is interested in analysing discourse as an impersonal



system which exceeds the individual, and he analyses precisely this abstract, anonymous system and structures, and not the individuals who interface with the system. Discourse itself structures what statements it is possible to say, the conditions under which certain statements will be considered true and appropriate. Discourse conditions that certain statements will be more productive of other statements than others.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Foucault's work on discourse and power is useful in helping theorists to consider the way that we know what we know; where that information comes from; how it is produced and under what circumstances; whose interests it might serve; how it is possible to think differently; in order to be able to trace the way that information that we accept as 'true' is kept in that privileged position. This enables us to look at the past without adopting a position of superiority – of course we know better now – in order to be able to analyse the potential strangeness of the knowledge which we take as 'true' at present.

## POWER/KNOWLEDGE

Many of Foucault's writings are concerned with how it is that we know something, and the processes whereby something becomes established as a fact. As we saw in the last chapter on discourse, Foucault is interested in the processes of exclusion which lead to the production of certain discourses rather than others. He is interested in the same processes of exclusion in relation to knowledge and, in the collection of essays entitled *Power/Knowledge* (1980), Foucault explores the way that, in order for something to be established as a fact or as true, other equally valid statements have to be discredited and denied. Thus, rather than focusing on the individual thinkers who developed certain ideas or theories, in works such as *The Order of Things* (1970) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault wants to focus on the more abstract institutional processes at work which establish something as a fact or as knowledge.

The conventional view of knowledge, and particularly scientific knowledge, is that it is created by a series of isolated creative geniuses, for example, Einstein and Pasteur. They are characterised as exceptional people who were able to transcend the conventional ideas of their period and who were able to formulate completely new ideas and theoretical perspectives. In a similar way, the History of Ideas within the philosophical tradition is largely characterised by this concern with individual thinkers, such as Hegel and Wittgenstein, who,

it is claimed, changed the course of intellectual endeavour. Foucault would like to produce a much more anonymous, institutionalised and rule-governed model of knowledge-production. As Ian Hunter states:

Foucault's reformulation of the concept of discourse derives from his attempts to provide histories of knowledge of what men and women have thought. Foucault's histories are not histories of ideas, opinions or influences nor are they histories of the way in which economic, political and social contexts have shaped ideas or opinions. Rather they are reconstructions of the *material conditions* of thought or 'knowledges'. They represent an attempt to produce what Foucault calls an *archaeology* of the material conditions of thought/knowledges, conditions which are not reducible to the idea of 'consciousness' or the idea of 'mind'.

(Hunter, cited in Kendall and Wickham 1999: 35)

Thus, he is not interested so much in what is known at any one period but rather in 'the material conditions of thought' that is the processes which led to certain facts being known rather than others.

Foucault is very aware of how much easier it would be to approach the history of knowledge and ideas by tracing the ideas of 'great thinkers' of Western culture, but instead he has decided to 'determine, in its diverse dimensions, what the mode of existence of discourses (their rules of formation, with their conditions, their dependencies, their transformations) must have been in Europe since the 17th century, in order that the knowledge which is ours today could come to exist, and more particularly, that knowledge which has taken as its domain this curious object which is man' (Foucault 1991a: 70). Thus, he is focusing on the mechanisms by which knowledge comes into being and is produced, and that includes the human sciences in which Foucault, of course, situates his own work. In *The Order of Things* (1970), he is particularly interested in the epistemic shift in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in which science turned its attention from the examination of the physical processes within the natural world to the study of 'man'. He argues that:

Classical thought and all the forms of thought that preceded it, were able to speak of the mind and the body, of the human being, of how restricted a place [s/]he occupies in the universe, of all the limitations by which [her/]his knowledge or [her/]his freedom must be measured, but not one of them was

able to know man as [s/]he is posited in modern knowledge. Renaissance 'humanism and Classical 'rationalism' were indeed able to allot human beings a privileged position in the order of the world, but they were not able to conceive of man.

(Foucault 1970: 318)

So, Foucault wants us to question the self-evident nature of disciplines such as sociology and psychology, consider the way that people thought about humankind before these disciplines developed and analyse the processes whereby it becomes possible to study 'man' as an object.

In *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault describes knowledge as being a conjunction of power relations and information-seeking which he terms 'power/knowledge' (Foucault 1980). He states, in an essay entitled 'Prison talk', that 'it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power' (Foucault 1980d: 52). This is an important theoretical advance in this discussion of knowledge, since it emphasises the way that knowledge is not dispassionate but rather an integral part of struggles over power, but it also draws attention to the way that, in producing knowledge, one is also making a claim for power. For Foucault, it is more accurate to use his newly formed compound 'power/knowledge' to emphasise the way that these two elements depend on one another.

Thus, where there are imbalances of power relations between groups of people or between institutions/states, there will be a production of knowledge. Because of the institutionalised imbalance in power relations between men and women in Western countries, Foucault would argue, information is produced about women; thus we find many books in libraries about women but few about men, and similarly, many about the working classes but few about the middle classes. There are many books about the problems of Black people, but not about Whites. Heterosexuality remains largely unanalysed while homosexuality is the subject of many studies. While this situation is changing radically, where studies of heterosexuality and whiteness have been undertaken, statistically it is still fair to say that academic study within the human sciences has focused on those who are marginalised (see Wilkinson and Kitzinger 1993 on heterosexuality, and Brown *et al.* 1999 on whiteness). Indeed, one could argue that anthropological study has been largely based on the study of those who are politically and economically marginal in relation to a Western

metropolis. Thus, although the academic study of a group of people, for example, the analysis of the dialect use of certain groups, often seems self-evident to the researcher, Foucault argues that the object of such research is frequently people who are in less powerful positions. Very few linguists analyse the dialect use of those who speak Received Pronunciation or BBC English; generally, studies are of those with what are seen as regional dialects or accents. In a complex process, this production of knowledge about economically disadvantaged people plays a significant role in maintaining them in this position. But rather than seeing the production of knowledge as wholly oppressive, Foucault is able to see that the production of information by the marginalised themselves can alter the status quo as I discuss later in this chapter.

Foucault characterises power/knowledge as an abstract force which determines what will be known, rather than assuming that individual thinkers develop ideas and knowledge. He asserts that:

the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of [the] fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations. In short it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it, and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge.

(Foucault 1991a: 27–28)

This is quite a shocking statement in that it dispenses with the myths which in Western society we have formulated for ourselves about the development of knowledge being due to the devotion of innumerable scholars who have worked unceasingly to improve on past knowledge; instead in Foucault's vision, it is power/knowledge which produces facts and the individual scholars are simply the vehicles or the sites where this knowledge is produced. You might think that this is an overstatement, but it is precisely in the most hyperbolic moments of Foucault's writings that his work is most rewarding in theoretical terms. If we allow ourselves to think these 'unthinkable' and seemingly insane ideas about what we know, then we may be able to analyse the extent of the role of individuals and impersonal abstract forces in the production of knowledge.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Foucault asserts that the set of procedures which produce knowledge and keep knowledge in circulation can be termed an 'épistémé'. In each historical period this set of rules and conceptual tools for thinking about what counts as factual changes. To give an example of the type of conceptual tool that Foucault has in mind, let us consider what he says about what he terms a 'will to know' which he asserts characterises the épistémé which developed at the end of the nineteenth century: this will to know is a voracious appetite for information, alongside, or perhaps, prior to which, developed a set of procedures for categorising and measuring objects (Foucault 1981: 55). We should not assume that this will to know or will to truth is universal or unchanging, although it sometimes feels as if it is, in this Information Age where, with the development of the Internet, it seems self-evident that we need more and more space to store information and make it available to as many people as possible. Instead, we should see the will to know reinforced and renewed by whole strata of practices, pedagogies, libraries, institutions, technologies and so on. For example, at the height of the British colonial period in the nineteenth century, there was an outpouring of scholarly, and more popular, knowledge about India and Africa, as the post-colonial theorists Edward Said and Mary Louise Pratt have shown (Said 1978; Pratt 1992). The colonial authorities felt that it was their duty to produce information about the colonised country, by producing detailed maps of the territory, describing architecture in great detail, providing grammars and dictionaries of the indigenous languages, describing the manners and customs of the people. This production of information was also achieved by those who were not employed by the colonial regimes, such as travel writers, novelists, scientists, but who saw in the colonial sphere an opportunity to expand global knowledge. Mary Louise Pratt, in particular, argues that this production of information was not a simple process whereby information about the colonised country was amassed in an objective fashion, as is conventionally assumed; she argues that, in fact, in the process of collecting data, for example about the flora of a country, the Western botanist was setting that information within a Western classificatory system which, in the process, erased the system of classification developed by the indigenous people, which might focus on the use of plants in medicine or in ritual, rather than on the morphological features of the plant, as in the Western model.

Thus, Westerners in the colonial period imposed systems of classification on the colonised countries which they proposed as global objective systems of knowledge, but which were, in fact, formulated from a Western perspective with Western interests at their core (see Foster and Mills 2002, for a fuller discussion). This process of production of knowledge took place through excluding other, equally valid forms of classification and knowledge which were perhaps more relevant to the context. Thus, we must be very suspicious of any information which is produced, since even when it seems most self-evidently to be adding to the sum of human knowledge, it may at the same time play a role in the maintenance of the status quo and the affirming of current power relations.

Foucault argues that rather than knowledge being a pure search after 'truth', in fact, power operates in that processing of information which results in something being labelled as a 'fact'. For something to be considered to be a fact, it must be subjected to a thorough process of ratification by those in positions of authority. As an example of this complex process of exclusion and choice whereby something becomes a 'fact' we might consider the way that, in the West, we tend to assume that the images that we are shown on television news reports must be 'true' and 'factual', but we do not generally consider the complex and lengthy process of editing and exclusion which is enacted on those images before they reach our television screens. To give an example of the way that the information we receive, which we assume to be true, is constrained by governments and other agencies, consider the following comments by the *Washington Post* correspondent, Carol Morello in 2001 on what she was allowed to report from the Anglo-American war in Afghanistan. She describes the way that journalists were only allowed to report if they joined the 'pool' system, whereby the army only gave the journalist accreditation and, therefore, information if they joined the 'pool'; if they joined the pool, they were then allowed very restricted access to certain locations. When Morello was told by the military that some American casualties were arriving she asked the American military forces:

Could a photographer take photos of the wounded arriving? No. Could print reporters just stand to the side and observe? No. Could reporters talk to the Marine pilots who had airlifted the wounded to the base? No. Could they talk to the doctors after they had finished treating the wounded? No. Could they

talk to the injured Afghan fighters who had also been transported to the base? No. . . . In every war there is an innate tension between the military and the journalists who want to cover the battles up close. With the US troops in southern Afghanistan, however, reporters have operated under limitations more restrictive than those imposed during the Persian Gulf War in 1991.

(Morello, cited in Morgan 2002: 8)

Thus, although, when we watch television we see images which seem to us to be immediate and authentic, these 'true' images of the conflict are the result of a very mediated and stage-managed series of negotiations between journalists and the military and government forces.

In an interview 'Critical theory/intellectual theory', as in his more extended work in the three volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault suggests that there has developed, within the West since the 1960s, a sense that people should try to find out the 'truth' about themselves. He suggests that it is a common assumption that if one examines one's sexuality, one's past experiences, one could discover the essence of your very being: you could 'find' yourself. However, for Foucault, the moment when you think that you have discovered the 'truth' about yourself is also a moment when power is exercised over you: he puts it in the following way: 'if I tell the truth about myself . . . it is in part that I am constituted as a subject across a number of power relations which are exerted over me and which I exert over others' (Foucault 1988c: 39). In the very process of what seems like constituting oneself as a subject, as an individual, producing knowledge about oneself only makes one an object of discourse, an object of power/knowledge. He takes this thinking about knowledge of oneself a stage further in his essay 'The dangerous individual'; he argues that when those who have been convicted of crimes are being sentenced, it is now deemed essential to know about them in order to judge them. He asks: 'can one condemn to death a person one does not know?' (Foucault 1988e: 127). In the process of convicting someone, a judge needs to be able to assess whether the person's actions were determined by a pathology or whether they were undertaken with full consciousness and intentionality. In each of these cases, the way that the criminal is treated and the type of sentencing is different; for example, in the United States, when a murder is committed, if the cause of the crime is pathological, the murderer will be confined to a mental institution and subjected to treatment, whereas if the murder is considered to be intentional, the murderer is executed or imprisoned.



In an interview entitled 'Truth and power' he examines the way that truth, like knowledge, is not an abstract entity as many within the Western philosophical tradition have assumed. Instead, he asserts that 'truth is of the world; it is produced there by virtue of multiple constraints' (Foucault 1979a: 46). He contrasts the conventional view of truth conceived as a 'richness, a fecundity, a gentle and insidiously universal force' with what he terms 'the will to truth' – that set of exclusionary practices whose function is to establish distinctions between those statements which will be considered to be false and those which will be considered true (Foucault 1981: 56). The true statements will be circulated throughout the society, reproduced in books; they will appear in school curricula and they will be commented on, described and evaluated by others in books and articles. These statements will underpin what is taken to be 'common-sense knowledge' within a society. Those statements which are classified as false will not be reproduced. Each society has its own 'regime of truth', that is, the type of statements which can be made by authorised people and accepted by the society as a whole, and which are then distinguished from false statements by a range of different practices. In an interview, 'Power and sex', he analyses the way that 'truth' or 'facts' are kept in place by a complex web of social relations, mechanisms and prohibitions and argues that 'my aim is not to write the social history of a prohibition but the political history of the production of "truth"' (Foucault 1988d: 112). And furthermore, in 'Questions of method', he adds that 'my problem is to see how [people] govern (themselves and others) by the production of truth . . . (by the production of truth I mean not the production of true utterances, but the establishment of domains in which the practice of true and false can be made at once ordered and pertinent)' (Foucault 1991b: 79). Thus, his analysis of truth and knowledge cannot be seen to be a simple political analysis of the oppressive forces of power/knowledge; he characterises his analysis as one which simply describes rather than criticises.

His analysis of the distinction between fact and falsehood is extended into the literary field by the literary analyst, Lennard Davis, who has shown that before the eighteenth century there was a certain laxity towards the division between fact and fiction (Davis 1983). In the eighteenth century, Davis argues, a number of legal interventions by the government began to make their presence felt on what could be published and this resulted in the division between fact and fiction

being clearly established; because the government was trying to restrict criticism in the press, the libel laws defined (and stamp duty taxed) those elements which claimed to be true and factual. Before this, newspapers and chapbooks had contained descriptions of events both natural and supernatural, true and imaginary, which had a moral or religious significance; now, newspapers began to publish reports of events which were recent and which were claimed to be true.

Foucault is not concerned to set up the notion of truth in opposition to a Marxist notion of ideology or false ideas, false consciousness himself, but simply to analyse the procedures which are used to maintain these distinctions. This is one of the difficulties which critics like Edward Said have found in their use of Foucault's work, since for post-colonial theorists it seems indispensable to see the representations by the colonial powers of colonised countries as false (Said 1978). For example, British writers within the colonial period often described the indigenous people of India and Africa as lazy, backward, dirty, inferior, 'primitive', and underdeveloped in comparison to a modern industrialised West. Said struggles in his use of Foucault's work on the question of the truth of these representations, since, at one and the same time, he is forced to see the constructedness of these 'factual' accounts, while wishing to somehow contrast this with a 'true' description of these countries. Such a description of what these countries and their inhabitants were *really* like is, in Foucault's terms, equally fictional and constructed. What Foucault argues is that 'it's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which is a chimera for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time' (Foucault 1980b: 133).

Although hegemony is a term which is much debated within Marxist theory, it can broadly be defined within the following terms: hegemony is a state within society whereby those who are dominated by others take on board the values and ideologies of those in power and accept them as their own; this leads to them accepting their position within the hierarchy as natural or for their own good.

Thus, truth, power and knowledge are intricately connected and what we need to analyse is the workings of power in the production of

knowledge. This is especially important for Western feminist theorists who tried initially to document the 'truth' of women's condition or women's experiences to oppose the falsehood of sexist stereotypes of women. However, the 'truth' of these feminist representations was also challenged by other women from marginalised, non-Western groups who did not feel that these images accurately reflected their situations, their concerns and values (Minh-ha 1989). What Western feminists have learned from this debate over who can represent 'women' as a whole, is that the term 'women' is one which it is almost impossible to discuss, since different groups of women will bring different perspectives to what 'women' are. Thus, what Foucault is concerned to assert is that truth is constructed and kept in place through a wide range of strategies which support and affirm it and which exclude and counter alternative versions of events. He is not necessarily concerned to provide alternative versions of events which may be seen by some to be more accurate or which fit in more with his perspective.

However, despite this seeming dispassionate stance on truth and knowledge, Foucault suggests that it is important to counter the types of information which have been disseminated to us by the government and its institutions, and in his own political activism, he considered that the production of knowledge could play an important role. For example, he, along with other campaigners, set up a group in the 1970s which provided information about the conditions in French prisons. This Group d'Information sur Les Prisons, rather than simply critiquing the conditions in prison, provided information about those conditions, written by the prisoners themselves. He stated in a speech setting out the group's manifesto:

we propose to let people know what prisons are: who goes there, and how and why they go; what happens there; what the existence of prisoners is like, and also the existence of those providing surveillance; what the buildings, food and hygiene are like; how the inside rules, medical supervision and workshops function; how one gets out and what it is like in our society to be someone who does get out.

(Foucault, cited in Eribon 1991: 225)

This production of unpalatable information, the sort of information that most people would rather not think about, is a form of critique in its own right, forcing to the front of our consciousness the facts

about what is entailed when we as a society condemn certain people to confinement.

Yet, it is also important that even this type of seemingly critical knowledge is not seen to be exempt from the workings of power/knowledge. This is important to bear in mind when we consider the work of white, middle-class, Western sociologists and anthropologists who, perhaps with the best intentions, study working-class communities or communities in other countries: in the process of collecting data and information about those communities they cannot but establish power relations between them and the group. This conjunction of power and knowledge has created great difficulties within sociology, linguistics and anthropology, where studying other communities can be seen to turn them into objects of knowledge. The feminist sociologist, Bev Skeggs (1997), is very aware of this problem in her sociological work about working-class women, as are many of those within the tradition of critical anthropology, who have tried to position themselves alongside the people whom they are studying rather than in a position of superiority. They have had to adopt a range of strategies, for example, giving their research findings to the communities to comment on, including critical comments by members of the study, and writing the research with members of the community, and acknowledging their input. (See, for an example of such a project, Bourdieu *et al.* 1999.) Foucault's decision in relation to the Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons was to attempt to provide the conditions from which the prisoners could speak for themselves; the group talked to prisoners and interviewed their families. He asserts that: 'these investigations are not made from the outside by a group of technicians. Here the investigators and the investigated are the same. It is up to them to speak, to dismantle the compartmentalisation, to formulate what is intolerable and to tolerate it no longer. It is up to them to take charge of the struggle that will prevent the exercise of oppression' (Foucault, cited in Eribon 1991: 228). Here, Foucault seems to be suggesting that in taking the role only of facilitator, he can sidestep the possibility of posing himself as superior to the prisoners; however, he still seems to be determining the form which action on the part of prisoners might take. Serge Livrozet, one of the prisoners who described their experiences in an interview in *Libération* in 1974, clearly felt that Foucault's position was not simply that of a facilitator, when he commented: 'these specialists in analysis are a pain. I don't

need anyone to speak for me and proclaim what I am' (Livrozet, cited in Eribon 1991: 234). Thus, every instance of production of knowledge, every instance when someone seems to be speaking on behalf of someone else, no matter how good their intentions are, needs to be interrogated.

Foucault's work on power/knowledge is also, in essence, an analysis of the historical processes at work in the construction of what our society as a whole knows about the past. It is only by critically examining the past that we can defamiliarise what we know about the present. Foucault's notion of history is profoundly antithetical to notions of what is often called Whig history, that is those versions of history which were formulated in the nineteenth century and which assumed that human civilisations (that is for these historians, European civilisations) were inevitably progressing and must necessarily be better than those in the past. Foucault questions this type of triumphalism. In his interview 'Critical theory/intellectual theory', he asserts: 'I think we should have the modesty to say to ourselves that the time that we live in is not *the* unique or fundamental or irruptive point in history where everything is completed and begun again' (Foucault 1988c: 36). Thus, we need to fundamentally question the notion of 'progress'.

Foucault has often been criticised by historians since he is rather cavalier in his generalisations about the past. However, he is using historical material for different purposes than scholarly historians. The sociologists, Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham, assert that this difference of purpose can be seen in the following terms:

the Foucaultian method's use of history . . . does not involve assumptions of progress (or regress) . . . it involves histories that never stop; they cannot be said to stop because they cannot be said to be going anywhere. To use history in the Foucaultian manner is to use it to help us see that the present is just as strange as the past, not to help us see that a sensible or desirable present has emerged . . . or might emerge.

(Kendall and Wickham 1999)

The notion that history is not 'going anywhere', that there is no progress, is very disconcerting for many readers. But Kendall and Wickham go on to suggest that within a Foucauldian analysis 'history should not be used to make ourselves comfortable, but rather to disturb the taken-for-granted' (Kendall and Wickham 1999: 4). Rather than

characterising the present as an inevitable outcome of events in the past we must see the present as one possible outcome of those events: to analyse the present then, 'does not consist in a simple characterisation of what we are but instead – by following lines of fragility in the present – in managing to grasp why and how that-which-is might no longer be that-which-is' (Foucault 1988c: 36). In a sense, what we have to bear in mind is that the present is both 'a time like any other' as well as 'a time which is never quite like any other' (Foucault 1988c: 37). Perhaps, what Foucault's form of analysis teaches us is that in some senses the present is unanalysable since it seems as if it is too complex to see clearly what is happening, and because it is too familiar. However, if we are to analyse it at all, and this does seem to be Foucault's aim, to analyse the present by discussing the past, then we must begin by treating it as if it were more like the past, in all its strangeness.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Foucault in a number of his writings is concerned to establish the interconnectedness of power and knowledge and power and truth. He describes the ways in which knowledge does not simply emerge from scholarly study but is produced and maintained in circulation in societies through the work of a number of different institutions and practices. Thus, he moves us away from seeing knowledge as objective and dispassionate towards a view which sees knowledge always working in the interests of particular groups.



## THE BODY AND SEXUALITY

Foucault wrote on the impact of institutional and discursive forces on the body, particularly in books such as *The History of Sexuality* (1978–1986). He suggests that the body should be seen as the focus of a number of discursive pressures: the body is the site on which discourses are enacted and where they are contested. He also analysed, in *The Order of Things* (1970) and in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), the changes consequent on the academic and governmental analysis of the population as a whole, what he terms ‘bio-power’, that is, the ‘increasing organisation of population and welfare for the sake of increased force and productivity’ (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1986: 8).

His analysis of the interaction between the body and institutions has been very influential among feminists and Queer theorists from the 1980s onwards. Jana Sawicki suggests a reason:

among the many influential French critical theorists Foucault was distinct in so far as his aim was to intervene in specific struggles of disenfranchised and socially suspect groups such as prisoners, mental patients and homosexuals. In so far as Foucault’s discourse appeared to be more activist and less narrowly academic than those of his post-structuralist counterparts, it compelled activist feminist theorists to take a serious look at his work.

(Sawicki 1998: 93)



Thus, theorists of marginalised groups have found his work useful because it lends itself to being put to use in a political cause.

## **THE BODY, DISCOURSE AND SEXUALITY**

Many analyses of power have focused on the role of institutions, but Foucault analyses the operation of power largely outside the realm of institutions; for this reason, the body is one of the sites of struggle and discursive conflict upon which he focuses. Rather than a top-down model of power relations which examines the way the State or institutions oppress people, he is concerned to develop a bottom-up model, where the body is one of the sites where power is enacted and resisted. Smart argues that:

An analysis of the techniques and procedures of power at the most basic level of the social order which then proceeds to a documentation of changes and developments in their forms and their annexation by more global forms of domination is radically different from an analysis which conceptualises power as located within a centralised institutional nexus and then seeks to trace its diffusion and effect in and through the social order.

(Smart 1985: 79)

This first type of analysis is a Foucauldian one, focusing on the way that mundane power relations at a local level feed into the constitution of institutional power relations. Maybe it would be more accurate to say that Foucault is attempting to privilege neither side of the power relation, but is concerned to describe the interaction of institutions and the individual without assuming that one of them is primary in the relation.

The focus in Foucault's work on the body rather than the individual is important. The individual in Foucault's framework is considered to be an effect rather than an essence, as Gary Wickham puts it: 'the notion of bodies as the target of power is part of Foucault's attempt to avoid the liberal conception of individuals as unconstrained creative essences' (Wickham 1986: 155). Foucault argues that 'the individual is not to be conceived of as a sort of elementary nucleus . . . on which power comes to fasten . . . In fact, it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals'

(Foucault 1980a: 98). Thus, rather than seeing individuals as stable entities, he analyses the discursive processes through which bodies are constituted. This is a particularly useful notion for feminists and Queer theorists who wish to theorise the forms of oppression of women, gays and lesbians without falling into false assumptions about essentialism (the notion that sexual or other difference is due to biological difference). Foucault suggests, in an essay entitled 'Nietzsche, genealogy and power' that the body should be seen as 'the inscribed surface of events', that is, political events and decisions have material effects upon the body which can be analysed. He also described the body as 'the illusion of a substantial unity' and 'a volume in perpetual disintegration', thus emphasising that what seems most solid is, in fact, constructed through discursive mediation; for him the task of genealogical analysis 'is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the processes of history's destruction of the body' (Foucault 1986b: 83). As well as questioning the seeming solidity of the body, Foucault also draws attention to the body as 'an historically and culturally specific entity', that is, one which is viewed, treated and indeed experienced differently depending on the social context and the historical period. In this sense, bodies are always subject to change and can never be regarded as natural, but rather are always experienced as mediated through different social constructions of the body.

In his work on 'bio-power', Foucault argues that it is at the level of the body that much regulation by the authorities from the nineteenth century onwards is enacted: knowledge is accumulated, populations are observed and surveyed, procedures for investigation and research about the population as a whole and of the body in particular are refined. Here, he argues, the aims of government in their attempts to control populations and the social sciences in their investigations of population growth and large-scale trends across societies seemed to coalesce. The view of the population as a whole as a resource was a new one; as the critics Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow put it: 'The individual was of interest exactly insofar as [s/he] could contribute to the strength of the state. The lives, deaths, activities, work and joys of individuals were important to the extent that these everyday concerns became politically useful' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1986: 139). Thus, while ostensibly surveys of the population were undertaken by the government to improve the welfare of the population as a whole – for example, eradicating venereal disease and incest among the working classes, they in fact had

the effect of tightening the disciplinary regime, so that the population was more strictly controlled.

Bio-power is not simply concerned with analysis of populations as a whole but also with the analysis of sexuality. Foucault's focus on the analysis of sexuality has played an important role in challenging preconceived notions of sexual identity. In a statement which exemplifies the Foucauldian approach to analysis, he argues that his study *The History of Sexuality* (1978–1986):

was intended to be neither a history of sexual behaviours nor a history of representations, but a history of 'sexuality' – the quotation marks have a certain importance. My aim was not to write a history of sexual behaviours and practices, tracing their successive forms, their evolution, and their dissemination; nor was it to analyse the scientific, religious or philosophical ideas through which these behaviours have been represented. I wanted first to dwell on that quite recent and banal notion of 'sexuality': to stand detached from it, bracketing its familiarity, in order to analyse the theoretical and practical context with which it has been associated.

(Foucault 1985: 3)

In the three-volume *History of Sexuality*, he focuses on views of sexuality and the consequent conceptualisation of the self since the Greeks. In the first volume, he analyses in particular the views of sexuality which developed within the nineteenth century which he argues still have an influence on contemporary notions on sexuality. He contrasts the 'frankness' and 'publicness' of people in the seventeenth century around sexual matters to the prudery and attempts to confine discussions of sexuality behind closed bedroom doors in the Victorian era. What makes his analysis of sexuality important is that he argues that while, within the nineteenth century, there was an attempt to silence discussion of sexuality and restrict sexual practices, we should not assume that this repression was effective, or effective in the ways in which it was envisaged it would be. The seeming repression of sexual discussion and sexuality itself had an unintended effect, that is to increase the desire to speak about sexuality and increase the pleasure gained from violating these taboos:

if sex is repressed, that is condemned to prohibition, non-existence and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a

deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself [/herself] to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he [/she] upsets established law; he [/she] somehow anticipates the coming freedom.

(Foucault 1986c: 295)

This is a paradoxical analysis of the repression of sexuality and indeed of the liberalisation of views on sexuality, since it has led to people in the twenty-first century imagining that freedom lies in unfettered sexual expression.

He argues, in an essay entitled 'We other Victorians', that:

since the end of the sixteenth century, the 'putting into discourse of sex', far from undergoing a process of restriction, on the contrary has been subjected to a mechanism of increasing incitement . . . the techniques of power exercised over sex have not obeyed a principle of rigorous selection, but rather one of dissemination and implantation of polymorphous sexualities . . . the will to knowledge has not come to a halt in the face of a taboo that must not be lifted, but has persisted in constituting – despite many mistakes of course – a science of sexuality.

(Foucault 1986c: 300)

Thus, rather than closing down the possible forms of sexuality, the repressive discourses which circulated around sexual behaviour in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries actually had the effect of constituting seemingly perverse forms of sexuality as *possible* and, perhaps more importantly, as *desirable* (since forbidden) forms of behaviour. Thus, homosexual activity, which before the nineteenth century had been seen as a series of stigmatised acts engaged in by males, began to be seen to constitute a particular sort of individual who would engage in those acts and no other. Thus, for the first time homosexuals and heterosexuals were constructed as distinct categories. Homosexuals began to be seen as particular types of people who were born as 'inverts', that is, pathologically perverse. Thus, homosexuality as a categorisation of individuals was invented. Because of this seeming solidity of the construction of this categorisation of sexual preference, sex and sexuality became the legitimate object of scientific study.

In *History of Sexuality, Vol. I* (1978), Foucault analyses the changes in the focus of the analysis of sexuality and the way that perversity became of great importance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In the seventeenth century, Foucault argues, the focus of concern was on the matrimonial couple: 'the sex of the husband and wife was beset by rules and recommendations': when it was possible and not possible to have sex (Foucault 1986d: 317). However, other forms of sexual practice 'remained a good deal more confused: one has only to think of the uncertain status of "sodomy", or the indifference regarding the sexuality of children' (Foucault 1986d: 317). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the sexuality of the couple came under less overt scrutiny: instead, the focus was on:

the sexuality of children, mad men and women and criminals: the sensuality of those who did not like the opposite sex; reveries, obsessions, petty manias, or great transports of rage. It was the time for all these figures, scarcely noticed in the past, to step forward and speak, to make the difficult confession of what they were.

(Foucault 1986d: 318)

Foucault analyses the process of confession, whereby in order for past actions to be atoned for, they must be spoken about to an authorised person. This practice developed within the Christian Church but can be seen in a wide range of practices today, ranging from therapeutic counselling, testimonia/autobiographical writing and reality-TV and in gay and lesbian 'coming out'. He argues that 'the Christian West invented this astonishing constraint, which it imposed on everyone, to say everything in order to efface everything, to formulate even the least faults in an uninterrupted, desperate, exhaustive murmuring, from which nothing must escape' (Foucault 1979d: 84). Foucault's tracing of the history of the confessional to the religious ritual of atonement and forgiveness suggests that 'coming out' is constrained by similar views of homosexuality as sin. However, perhaps gay and lesbian theorists have managed to recontextualise coming out as a liberatory movement where a gay or lesbian becomes openly a member of a different sort of community and becomes a different sort of person, rather than being someone who is publicly admitting their sins.

Foucault describes, in Volume II of the *History of Sexuality* (1985), the ways in which, for ancient Greek society, homosexual acts were seen in very different ways, not as defining oneself as a particular type of individual, but as indicating one's control of one's appetites. He analyses the sexual codes of the Greeks in order to show that our

notion of sexuality 'applies to a reality of another type', rather than sexuality being seen as a constant (Foucault 1985: 35). For the Greeks, 'what differentiates men from one another . . . is not so much the type of objects toward which they are oriented, nor the mode of sexual practice they prefer; above all, it is the intensity of that practice' (Foucault 1985: 44). Thus, moderation of sexual practice and control of lust were seen as more important and more defining of a moral self than whether men chose to have sexual relations with women, men or with boys. Thus, Foucault is not simply interested in the way subjects come to recognise themselves as sexed individuals, but also in the way that this analysis of one's sexual behaviour leads one to judge oneself morally. Rather than assuming that there is some necessary link between sexual behaviour and moral standards, Foucault asks 'why is sexual conduct, why are the activities and pleasures that attach to it, an object of moral solicitude?' (Foucault 1985: 10). Foucault describes the way in which, for the Greeks, through mastery of one's sexual behaviour and sexual appetite one formed oneself as a moral or ethical subject: 'a process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as a moral goal' (Foucault 1985: 28).

Foucault argues that not only was homosexuality invented in the nineteenth century but so was sexuality itself. Until the eighteenth century, there was a concern with the regulation of the 'flesh', that is the control of desire and demand; in the nineteenth century this develops into a concern with sexuality. Since the nineteenth century, this has had the effect of determining that in a sense one *is* one's sexual preference; the sex of the person that one sleeps with determines the identity category that you inhabit. Foucault saw the construction of sexuality being constituted along three axes: 1) knowledges about sexual behaviour; 2) systems of power which regulate the practice of sexual acts; 3) 'the forms within which individuals are able, are obliged, to recognise themselves as subjects of this sexuality' (Foucault 1985: 4).

In *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I* (1978), and in an essay 'The repressive hypothesis' (1986d), Foucault discusses the way that children's sexuality was discussed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; he shows that in the seventeenth century there had been a certain 'freedom' between adults and children to talk about sexual matters which was lost in the repressive moves to prevent male children

masturbating; however, ‘this was not a plain and simple imposition of silence. Rather it was a new regime of discourses. Not any less was said about it; on the contrary. But things were said in a different way and in order to obtain different results’ (Foucault 1986d: 309). He suggests that one has only to look at the architecture of schools built during this period to see:

that the question of sex was a constant preoccupation. The builders considered it explicitly. The organisers took it permanently into account. All who held a measure of authority were placed in a state of perpetual alert . . . The space for classes, the shape of the tables, the planning of the recreation lessons, the distribution of the dormitories (with or without partitions, with or without curtains) the rules for monitoring bedtime and sleep periods – all this referred, in the most proximal manner, to the sexuality of children.

(Foucault 1986d: 310)

Not only did the sexuality of (male) children become an issue which had to be confronted and managed in schools, but it became a general and public problem which required parents, doctors and schoolteachers to be advised:

doctors counselled the directors and professors of educational establishments, but they also gave their opinions to families; educators designed projects which they submitted to the authorities; schoolmasters turned to students, made recommendations to them, and drafted for their benefit books of exhortation, full of moral and medical examples. Around the schoolboy and his sex there proliferated a whole literature of precepts, opinions, observations, medical advice, clinical cases, outlines for reform and plans for ideal institutions.

(Foucault 1986d: 310)

In this sense, rather than repressing and silencing male children’s sexuality, those very children were drawn into a ‘web of discourses which sometimes address them, sometimes speak about them’ and which shaped their sexual responses (Foucault 1986d: 311).

This treatment of boys’ masturbation as an epidemic which needed to be eradicated entailed:

using these tenuous pleasures as a prop, constituting them as a secret (forcing them into hiding so as to make possible their discovery), tracing them back to

their source, tracking them from their origins to their effects, searching out everything that might cause them or simply enable them to exist. Wherever there was a chance they might appear, devices of surveillance were installed; traps were laid for compelling admissions; inexhaustible and corrective discourses were imposed; parents and teachers were alerted, and left with the suspicion that all children were guilty, and with the fear of being themselves at fault if their suspicions were not sufficiently strong . . . an entire medico-sexual regime took hold of the family milieu

(Foucault 1986d: 322)

What is interesting about this analysis of children's sexuality is precisely the reversal which Foucault's analysis makes: what seems to be repressed and silenced is, in fact, brought to light and discussed endlessly; and further, what the authorities seem to wish to repress, they in fact depend on for their functioning. This is quite different from the conventional notion of repression or prohibition, as he puts it:

the child's 'vice' was not so much an enemy as a support; it may have been designated as the evil to be eliminated, but the extraordinary effort that went into the task that was bound to fail leads one to suspect that what was demanded of it was to persevere, to proliferate to the limits of the visible and the invisible, rather than to disappear for good. Always relying on this support, power advanced, multiplied its relays and its effects, while its target expanded, subdivided, and branched out, penetrating further into reality at the same pace.

(Foucault 1986d: 322)

Thus, this analysis of sexuality can be seen to be, at one and the same time, an analysis of the workings of power and the way that, despite the intentions of those acting to control children's sexuality, certain other effects ensued.

As part of his analysis of sexuality, he analyses what we would now term 'child abuse' but which he labelled 'inconsequential bucolic pleasures' (Foucault 1986d: 312). He describes the case of a French male farmhand in 1869 who was indicted for indecent assault (in Foucault's words: 'he had obtained a few caresses from a little girl'); he was arrested and his case was reported by gendarmes, a doctor and two experts. Foucault suggests that the only significance of this case is the pettiness of it all, that 'this everyday occurrence in the life of village sexuality . . . could become from a certain time, the object not only



of a collective intolerance but of a judicial action, a medical intervention, a careful clinical examination, and an entire theoretical elaboration' (Foucault 1986d: 313). The authorities acquitted the farmhand of any crime but locked him away in a hospital where he remained until his death. It is clear with whom Foucault's sympathies lie: he refers to 'these barely furtive pleasures between simple-minded adults and alert children', and 'this village half-wit who would give a few pennies to little girls for favours the older ones refused him', but particularly in the current concern about paedophilia, these 'furtive pleasures' do not seem so inconsequential. Foucault asks us to analyse the way we categorise these sexual acts and those who engage in them without resorting to categorisations such as paedophiles.

Some feminist theorists have found this type of analysis of sexuality productive, forcing us to reconsider the seemingly self-evident nature of our responses to sexual acts. For example, Nicola Gavey surveyed a wide range of heterosexual women and asked them whether they had ever had unwanted sex with their partners (Gavey 1993). While most of them admitted that they had had sex with their partners when they had not wanted to, they did not classify this as rape because of their views about the difference of male and female sexual needs and drives. Because of the way relations between men and women are still often structured around notions of unequal power, Gavey argues that some women find it difficult to refuse to have sex with their partners. This is because many heterosexual women view sexual relations in terms of contradictory notions of consent and availability: 'when dominant discourses on women's sexuality are structured around consent, and they neglect more active notions such as desire, it is little wonder that women often don't really understand the concept of consent in a way that is meaningful to us' (Gavey 1993: 105).

In another feminist study, Linda Grant questions that date rape should always be presumed to have the devastating effects which media-reports and therapists assume it does. She analyses the construction of the concept of date-rape in the last fifteen years, and contrasts the way that date-rape is considered now and the way that she herself experienced a sexual encounter she had in the 1970s, where she felt forced into having sex against her will. Although she categorised this sexual experience as unpleasant and it made her angry, she was surprised, when telling another person, to be informed that she had been raped. She says, describing herself in the third person – perhaps a telling strategy:

By the end of the afternoon she'd pretty well forgotten about the night before. She did not feel defiled. She did not shower a dozen times, scrubbing at her skin. She did not feel her identity evaporate. She did not call the police. She did not inform the university authorities. She did not confront the man. What she did do was to tell a number of people what had happened and it was agreed that it was typical of him – he was an arrogant, egocentric bastard . . . no one suggested that the woman should go for counselling. No one held her. She didn't develop an eating disorder and she was never afterwards able to feel that the event had been a trauma. She just had it down as a bad night.

(Grant 1994: 79)

While this type of analysis does not aim to question the traumatic effect of violent rape on women, as it is clear that such rape and sexual abuse is a brutal violation of women and does have serious psychological consequences, what Grant is drawing attention to is the way that date-rape has been constructed as a form of sexual behaviour which entails a number of different types of behaviour in response to it. She is questioning whether this set of behaviours need necessarily be consequent to this type of sexual experience. Thus feminists working with Foucault's ideas have tried to question the self-evident nature of our thinking about sexual assault and our responses to it.

This focus on the body as a place where discourses are acted out and acted upon is one of the ways that Foucault manages to consider the way that identities are constructed without falling prey to a simple liberal humanism (that is, an assumption that there is a stability to the individual and that each individual is unique). He is interested in examining the way that power relations produce particular types of identities. However, rather than seeing power as simply a site of oppression, or as simply determining certain identities, Foucault sees that it is in negotiation and play that identities are formed. Foucault suggests that it is possible to construct what he calls counter-discourses and counter-identification, that is, individuals can take on board the stigmatised individualities that they have been assigned, such as that of 'perverse sexuality' and revel in them rather than seeing them in negative terms. Thus, some lesbians can use terms such as 'dyke' to refer to themselves, and some gay men can use the word 'queen' or 'poof' in a positive way. Indeed, the very use of the word 'Queer' to describe anti-essentialist lesbian and gay theorising is an instance of counter-identification, of celebrating the terms which have been used

to condemn us. Foucault analyses the stereotypical image of the homosexual: 'in nineteenth century texts there is a stereotypical portrait of the homosexual or invert: not only his mannerisms, his bearing, the way he gets dolled up, his coquetry, but also his facial expressions, his anatomy, the feminine morphology of his whole body are regularly included in this disparaging description' (Foucault 1985: 18). Foucault focuses on the way that this image of homosexuality comes to stand for homosexuality as a whole and argues that it has a complex relation with the behaviour and self-representation of homosexuals since 'actual behaviours may have corresponded [to this image] through a complex play of inductions and attitudes of defiance' (Foucault 1985: 18). This notion that individuals can take this negative stereotype and use it productively to form elements of their own individuality has been drawn on by lesbian theorists in particular. For example, Robyn Queen has analysed the way that lesbians represent themselves in an often complex mixture of parodies of stereotypical heterosexual behaviour together with ironised stereotypes of lesbian and gay, butch and femme behaviours (Queen 1997). William Leap describes an incident where, when confronted with the phrase 'Death to Faggots' written on a lavatory wall, a gay male had written in response, 'That's Mr. Faggot to you, punk'. As Leap puts it: 'Using an appeal to appropriate verbal etiquette to a death threat is an especially delicious moment of queer phrase-making' (Leap 1997). Thus, rather than assuming that the identities that we seem to have at the present moment are stable and only to be seen from one perspective, Foucault suggests that there are ways of subversively using these positions which have been mapped out for us by others. For many Queer theorists, identity is best seen as performative, something which we do and act out, something which we assemble from existing discursive practices, rather than as something which we possess (Butler 1990).

One of the issues which Foucault consistently draws attention to is the way that, since the 1960s, people have sought the truth about themselves in their sexuality. If one is sexually liberated and freed from all prudish constraints, it was argued, one will in a sense be more truly oneself. In the nineteenth century, through the force of knowledges about sexuality, individuals 'were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognise and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play between themselves and themselves a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth

of their being, be it natural or fallen' (Foucault 1985: 5). However, in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I*, Foucault shows that this notion of liberation through sexuality is an illusion as 'where there is desire, the power relation is already present: an illusion, then to denounce this relation for a repression exerted after the event; but vanity as well to go questing after a desire that is beyond the reach of power' (Foucault 1978: 151).

As well as analysing the way that homosexuality and children's sexuality has been constructed, Foucault also considers the way that women's bodies and sexualities are shaped by social pressures. Women's bodies, particularly middle-class women's bodies have been the subject of a vast array of different practices and discursive regimes. Feminist theorists have taken the notion of disciplinary regime, discussed in Chapter 1, and used it to analyse the workings of femininity on the female body. A disciplinary regime is one where one's comportment is overseen and subjected to a series of rules and regulations relating to control of appetite, movement and emotion. Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, describes the disciplinary structures which were put in place in prisons and armies in the nineteenth century in order to ensure the smooth running of these institutions; people within the institutions were forced to obey commands and perform even mundane actions according to a rigid set of rules which were internalised to such an extent that they began to seem part of the individual's personality. Capitalist production has colonised a great number of techniques from such institutions, and others, in its construction of the work ethic, ensuring that notions such as punctuality, self-discipline and precision are internalised by workers as desirable qualities. In a similar way, some feminists have argued that femininity can be viewed as a disciplinary regime. Femininity is achieved (if it is ever achieved) through a long process of labour to force the body into compliance with a feminine ideal, through depilation, cosmetics, exercise, dieting and attention to dress. It is this working on the body which is of interest to feminist theorists.

However, some feminist theorists have also remarked upon the fact that the notion of the disciplinary regime is perhaps unhelpful in this context since it appears to operate outside of an institutional context. And, as Sandra Bartky argues, 'no one is marched off for electrolysis at gunpoint' (Bartky 1988: 75). While noting that there are a number of experts who are consulted for advice on how best to manage one's

femininity, we still need to ask who 'is the top sergeant in the disciplinary regime of femininity? . . . The disciplinary power that inscribes femininity in the female body is everywhere and is nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular' (Bartky 1988: 70). Thus, although there are elements of disciplinary regime in femininity, it is the fact that no one particular agency can be held responsible which differentiates it from other disciplinary regimes. This lack of institutional agency behind the regulation of femininity is also what makes it difficult to critique and change – hence when the British Labour government made a commitment to try to change young women's views on body size recently, they turned to trying to influence the images represented in women's magazines.

One of the ways in which the bodies of women within particular contexts seem to be subjected to particular discursive frameworks is in relation to eating disorders as Sandra Bartky and Susan Bordo describe in their essays on anorexia nervosa (Bartky 1988; Bordo 1989). Here we see in action what Foucault terms a 'microphysics of power' that is the very minute operations of power, in this case upon the body. Disciplinary practices of, for example, exacting routines of body and object co-ordination train the body in certain ways to 'become docile' (Bartky 1988: 61). Bordo describes the way that, drawing on Foucault's work, we can trace a number of themes which have been seen to operate as ways of seeing the body and for her these are particularly important in the analysis of anorexia nervosa (Bordo 1989). The body is experienced as alien to the true self of the soul or the thinking self; it is experienced as confinement and limitation; and the body is the enemy and as something which eludes our control. These ways of thinking about the body have all been used at different periods of history, sometimes in conjunction or opposition. Anorexics aim to reverse these oppositions in order to put themselves (that part of them which is not their bodies) in control.

Bartky argues that feminist campaigns against certain disabling forms of femininity are not likely to be successful since many women have invested in these procedures:

Women . . . like other skilled individuals have a stake in the perpetuation of their skills, whatever it may cost to acquire them and quite apart from the question of whether as a gender they would have been better off had they never had to acquire them in the first place. Hence, feminism . . . threatens

women with a certain de-skilling, something people normally resist; beyond this, it calls into question that aspect of personal identity that is tied to the development of one's sense of competence.

(Bartky 1988: 77)

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Thus, a Foucauldian analysis of the body and sexuality is concerned to defamiliarise those elements which are taken for granted and challenge any statement which argues for the unchanging nature of the body. Foucault's ideas about sexuality have led to a radical questioning of the relation between sexual choice and sexual preference and identity. His work has also been influential in rethinking identity itself and has led to a concern with performative rather than essentialist views of identity. He analyses the relation between institutions and the body and the way that power relations are played out on the body, but he does not see the body as passive in this process and is as much concerned with charting the possible forms of resistance to control as with describing disciplinary control itself.



## QUESTIONING THE SUBJECT: MADNESS AND SANITY

Foucault wrote many books and articles which challenged the stability of the individual subject. For example, as I discussed in the previous chapter, his work in *The History of Sexuality* aimed to question whether one's preference for certain types of sexual acts with certain types of people marked one out as a particular type of individual, thus destabilising the very notion of gendered and sexual identity. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) and *The Order of Things* (1973), he tried to develop a form of analysis which focused on the impersonal and abstract forces of discourse in structuring the individual, thus calling into question the notion of the individual as any more than a site where discourses are played out, as I discussed in Chapter 2. In addition, Foucault also analysed a subject which is perhaps at the heart of the notion of the individual: the construction of the notion of mental illness. Although most of Foucault's academic training was in philosophy, after his first degree he trained for a higher degree in psychology and a diploma in pathological psychology, and he worked for a short period in a mental hospital and psychologically assessed prisoners; this interest in psychology persisted in many of his works, most notably in *Madness and Civilisation* (1967). He himself suffered persistently from depression and attempted suicide on several occasions. This may have been partly due to the great difficulty at this time about being openly homosexual, but it does suggest that 'his pronounced interest in



psychology stemmed from elements in his own life' (Eribon 1991: 27). These concerns with challenging our conventional views on mental illness and sexuality have led him to emphasise the importance of trying to analyse without employing the notion of the individual subject and to see the subject as an effect of discourses and power relations.

Foucault's work in *Madness and Civilisation* (1967), on the way that madness is constructed by society and its institutions has been profoundly influential, his work appearing at a time when the alternative psychiatric movement in Britain and America, which tried to challenge the medicalisation of mental illness, was beginning to develop. He aimed to try to demonstrate that rather than madness being a stable condition, mental illness should rather be seen as 'the result of social contradictions in which [humans are] historically alienated' (Foucault, cited in Eribon 1991: 70). These social contradictions change from era to era. He saw madness as being constructed at a particular point in history; madness is constituted to ring-fence reason or sanity and to create clear distinctions between madness and sanity. Madness is also constructed as part of a wider process of the development of modernity, and hence as a part of a process whereby the *épistémé* moves from explanations based on religion, to those based on medical analysis: the feminist geographers, Liz Bondi and Erica Burman, argue, drawing on Foucault's work: 'The move from a moral-religious to a secular and medical approach to the production and evaluation of individual experience is what – according to Foucauldian analyses – makes the shift to modernity, along with all those other practices of production and consumption that mark the birth of the rational bourgeois – and we might add culturally masculine – individual subject' (Bondi and Burman 2001: 7). Donnelly even argues that 'early psychiatry helped to constitute the object "madness" which it then developed to treat' (Donnelly 1986: 18). This seems to be a little too intentionalist an account of the development of psychiatry, but there is a certain truth in the statement. Foucault's method in analysing the history of madness is 'rather than asking *what* in a given period, is regarded as sanity or insanity, as mental illness or normal behaviour, [instead] . . . to ask *how* these divisions are operated' (Foucault 1991b: 74). Thus, just as in the case of his analysis of the constitution of truth and knowledge, (discussed in Chapter 3) he is interested in how madness is kept in place, what tools are used to keep madness in circulation as a category, and what processes are used to distinguish between the mad and the sane.

Rather than reifying madness, Foucault traces the way that madness has been constructed in different forms and judged in different ways throughout history. Thus, rather than seeing madness in the negative way that we do in the West at present, David Cooper suggests that in reading Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation*, 'one is awakened to a tragic sense of the loss involved in the relegation of the wildly charismatic or inspirational area of our experience to the desperate region of pseudo-medical categorisation from which clinical psychiatry has sprung' (Cooper, introduction to Foucault 1999: viii). Behaviour such as hearing imaginary voices, hallucinating, hysteria, speaking in tongues, which would, in other periods of history, have been seen as possessions by spirits or God, or visions inspired by angels, instead of being valued and sanctified by the Church, became something which needed to be treated by confinement and the administering of drugs. Foucault identifies a shift in the way that madness is conceptualised:

in the Renaissance, madness was present everywhere and mingled with every experience by its images or its dangers. During the classical period, madness was shown, but on the other side of the bars; if present, it was at a distance, under the eyes of a reason that no longer felt any relation to it and would not compromise itself by too close a resemblance.

(Foucault 1999: 70)

Foucault also shows that during the Classical period, rather than madness being considered as an illness as it now is, it was seen as a manifestation of animality; in *Madness and Civilisation*, he comments that: 'the animality that rages in madness dispossesses man of what is specifically human in him; not in order to deliver him over to other powers, but simply to establish him at the zero degree of his own nature' (Foucault 1999: 74). This is important to bear in mind when analysing the way that madness is treated and interpreted in the twenty-first century as the medicalisation and confinement of those considered to be mentally ill, and even the care of those people within the community, presupposes a very different model of madness and cure. If madness is considered to be the epitome of animality then the only cure is discipline and brutality to curb these passions; if madness is considered to be the result of chemical imbalance in the brain, or of repression of trauma during childhood, then the only cure is the use of drugs to restore the chemical balance, and/or therapy. Foucault

confronts us with the strange treatments of madness which developed in the eighteenth century, when madness was seen as due to imbalance within the system of humours. Patients were given blood transfusions, were shocked by sudden immersion in cold water, were forced to ingest bitters. This focus on the strangeness of the way that madness was treated in the past forces us to consider the strangeness of the way that we treat mental illness, with madness now functioning as a pathology, treated by confinement, drugs or the use of electric shock therapy.

Rather than assuming that the distinction between madness and sanity self-evidently exists, Foucault examines, in *Madness and Civilization* (1974), the way that institutional changes, such as the availability of houses of confinement, contributed to the development of such a distinction. Foucault describes the way that the institutionalisation of those considered to be insane developed from the practice in the twelfth century of confining those who were suffering from the highly infectious disease leprosy. Leper houses were built in Europe from the twelfth century onwards to prevent leprosy from spreading to the rest of the population. In England and Scotland alone, 220 leper houses were built during the twelfth century. Because of this segregation and because, with the cessation of the Crusades the contagion from sources in the East was largely eliminated, by the sixteenth century leprosy was less widespread in Europe. In the seventeenth century, hospitals which had been built to house lepers were taken over to be used as asylums for those who were categorised as 'socially useless'; this included the idle, the poor, those who had scandalised their families, together with those whose behaviour was considered to be in any way abnormal. All those who could not, or would not, work, were placed in this category and confined. Foucault sees the confinement of those who did not work as partly determined by economic conditions of the time, but he does not reduce this measure simply to economic forces, since he shows that even when the economy improved, the poor were still confined and forced to labour. What strikes Foucault about this process of confinement, which he terms 'the great confinement', is just how many people were confined: he claims that 'more than one out of every hundred inhabitants of the city of Paris found themselves confined [in one of the houses of confinement]' (Foucault 1999: 38). The Hôpital Général in Paris alone contained 6,000 people. The confinement of this very diverse group of people was not enacted on

grounds of medical incapacity or with the aim of curing the confined. This draws attention to the relative recentness of the medicalisation of madness – the categorising of madness as a mental *illness*.

In the nineteenth century, these houses of confinement began to be used solely for the confining of those who were considered insane: in *Madness and Civilisation*, Foucault argues that:

the asylum was substituted for the [leper] house, in the geography of haunted places as in the landscape of the moral universe. The old rites of excommunication were revived, but in the world of production and commerce. It was in these places of doomed and despised idleness, in this space invented by a society which had derived an ethical transcendence from the law of work, that madness would appear and soon expand until it had annexed them. . . . The nineteenth century would consent, would even insist that to the mad and to them alone be transferred these lands on which a hundred and fifty years before, men had sought to pen the poor, the vagabond, the unemployed.

(Foucault 1999: 57)

While most critics would see the reform of the asylums in the nineteenth century, and the move away from the harsh treatment of patients, where inmates were chained up, to one where patients were treated more compassionately, where their complaints were listened to, and they were no longer viewed as a ‘freakshow’ for the middle classes, as a period of liberalisation and as a time when those who were judged to be mentally ill were treated with more care, Foucault argues that this should not be seen as a simple improvement of conditions: ‘the asylum no longer punished the madman’s guilt . . . but it did more, it organised that guilt. It organised it for the madman as a consciousness of himself’ (Foucault 1999: 252). Thus, unlike with any other illness, the diagnosis of mental illness seems also to imply a failing on the part of the individual for which they can be blamed: Foucault claims that:

the asylum . . . is not a free realm of observation, diagnosis and therapeutics; it is a juridical space from where one is accused, judged and condemned, and from which one is never released except by the version of this trial in psychological depth, that is by remorse. Madness will be punished in the asylum, even if it is innocent outside of it. For a long time to come, and until our own day at least, it is imprisoned in a moral world.

(Foucault, cited in Eribon 1991: 97)

This has led to the stigmatisation of mental illness, so that even when it is clear that psychological damage is the result of social conditions, sexual abuse or poverty, the individual is held to be at fault or to blame. As some feminist theorists have argued, the ‘mental health services . . . have helped to maintain the social status quo by naming and managing as “madness” the psychological damage and distress caused by social inequalities’ (Williams *et al.* 2001: 98). In a similar way, we need to question critically whether the releasing of people into ‘care in the community’ from the 1980s onwards in Britain is necessarily better for those people. The closing of the asylums seems for many a radical improvement, but the conditions of those in the community, living in hostels or on the street, without sufficient support or funding, with the possibility of enforced medication, means that we cannot necessarily see this supposed liberalisation as making these people more free. Furthermore, while many consider that those people undergoing mental crises are now treated with more respect and dignity than in previous periods, Foucault asks us to question our assumptions yet again. The medicalisation of madness has resulted in the alleviation of suffering for many, but this has also resulted in a greater stigmatisation of mental illness, and has placed the ‘cure’ of madness in the hands of professional psychiatrists and therapists.

As I have shown above, Foucault charts the way that certain types of behaviour have thus begun to be characterised as aberrant and indicative of mental illness. Feminist theorists such as Dorothy Smith (1990), in her article on mental illness entitled ‘K is mentally ill’, have drawn on Foucault’s work to describe the complex process of distinguishing what behaviour we are prepared to tolerate and what behaviour we feel needs to be categorised as indicative of mental illness. She analyses the way that a group of friends gradually begin to notice certain forms of withdrawn behaviour on the part of an individual she calls K. Through discussion with one another, they come to the decision that she is suffering from a mental illness and must therefore be referred to a doctor, and in the end confined to an asylum. Smith should not be seen as suggesting that K is not suffering distress, but what she is focusing on is the process whereby it is decided that she is mentally ill. This process is a discursive one where reference is made to the norms of society, and how we expect people to behave. This change in the view of aberrant behaviour has consequences as Foucault has shown; in previous periods, if people displayed aberrant behaviour,

they were largely left alone or stigmatised as being non-productive, but the medicalisation of mental illness results in sometimes enforced confinement and treatment and what, in the special issue of *Feminist Review* on mental illness, was termed 'an individualising, apolitical, biologicistic understanding of [distress]' (Allred *et al.* 2000: 1). Thus, what may in fact be seen to be primarily emotional problems are now categorised as problems of mental illness requiring medical intervention. Many feminists, such as Elaine Showalter, have analysed the way that those women who have rebelled against the social conventions and restrictions on women's behaviour have sometimes been labelled as mentally ill (Showalter 1987). Thus, the fact that the distinction between madness and sanity has been confused with the socially constructed distinction between the normal and the abnormal means that any instances of seemingly aberrant behaviour can be labelled as an instance of mental illness.

Feminist theorists drawing on Foucault's work have challenged the way that drugs are administered to those suffering from mental distress to 'cure' them, and indeed some feminists have tried to celebrate, or at least view in different ways, the behaviours which have been considered by others to be aberrant. In a clear case of counter-identification which I discussed in the previous chapter, feminist theorist and activist Sasha Claire McInnes states:

Today, as I recover my Self, I am elated (Manic), shy introverted and reflective (Social Phobia) irritable and frustrated (PMS) whelmed and stressed (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) sad and melancholic (depression) passionate, joyful, extroverted in utter abandon (Mania) wanting and expecting respect (Borderline Personality Disorder) and fearful (anxiety disorder). All of these feelings and others are now precious to me. I want these feelings. I want them all. It's the 'messiness' of my humanity and of being alive that I choose and cherish over the half-life offered by brain, mind and heart-numbing legal drugs.

(McInnes 2001: 164)

In this quotation from McInnes we can see someone who is keenly aware of the way that their behaviour has been described by those within the medical establishment and by psychiatrists, who would see these 'symptoms' as in need of treatment and cure. McInnes' alternative vision of these behaviours, classified as physical and social

disorders by others, stresses the positive elements, even when they seem to bring her some distress.

Foucault's work on the distinction between madness and sanity and the constructed nature of mental illness has been enormously influential for both those such as feminist theorists who are concerned to analyse the way that women are judged to be mentally ill, as well as those people who have suffered mental distress and have found themselves treated in particular ways by the medical establishment. This challenging work by Foucault is in essence, a fundamental analysis of the nature of the human individual and a call to destabilise the subject.

## THEORISING WITHOUT THE SUBJECT

Thus, as both of these discussions of Foucault's work on sexuality and on madness have shown, Foucault is concerned with the radical questioning of the stability of the individual subject or self in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) and *The Order of Things* (1973). This move away from the analysis of the individual subject to an analysis of the constitution of the subject, led him also to be interested in what led academics to turn to the analysis of 'Man' when the human sciences developed in the nineteenth century and, indeed, he suggests that this focus was not coincidental but that it was a necessary relation. He states, in an interview entitled 'Critical theory/intellectual theory', 'while historians of science in France were interested essentially in the problem of how a scientific object is constituted, the question I asked myself was this: how is it that the human subject took itself as the object of possible knowledge? Through what forms of rationality and historical conditions? And finally at what price?' (Foucault 1988c: 29/30). Rather than the focus on the self appearing to be a natural progress in the development of knowledge, he suggests that the analysis of the self needs to be scrutinised, and perhaps that this analysis of the subject need not necessarily be seen in positive terms.

Foucault sees the emergence of 'Man' as an object of knowledge as an epistemic shift, a dramatic change in the way that societies conceptualise. This emergence of 'Man' has profound consequences for representation, as the critics Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow put it:

Representation suddenly became opaque. As long as discourse provided a transparent medium of representation whose linguistic elements corresponded

to primitive elements in the world, representation was not problematic. God had arranged a chain of being and arranged language in pre-established correspondence with it. Human beings happened to have a capacity to use linguistic signs, but human beings as rational speaking animals were simply one more kind of creature whose nature could be read off from its proper definition so that it could be arranged in its proper place on the table of beings. There is no need for any finite being to make representation possible: no place in the picture for a being who posits it.

(Dreyfus and Rabinow 1986: 27)

Foucault argues, in *The Order of Things*, that from this Classical épistémé where 'Man' is not represented, there is a shift to a focus on representing and analysing 'Man': 'In the general arrangement of the Classical épistémé, nature, human nature and their relations are definite and predictable functional moments. And man as a primary reality with his own density, as the difficult object and sovereign subject of all possible knowledge, has no place in it' (Foucault, cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1986: 27).

For me, the most forceful element of his thinking about the focus on 'Man' in the analysis of the development of medical science is one of his more successful reversals of conventional wisdom: he shows the way in which the dissection and examination of the corpse led to the beginning of medical knowledge about the processes within the living body. To be able to decipher symptoms which were only displayed on the outside of the living body, the doctor had to examine the inside of the dead body. Once the discovery of the use of dissection is made, he comments in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973), 'life, disease and death now form a technical and conceptual trinity'. And he goes on to say:

it will no doubt remain a decisive fact about our culture that its first scientific discourse concerning the individual had to pass through this stage of death. Western man could constitute himself in his own eyes as an object of science, he grasped himself within his language and gave himself in himself and by himself, a discursive existence only in the opening created by his own elimination: from the experience of Unreason was born psychology, the very possibility of psychology; from the integration of death into medical thought is born a medicine that is given as a science of the individual.

(Foucault, cited in Eribon 1991: 154)



In an extension of his analysis of the emergence of 'Man' as the object of the human sciences, he also argues that 'one has to dispense with the constituent subject . . . to attain an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within the historical texture' (Foucault 1978: 35). Thus, in examining the development of the human sciences, his aim is to develop a form of analysis which does not focus on the subject at all, but which focuses on the discursive processes which brought it into being. In *The Birth of the Clinic* (1975), Foucault begins the process of tracking down the concern with the analysis of human nature; he argues that 'it is within medical discourse that the individual first became an object of positive knowledge' (Foucault 1975: 27). In one of Foucault's challenging aphorisms, he then goes on to propose the death of Man, by analogy with Nietzsche's death of God:

one thing in any case is certain; man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge. Taking a relatively short chronological sample within a restricted geographical area – European culture since the sixteenth century – one can be certain that man is a recent invention within it. It is not around him and his secrets that knowledge prowled for so long in the darkness . . . As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.

(Foucault, cited in Eribon 1991: 159)

Thus, not content with theorising without the subject, he suggests that our current obsession with analysing human nature in human sciences such as sociology and psychology will soon end. In an interview in 1966, when asked what or who he considered to be behind the system which structuralists describe, he replied:

What is this anonymous system without a subject, what thinks? The 'I' has exploded . . . this is the discovery of the 'there is'. There is a *one*. In some ways one comes back to the seventeenth century point of view, with this difference: not setting man but anonymous thought, knowledge without a subject, theory with no identity, in God's place.

(Foucault, cited in Eribon 1991: 161)

Thus, Foucault is concerned with what enables certain things to be thought and said rather than the individuals who articulate those thoughts. He is concerned more with analysing the impersonal

discursive processes at work rather than the way that individuals carve out for themselves a place within these abstract discourses.

This intriguing analysis which aims to dispense with the subject is at odds with much critical thinking and, indeed, with much common-sense thinking, which seems 'naturally' to be focused on the individual and identity. However, Foucault forces us to consider the specificity of this focus on the individual within the West, determined as it is by the particular set of discursive structures which make the individual seem self-evident.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Foucault's focus on the changing way in which the distinction between madness and sanity is made, and the invention of mental illness, rather than on the individual subject makes us analyse the process of subjection and resistance at work in the relation between institutions, the government, the family and individual subjects. His anti-psychoanalytic stance is productive at a theoretical level, making us see the subject as an effect of power relations rather than as something which precedes those relations and which is constrained by them. Foucault is the only theorist who analyses mental illness without being concerned with the development of an alternative system for analysing the psyche and emotional distress; in some senses, for him, the self and the individual are not of interest and, in fact, constrain our thinking on the subject.



# AFTER FOUCAULT

Is much better than his grades – will have to free himself of a tendency to be obscure.

(Foucault's secondary school report, 1945, cited in Eribon 1991: 22)

In any book of this type which aims to introduce readers to the work of a particular theorist, it is only possible to give a general overview of Foucault's work and suggest ways in which Foucault might be approached and put to use. The aim of this chapter is to try to bring together the suggestions which have been made over the course of the various chapters on Foucault's work, to suggest ways in which his theoretical positions might be brought to bear in the analysis of texts and more general analysis. However, it should be borne in mind that Foucault does not have one theoretical position. Indeed, Foucault suggests that the reason that he irritates a wide group of people is precisely because he does not have a unitary position (Foucault 1991b). Others may argue that that is, in fact, the basis of his appeal.

## **READING FOUCAULT**

Foucault, like many other French theorists of this era, has been found by many to be quite difficult to read for a variety of reasons, some of them stylistic and some of them to do with content. In terms of

content, he assumes a familiarity on the part of the reader, in much of his work, with a very wide range of philosophical ideas and theorists, such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Hegel and Marx, which for many readers within the English speaking world, is not always shared. He also assumes an ability on the part of his readers to engage in interdisciplinary thinking (that is, for example thinking about issues pertaining to psychology from a historical and philosophical perspective) which for many people, accustomed to disciplinary-bound work, may prove difficult. Furthermore, he approaches subjects which are not theoretically 'mapped out' in the way that other theoretical work is, and as such he may be seen as establishing ways of approaching a subject which are radically new.

In terms of stylistic difficulties, the very complex grammatical structures of his sentences can be off-putting, but are characteristic of a certain French discursive tradition in philosophical work and particularly in French post-structuralist theory. He himself remarks in response to criticism of one of his books on the grounds of the opacity of his argument and style that 'I willingly concede that the style is unbearable; one of my flaws is not being naturally clear' (Foucault, cited in Eribon 1991: 84). For these and many other reasons, Foucault's writing style and the form of his argumentation sometimes does deter all but the most intrepid reader.

## USING FOUCAULT'S METHODS

Some theoretical work is not easy to 'apply'. Indeed, there are problems in thinking that theory should always, and only, be applied. Foucault himself tried to question the distinction between theory and analysis when he said 'theory does not express, translate or serve to apply practice: it is practice' (Foucault, cited in Kritzman 1988: xix). However, generally when we read theoretical work in an academic context, there is sometimes a disjunction between the theory that we are reading and the uses which we are able to make of it. Foucault's work is often insightful, but it is sometimes difficult to know how best to use it. Sometimes, the reader is led to use certain decontextualised elements from Foucault's work: this is the 'application' of Foucault at its worst, where the Panopticon is examined as a structuring principle in the layout of libraries, railway stations, supermarkets and so on, and the distinction between madness and sanity is investigated in a

particular genre of books (women's writing, post-colonial writing and so on) as if Foucault's work were simply descriptive. For example, some critics have described Foucault's analysis of the constructed nature of mental illness and the way the parameters and constituents of insanity vary over time and then have traced in an analogical way the literary texts of writers such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1973/1899) in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, or Ken Kesey's (1973) *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. In this type of analysis, Foucault's work is used at a thematic level, where his findings are seen to be analogous to the sort of explorations which literary writers have been engaged in. Foucault's work here is used as a sort of catalyst for literary exploration. This thematic approach to Foucault simply repeats Foucault's ideas rather than making use of him. Since Foucault was very concerned to question ways of thinking rather than simply locating themes to apply, it seems best to concentrate on the critique of thinking and concepts.

There are certain elements of Foucault's thought which are particularly productive to draw on when analysing texts or events. There are also particular methodological stances which Foucault takes which it is worth focusing on, although it is important to bear in mind that Foucault did not develop a fully worked out methodological position, and criticised the very notion of formulating one type of position. These stances and approaches include the following elements:

## 1 DRAW ON ARCHIVES

In all of Foucault's theoretical work, use of an archive figures very large. He worked in a wide range of libraries, for example the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris but also more obscure university libraries in Uppsala, Sweden and Hamburg, Germany, drawing on their archives and finding most insight in the most obscure texts. In his work on the confession of the murderer Pierre Rivière, he commented that he had used such an obscure text for the following reasons:

documents like those in the Rivière case should provide material for a thorough examination of the way in which a particular kind of knowledge (e.g. medicine, psychiatry, psychology) is formed and acts in relation to institutions and the roles prescribed for them (e.g. the law with respect to the expert, the accused, the criminally insane and so on). They give us a key to the relations of power, domination and conflict, within which discourses emerge

and function, and hence provide material for a potential analysis of discourse (even of scientific discourses) which may be both tactical and political, and therefore, strategic. Lastly, they furnish a means for grasping the power of derangement peculiar to a discourse such as Rivière's and the whole range of tactics by which we can try to reconstitute it, situate it and give it its status as the discourse of either a madman or a criminal.

(Foucault, cited in Eribon 1991: 235)

Throughout his career, Foucault chooses to work on non-canonical, obscure texts precisely because they offer such rich possibilities for analysis.

Foucault tends to examine those subject areas which others did not consider worthy of attention, for example, the confessions of murderers, the case notes on child molesters, the documentation around children's masturbation, and so on. In current theoretical work in a wide range of subject areas this sense of examining the more banal, mundane and perhaps more ephemeral texts has become a major shift in attention, undoubtedly partly due to Foucault's work. Foucault does not analyse these diverse resources in order to be able to capture trends or themes in a particular period, but rather to examine the possible forms of expression which circulate within a given period.

## 2 BE SCEPTICAL

Foucault advocates a profound and radical scepticism; he describes his project as aiming:

to give some assistance in wearing away certain self-evidences and common-places about madness, normality, illness, crime and punishment; to bring it about, together with many others, that certain phrases can no longer be spoken so lightly, certain acts no longer, or at least no longer so unhesitatingly performed; to contribute to changing certain things in people's ways of perceiving and doing things; to participate in this difficult displacement of forms of sensibility and thresholds of tolerance.

(Foucault 1991b: 83)

This radical scepticism towards one's material has always caused the most difficulties for theorists drawing on Foucault's work, since it can be confused with cynicism. However, what Foucault's work does is

to suspend judgement; rather than assuming that a particular analysis of events is 'true' and therefore marshalling a series of 'facts' to back up an argument, Foucault suggests that we should be critical of our own position.

Judgement is one of the hidden elements which are present in a great number of critical positions within the humanities and social sciences, even those which pride themselves on their supposed objectivity. Foucault argues that:

it's amazing how people like judging. Judgement is being passed everywhere all the time. Perhaps it is one of the simplest things mankind has ever been given to do. And you know very well that the last [person], when radiation has finally reduced [their] last enemy to ashes, will sit down behind some rickety table and begin the trial of the individual responsible . . . I can't help but dream, about a kind of criticism that would try not to judge.

(Foucault 1988: 326)

Thus, assuming that the past is inferior to the present and that we have made great progress is a value judgement, and within a Foucauldian framework needs to be avoided. This assumption may be made explicitly or it may be located at the level of presupposition, for example, in assertions about the 'primitive' or 'simple' nature of life in countries outside Europe which are described as 'developing countries' or 'pre-industrialised'; here we are implicitly assuming a linear trajectory for the development of all countries' economies along the lines of Western capitalist countries; implicit in this assessment of 'developing' countries is an assertion that being 'developed' and 'industrialised' is necessarily better than other forms of economic development. Thus, Foucault calls on us to suspend our judgement when we analyse.

### 3 DON'T MAKE SECOND ORDER JUDGEMENTS

Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham argue that 'the suspension of judgement involved in good Foucaultian use of history is largely about suspending judgements other than those you happen to recognise as your own': these judgements which you have not made yourself are what are termed second order judgements (Kendall and Wickham 1999: 13). They argue that this type of judgement may creep into our analysis 'when any aspect of any object being investigated is granted a



status (perhaps this status is labelled a “cause”, perhaps something else, which draws its authority from another investigation’ (Kendall and Wickham 1999: 13). This form of analysis is at the meta-theoretical level, one which analyses the value judgements which have infiltrated our arguments because we have unwittingly adopted someone else’s theoretical perspective. This rejection of second order judgements can lead to a type of analysis which does not make political claims. However, while this is a Foucauldian strategy par excellence, you might ask in your own analysis whether this is adequate as a form of analysis – simply to provide a description of techniques without interpretation or claiming some status for the material that you have amassed.

#### 4 LOOK FOR CONTINGENCIES RATHER THAN CAUSES

One of the most significant elements of Foucault’s thought is that he did not seek to explain why something happened in any simple way, but rather saw that events were overdetermined, that is, that they had a multiplicity of possible causes, the conjunction of which brought the event to occur. What Foucault’s thought makes us realise is that the event that we are analysing need not necessarily have happened, or may have happened in a different way, if conditions had been slightly different. Major political changes have been triggered by the conjunction of a range of different political and non-political events. For example, when Neil Kinnock was leader of the Labour Party in the 1980s, various explanations were given for the fact that the party was not elected. Journalists and political analysts tend to focus on one of these as the main factor, for example, that his rhetorical style seemed anachronistic; that his economic policies were not in tune with the needs of the middle classes; that the trade unions seemed to form too close an alliance with the Labour party; and so on. None of these causes can be seen within a Foucauldian analysis as the sole cause of electoral defeat. All of these elements played a role in the defeat and, thus, it only takes one insignificant non-political element, for example, the style of Kinnock’s rabble-rousing speech to the Labour Party rally in Sheffield before the election, which for some inexplicable reason is always given as the reason why the Labour Party did not win, to mobilise those other elements into a particular type of result. What Foucault is interested in is what he calls ‘eventalisation’, that is:

making visible a *singularity* at places where there is a temptation to invoke a historical constant . . . to show that 'things weren't as necessary as all that' . . . eventalisation means discovering the connections, encounters, supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies and so on which at a given moment establish what counts as being self-evident, universal and necessary. In this sense, one is indeed effecting a sort of multiplication or pluralisation of causes.

(Foucault 1991b: 76)

We are accustomed in our research to look for clear causes and effects, but Foucault argues that we should simply trace the way that certain events happened and examine the contingent events which may, or may not, have played a role in their development. Thus, rather than seeing capitalism as a determining force in the way that events take place, we should see capitalism as one force among many others which lead to certain types of event occurring. Similarly in some research into gender, there is an assumption that gender causes difference in behaviour – the fact that certain people are male causes them to behave in certain ways. A Foucauldian analysis of gender would see sexual identity as being only one of the many factors which plays a role in particular types of behaviour and, indeed, would see that gendering process as shaped by the activity itself (Mills, forthcoming). In his genealogical analyses, Foucault suggests that we need to analyse contingencies so that we may move beyond the ways in which we currently limit ourselves.

## 5 INVESTIGATE PROBLEMS RATHER THAN A SUBJECT

When trying to use Foucault's work, if we begin with the notion of investigating a historical period or a subject, we may discover that we do not find Foucault of much use. If however, we focus on problems, such as the relation between ethnic minorities and institutions, or the social stigmatisation of those with disabilities, Foucault's way of thinking is more likely to be of use. That is not to suggest that Foucault necessarily offers solutions to the problems that he focuses on, since his method is non-interpretive. Nevertheless, while Foucault aims not to produce general solutions to the problems he isolates, we may still find that the choice of examples that he makes does have implicitly within it an argument and an interpretation. His choice of the study

of the way the sexuality of women, homosexuals and children is discussed is not unmotivated, and may be considered to have already built into it a judgement or political position.

## 6 DON'T OVERGENERALISE FROM YOUR FINDINGS

Foucault is very aware of the problem of generalising from analysis of specific texts, and he says: 'I don't try to universalise what I say: conversely, what I don't say isn't meant to be thereby disqualified as being of no importance' (Foucault 1991b: 73). Despite the difficulty of the multiple negatives in this statement, what Foucault is arguing here is that although generalisations are difficult to make, given the complexity and overdetermined nature of events, that does not mean that it is impossible to say anything at all, except the most specific statement about the particularities of one event. Yet, although generalisations are possible, great care must be taken in making grand statements about culture at a particular time. Nevertheless, Foucault himself is prone to generalise about the status quo at particular times, but perhaps his analyses are supposed to be taken as indicative of certain trends rather than as truly representative of a whole culture.

These six pointers should not be taken to be a definitive guide to Foucault's methods, but should help you to work out a form of Foucauldian analysis which is not simply a repetition of Foucault's themes but rather a way of working with his ideas and modifying them in line with your own concerns.

## IMPLICATIONS OF FOUCAULT'S WORK FOR LITERARY ANALYSIS

Many students of literature, having read this book, will be left thinking 'What has all this to do with the analysis of literature?' for in no sense could Foucault be considered a *literary* theorist. Indeed, many students of a Critical Theory course which I lecture on have stated – 'Foucault is fascinating at a philosophical and abstract level, but how can I make this work for the analysis of literature, and how can I integrate this sort of theoretical work into an essay?' As I have stressed throughout this book, the answer comes through the use of a form of lateral thinking. Rather than trying to shoehorn Foucault's work into an analysis of literary texts, we should rather turn our attention to the

way that Foucault makes possible an analysis of the grounds on which we analyse literature. Foucault's work is useful in analysing literature at a meta-theoretical level (that is, enabling us to describe how it comes about that literature is produced in the way that it is – taught in universities, written about by critics, discussed reverentially by the middle classes, made to appear to be distinct from popular culture and so on) rather than at an analytical level (that is, enabling us to comment or explain what is going on in literary texts). There are those who consider that it is possible to use Foucault in literary textual analysis but I hope that in this section I will be able to demonstrate that this type of analysis generally uses Foucault's theoretical work in an analogical way, rather than an analytical way; that is, their aim seems to be to show that these ideas are played out in literature at a thematic level, in ways which show similarities to Foucault's ideas.

## 1 LITERATURE AS DISCOURSE

Foucault's tastes in literature tended, like his tastes in music, to be rather towards the avant-garde end of the spectrum, and his commentaries on this type of literature tend to be rather surprisingly descriptive. His theories have been used by critics such as the post-colonial critic, Edward Said, to argue that we should analyse literary texts as part of a larger discursive formation rather than assuming that literature has a separate and privileged status in relation to other texts (Said 1978; 1993). Said, in particular was instrumental, along with New Historicist critics such as Stephen Greenblatt (see below) in suggesting that literature was best studied alongside other texts, such as travel writing, scientific writing, essays, in order to relate the literary text to its discursive context. Historians, such as Hayden White, have argued that historical texts have to be seen to share linguistic codes with literary texts; thus, both make use of narrative, focalisation and point of view and both literary and historical texts draw on similar discursive resources within a particular context (White 1987).

Critics drawing on Foucault's work have tried to map out the way that literature was constituted as a subject worthy of study in the nineteenth century (Eagleton 1983). When literature was first introduced for study at university level, it was necessary to authorise it by aligning it with religious study (making parallels between biblical criticism and literary criticism) and trying to make the study of literature appear

more scientific. In this way, literature could be seen to be a serious subject of study. This analysis of the constitution of literature as a proper university subject forces us to analyse particularly carefully the efflorescence of 'scientific' trends in literary theory, from New Criticism through structuralism and post-structuralism. A Foucauldian analysis of literary criticism would analyse the authorising moves which are made by literary critics and theorists to carve out powerful positions for themselves.

A Foucauldian analysis might question the stability and inevitability of the literary text. For example, McGann analyses the complex publishing history of Byron's *Don Juan* in 1818, where because of the fear of accusation of libel and blasphemy the text was published first in a very expensive edition without the author's name, only then to be published in pirated cheap versions by the radical press, which had very different impacts on their different audiences. For McGann, this example of publishing history:

illustrates how different texts, in the bibliographical sense, embody different poems (in the aesthetic sense) despite the fact that both are linguistically identical. In the second place, the example also suggests that the method of printing or publishing a literary work carries with it enormous cultural and aesthetic significance for the work itself. Finally, we can begin to see, through this example, that the essential character of a work of art is not determined *sui generis* but is, rather, the result of a process involving the actions of a specific and socially integrated group of people.

(McGann 2001: 293)

Thus, a Foucauldian analysis might focus on the way that the interpretation of a text depends in part upon the form in which it is published.

## 2 THE AUTHOR

As I have mentioned several times during this book, Foucault questioned the status of the author, particularly when the figure of the author is drawn upon to make coherent a body of diverse work, and to impose simplistic ideas of progression on them. Conventional literary analysis often tries to find out about the author and their concerns in order to enrich our understanding of the texts. But for Foucault, this information is, in essence, irrelevant. He would argue

that biographies of authors are constructed very selectively; biographers impose a narrative cohesiveness on events and describe only those events which are of interest to their particular perspective on the person's life. Particularly in the case of literary biographies, the information we know about an author may, in fact, be selected by biographers very much with the explication of literary texts in mind, and may draw on the literary texts themselves. A Foucauldian analysis would focus on the way in which we put that biographical and contextual information to work in interpretation. Foucault would suggest that the study of literature be undertaken without reference to the text of the author's life, but that what might be of interest is the author-function, that is the role the figure of the author is made to play in the analysis of literary texts.

### 3 CREATIVITY AND ORIGINALITY

Within traditional literary criticism, it is assumed that literature is a supremely creative sphere of writing. Post-structuralist theorists, and particularly Foucault, have forced us to see that literature, like any other discourse, has regularities of expression, genre and form at any particular moment. For him, it is not the notion of creativity which is of interest but those elements of a literary text which are repetitive, those which seem to be produced in relation to other texts, which seem to appear in many other texts. He is not arguing that it is not possible to be creative, but that given the creative possibilities – the fact that writers could say *anything* they liked – they, in fact, tend to say so little, and within such constricted limits. A Foucauldian analysis would be interested in the structural features of the discourses of literature which tend to produce similar features in texts at the level of narrative voice, style, genre and so on.

### 4 INTERPRETATION AND COMMENTARY

In a preface to a revised edition of *Madness and Civilisation*, Foucault stated that when a book is published:

from that moment on it is caught up in an endless play of repetitions; its doubles begin to swarm. Around it and far from it; each reading gives it an impalpable and unique body for an instant; fragments of itself are circulating

and are made to stand in for it, are taken to almost entirely contain it, and sometimes serve as a refuge for it; it is doubled with commentaries, those other discourses in which it should finally appear as it is, confessing what it had refused to say, freeing itself from what it had so loudly pretended to be.

(Foucault, cited in Eribon 1991: 124)

He included this preface, because his work on madness had had such a surprising response from the reading public; he had not intended the book to be adopted as a rallying call to the anti-psychiatry movement, nor to be read widely outside academic circles, but this statement seems to sum up the notion that interpretations of texts cannot be constrained by the intentions of the author. Once completed, the book is no longer within the author's control and the reader can make of it what they will. Thus, Foucault's work can be seen as a critique of those types of analysis which are concerned with reconstructing the author's intentions from the text itself.

Another Foucauldian concern, which I discussed in Chapter 2, which can be brought to bear on literary texts, is his concern with the role of commentary, that is critical evaluations or explications of texts. Foucault shows that there are certain texts, such as Shakespeare's, which are persistently commented on by critics, and these commentaries ensure that Shakespeare is kept in circulation and, in the process, give status to the commentary itself. Such texts are kept in print by publishing houses and therefore are readily available for further commentary. In recent years, publishers have made available texts by Black British authors and women writers because of the wealth of critical writing that there now is on these writers. Canonical literature is that which has the greatest number of commentaries and, as a literary scholar, one is always encouraged to research those texts which are canonical as one gains prestige for oneself in the process of analysing them. Thus, a Foucauldian analysis of literature might well focus on the role that literary criticism plays in the process of publishers maintaining books in print and in the process of canon-formation, rather than analysing literary texts themselves.

## 5 HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

New Historicism, which developed in the 1980s, was influenced directly by, among others, Foucault's thought and can be seen as an

attempt to put Foucault's ideas to work on literature. His integration of historical method and analysis into philosophical work was important in enabling literary scholars to attempt such historical work in their own field. Literary work has traditionally always included a great deal of straightforwardly historical information – setting a text in its historical context – but this work has generally been rather descriptive and historical information has been used only to provide explanations for certain thematic concerns in literary texts. Foucault's work showed the way that historical analysis could be exciting and focus on thematic concerns such as power relations and sexuality rather than simply contextual information for the understanding of the literary work. It is Foucault's work on power, in particular, which has played a major role in New Historicist accounts, as critics Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh comment:

his writings have consistently shown how so-called objective historical accounts are always products of a will to power enacted through formations of knowledge within specific institutions. His 'histories' resist the allure of 'total theories' which offer overarching narratives and instead focus attention on the 'other' excluded by and constructed by such accounts.

(Rice and Waugh 2001: 253–254)

New Historicists, such as Stephen Greenblatt, felt that it was possible for them in their historical work to do as Foucault had done in his philosophical analyses – to juxtapose texts from different genres and provenances and make them illuminate literary texts and to examine 'the embeddedness of cultural objects in the contingencies of history' (Greenblatt 2001: 308). The collection of essays edited by Nancy Armstrong and Lawrence Tennenhouse (1987) on conduct literature was motivated by the realisation that 'the literature of conduct and the conduct of writing known as literature share the same history. Both literature and conduct books, especially those written for women, are integral and instrumental to the history of desire' (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 1987: 1). For them, analysing texts in their discursive context, relating them to other texts, provides a more fully historicised account. Where their work differs from Foucault's is perhaps in their stress on agency and the self, for example Greenblatt argues that New Historicism is interested not in abstract universals but 'in particular contingent cases, the selves fashioned and acting according to the



generative rules and conflicts of a given culture' (Greenblatt 2001: 308). Nevertheless, this focus on agency is tempered by a very Foucauldian concern with the limits on agency: Greenblatt states that: 'actions that appear to be single are disclosed as multiple; the apparently isolated power of the individual genius turns out to be bound up with the collective, social energy; a feature of dissent may be bound up in a larger legitimation process, while an attempt to stabilise order on things may turn out to subvert it' (Greenblatt 2001: 308). New Historicist critics, thus, analyse the literary texts as the manifestation of certain discursive processes at work within the cultural context as a whole.

## PROBLEMS WITH FOUCAULT'S WORK

Throughout this book, rather than assuming that Foucault has the status of a guru whose teachings need to be followed unthinkingly, I have tried to draw attention to the problems which many theorists have found with Foucault's work. In some ways, Foucault is very seductive as a theorist because he seems to ambush and forestall every problem that you pose for him. However, I have already drawn attention in earlier chapters to the problems which are inherent in the notion of not developing a fully worked out methodology. If Foucault's theories are simply sets of ideas which can be drawn on if they prove to be useful, rather than fully cohesive analytical frameworks, how are they to be preferred to any set of uninformed, bigoted ideas which might prove useful? The fashionable nature of his work has meant that some people have used Foucault's work in a rather uncritical way, and the style of sweeping generalisation that Foucault often makes and which his followers have copied has irritated many people. Jean-Luc Godard, the French film director, said that he wanted to make films to contest the views of people like 'the Reverend Father Foucault' who asserts that ' "At such and such a period, they thought . . ." That's fine with me, but how can we be so sure? That is exactly why we try to make films; to prevent future Foucaults presumptuously saying things like that' (Godard, cited in Eribon 1991: 156).

I have also drawn attention to the problems which historians have found in Foucault's work because of his rather unscholarly use of historical material. Many historians find it difficult to accept the disinterested stance that Foucault takes towards his material. Those

who are politically committed find his work deeply flawed. For example, Jean-Paul Sartre, the French philosopher with whom Foucault clashed on several occasions, commented on his archaeological analysis:

An archaeologist is someone who studies the traces of a vanished civilisation . . . What Foucault presents us with is . . . a geology, the series of successive layers that make up our 'ground'. Each of these layers defines the conditions of possibility of a certain type of thought prevailing throughout a certain period. But Foucault does not tell us the thing that would be most interesting, that is, how each thought is constructed on the basis of these conditions, or how mankind passes from one thought to another. To do so he would have to bring in praxes, and therefore history, which is precisely what he refuses to do.

(Sartre, cited in Eribon 1991: 163)

This criticism of Foucault's seeming ahistoricism and lack of political analysis is typical of many on the Left.

His androcentrism, that is the centring of his analysis on male experience alone, has posed problems for feminist theorists, yet many of them have tried to modify his work to make it work for them, since many feminists have found his analysis of power relations productive. As I mentioned earlier in this book, it is not sufficient simply to add women in to a Foucauldian analysis; in some sense this androcentrism needs to be analysed and a modified framework needs to be developed which does not focus on the analysis of men or Man in isolation from the analysis of women, and which does not assume that by analysing the behaviour and concerns of men one is analysing human culture as a whole. It may be possible to see Foucault's sexism as determined by the cultural milieu in which he worked, but using Foucault's work in the twenty-first century means that we must address the gender-specific nature of his work.

Foucault's conception of power also poses difficulties for some critics. While it is important that he has focused on the possibility of resistance rather than only describing oppression, he has located resistance within power itself, thus denying the agency of those who oppose oppressive regimes. For some, the focus on power leads to repetition as if all cultural phenomena are reduced to power relations. One such critic, Robert Castel, criticised *Madness and Civilisation*, because he argued: 'the breadth of theoretical detours and the subtlety of analyses of situations close up around several simplified formulas,

and the argument in the hands of epigones becomes repetitive: everywhere and always there is nothing but repression, violence, the arbitrary, confinement, police control, segregation and exclusion' (Castel, cited in Eribon 1991: 126). Thus, for some critics, despite Foucault's stated aim to move away from the repressive hypothesis, in fact his work seems to chart only repression and does not focus very much on the productive mechanisms of power.

He has also been criticised by those working within the psychiatric profession for his work deconstructing the notion of madness. His work has proved immensely useful to the anti-psychiatry movement, since it has had the effect of suggesting that madness is constructed by society. However, for those suffering from mental illness, while it may be useful to know that the medicalisation of madness has a history, this knowledge does not offer them alternative remedies, since Foucault was equally sceptical of psychotherapy, seeing it as simply another form of confessional. Thus, his critique of madness has been productive, but erasing the materiality of mental illness may pose significant problems.

A further problem with Foucault's work can be seen in his analysis of discourse, for he seems to be ambivalent in his discussion of the non-discursive, at one and the same time asserting that everything is discursively constructed and yet also wanting to maintain that there are certain elements which are non-discursive. There are other fundamental problems which someone using Foucault's thought must address, for example as Barry Smart asks: 'Can the archaeologist in practice avoid questions of truth and meaning? Is it not necessary to differentiate between accurate (i.e. "true") and distorted descriptions or interpretations?' (Smart 1985: 54). Furthermore, Foucault's supposed disinterested stance belies the fact that, while he argues against relying on cause and effect to describe events, he somehow manages to smuggle these notions into his argument implicitly. This notion of simply describing is difficult to accept; the very fact that elements from the past have been assembled together implicitly constitutes an argument or narrative which stands as an explanation, however provisional, for some phenomenon in the present. For example, in *Madness and Civilisation*, Foucault seems to suggest that economic conditions were the driving force behind the confinement of the poor and the insane in the eighteenth century (Foucault 1991a). At other points in his analyses the reader is left at a loss as to how to explain the

phenomena described without resorting to notions of causality. Donnelly suggests that 'he comes ironically close to the perils of arguing from origins – as if to understand an object one need discover its pristine origins and hence the key to or germ of its subsequent development – which is precisely the fallacy genealogy is contrived to correct' (Donnelly 1986: 25).

However, rather than seeing these problems as flaws in Foucault's argument, many theorists see contradictions as theoretical stepping stones, ways of moving Foucault's work onwards, so that it may more adequately describe a world which has changed since Foucault wrote. We should not imagine that Foucault can offer us simple solutions to the problems which face us now, but we may be able to draw on his approach and methods in order to construct our own solutions.

In summary, then, there are a number of theoretical stances which can be taken when using a Foucauldian analysis of an event or a text. Not all of these particular positions will prove useful, but it is hoped that by isolating them in this way it will be possible to make Foucault's ideas work on the analysis of events and texts. One problem which is often faced in using Foucault's work is that one is led to draw on the images, themes or symbolisations that he uses, or quote from him at length only to be faced with the impossibility of saying anything further. What is essential is to use Foucault's methods in your reading of Foucault: be sceptical about the value of Foucault; do not accept any of his sometimes bold but often unjustified generalisations, and do not assume that he is telling you the 'truth' of the situation.



# FURTHER READING

## WORKS BY MICHEL FOUCAULT

In this section, Foucault's works are ordered by their original publication date, to give an idea of his publishing history. All of Foucault's works first appeared in French, but the publication details here indicate the English-language translations you are more likely to consult. For this reason, two dates will appear: the first, in square brackets, is the original publication date, while the second date and all other details refer to the translation. (Where translations are not available, only a date in square brackets will appear, and all details refer to the French text.)

It is advisable to read one or two short commentaries on a theorist's work before reading their work: Dreyfus and Rabinow's book on Foucault devotes a chapter to each of his major works and gives the reader a sense of a framework within which to approach Foucault's work as a whole (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982). Foucault's interviews are significantly easier to digest than his more considered theoretical work. Therefore, it is advisable to read these before going on to the major works (see collections of essays and interviews below such as Bouchard 1977; Morris and Patton 1979; Kritzman 1988). It is also advisable to try to tackle the more readable books by Foucault before going on to the more difficult ones: *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (1978/1976), is a particularly easy text to try first. The collections of

essays by Foucault, such as that by Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, and *Power/Knowledge* edited by Colin Gordon (1980) are also useful, as you can choose which elements of Foucault's work appeal to you most before deciding which books you will go on to read. However, at some stage you will need to read the major texts such as *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1994/1972), *The Order of Things* (1970/1966), *Madness and Civilisation* (1999/1967) and *Discipline and Punish* (1991/1975).

## BOOKS

Foucault, M. [1961] (1967) *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, (trans. R. Howard), New York: Pantheon.

This is a fairly accessible book on the way that Western societies have divided sanity from insanity. It is a very clear analysis of the changes that there have been in what counts as madness in different historical periods. The most accessible parts of the book are the first chapter on the way that houses of confinement developed from hospitals set up to house lepers and the second chapter on the Great Confinement in the seventeenth century when large numbers of French people were confined because of poverty or insanity. The fifth chapter, *Aspects of Madness*, is an interesting analysis of the way that madness manifests itself differently in different contexts.

— [1962] (1986) *Raymond Roussel*, Paris: Gallimard.

An analysis of the writings of the surrealist French poet, Raymond Roussel; translated into English by Charles Ruas as *Death and the Labyrinth*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday. For Roussel specialists only.

— [1963] (1973) *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, (trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith), New York: Pantheon.

Although this book is essential for those interested in the development of Foucault's ideas, it is perhaps a little specialised for many readers. It does however contain within the introductory chapter a marvellous description of the 'cure' for hysterics in the eighteenth century which involved being immersed in baths for 10 hours a day for 10 months. Unlike *Madness and Civilisation* which analyses the way that madness and sanity are conceptualised over a vast time-scale, *The Birth of the Clinic* focuses only on the late eighteenth century and analyses in rather technical language the relations between medical discourse and institutions.

—— [1966] (1973) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (trans. A. Sheridan), London: Tavistock.

As always with Foucault, this book opens with a tremendous vignette: a description by the novelist Jose-Luis Borges of a Chinese encyclopedia which classifies animals into a) those belonging to the Emperor; b) embalmed; c) tame; d) suckling pigs; e) sirens; f) fabulous and finally n) that from a great distance look like flies. This outlandish categorisation scheme underlies the driving principle of the book, which aims to force the reader to critically analyse the way that knowledge is organised within different historical periods. Although a complex book, in that Foucault is dealing with analogies between different sciences in the way that they organise ways of knowing, it is, nevertheless, a book which contains many illustrative examples.

—— [1969] (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith), New York: Pantheon.

This is one of Foucault's more difficult texts. Here he is grappling with the theoretical problems brought about through the use of the notion of discontinuity, that is the sense that there are sudden breaks in history, where regimes, ideas and ways of organising knowledge change. It is here that Foucault maps out the notion of a discursive formation, and describes the way that discourses emerge and are regulated. He describes the constitution of the archive and the statement here, and he describes the archaeological method.

—— [1973] (1978) *I, Pierre Rivière, Having Killed My Mother, My Sister and My Brother*, Paris: Gallimard.

This book consists of the memoir by Pierre Rivière, a nineteenth-century French peasant, who was convicted of killing three members of his family, together with one short essay by Foucault, six essays by members of the study group which he set up to examine this confession and contemporary material by doctors, psychiatrists, newspaper reports, letters and court proceedings. This book is a good introduction to the way a Foucauldian analysis can be made to work on a text.

—— [1975] (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York: Pantheon.

Foucault analyses here the changes there have been in the way that people considered to have committed crimes have been punished, from public torture and ritual disembowelling and branding to the current disciplinary regime where those considered to be criminals are locked



away in prisons or mental hospitals. Rather than assuming that there has been progress in the way that criminals are treated, Foucault suggests throughout this book that we need to critically analyse the confinement of criminals. The first two chapters on torture in the eighteenth century make for grim reading, but they usefully force us to reflect on current disciplinary regimes. The third section on discipline is very readable and the section on the examination is particularly insightful.

— [1976] (1978) *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I An Introduction*, (trans. Robert Hurley), New York: Pantheon.

This is by far the most accessible book by Foucault. He writes in a fairly informal way here and discusses sexuality and the way that we think about sexuality and repression giving a range of different examples, such as children's masturbation, homosexuality and women's hysteria. In this book, more than any other, he lays out his ideas on power relations and the way power functions in society. Because it is a fairly slim volume, and relatively easy to read, this is the book with which to start your study of Foucault.

— [1984] (1985) *The History of Sexuality, Vol. II: The Use of Pleasure*, (trans. Robert Hurley), New York: Pantheon.

Both in this volume of the *History of Sexuality* and Vol. III, Foucault seems to be trying to formulate a new ethical framework. In this volume, rather than writing a history of sexual desire, Foucault focuses on what he calls 'a hermeneutics of the self', that is, an analysis of the relation between pleasure and the moral concerns that sexual pleasures lead to, in this case, in ancient Greek culture. This concern with Greek and Greco-Roman sexual practices and moral codes may seem fairly alien to some readers, but Foucault's general concerns with an 'aesthetics of existence' are very pertinent to contemporary cultural analysis.

— [1984] (1986) *The History of Sexuality, Vol. III: The Care of the Self*, New York: Pantheon.

Although this volume is entitled 'The care of the self' it is very much concerned with the interaction between the self and others. In fact it could be seen more as an analysis of the concern with the care that others should take of themselves. This later work is less drawn on than others by critics, although there are several critical works devoted to both of the last volumes of *History of Sexuality*, for example, Moss (1998).

## ESSAYS AND INTERVIEWS

Essays by, and interviews with, Michel Foucault are so numerous that it is impossible to list and annotate them all here. A full bibliography may be consulted at [www.theory.org.uk](http://www.theory.org.uk) which also contains some useful commentaries and links to sites. The Foucauldian web site also contains an extensive bibliography: [www.thefoucauldian.co.uk](http://www.thefoucauldian.co.uk). Possibly the best bibliography can be found at [www.nakayama.org/polylogos/philosophers/foucault/index-e.html](http://www.nakayama.org/polylogos/philosophers/foucault/index-e.html).

Certain essays and interviews make essential reading, and these have been collected into several key collections in English. You may like to consult the following:

Foucault, M. (1977) *Michel Foucault: Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, (ed. D. Bouchard, trans. D. Bouchard and S. Smith), Oxford: Blackwell.

——— (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, (ed. C. Gordon), Brighton: Harvester.

Contains essays, lectures and interviews given by Foucault between 1972–1977; perhaps the most interesting of these is his interview ‘On popular justice’ where he maps out his ideas on power, and the interview on ‘The eye of power’ where he describes the Panopticon in some detail. This is a good introduction to Foucault since many of the ideas contained in these essays and interviews are treated in more detail and in more technical, dense language in his major works.

——— (1984) *The Foucault Reader*, (ed. P. Rabinow), Harmondsworth: Penguin.

This is a collection of some of the more important essays by Foucault, including ‘What is an author?’; ‘Nietzsche, genealogy, history’; and selections from texts such as *The Order of Things* and *Power/Knowledge*.

All essays and interviews cited in this study are listed in the Works Cited section.

## WORKS ON MICHEL FOUCAULT

Couzens Hoy, D. (ed.) (1986) *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell.

This collection of essays considers a wide range of difficult issues in Foucault’s work, for example his problematic use of historical

material, his political position, his relationship to the philosophical tradition and so on. Although the essays themselves are fairly demanding intellectually, they all take a critical position in relation to Foucault's work, which is productive.

Diamond, I. and Quinby, L. (eds) (1988) *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, Boston: North Eastern University Press.

An excellent collection of essays, all of which engage in analysing the productiveness of Foucault's thinking about power and the body, particularly for feminist theory. The essays are, on the whole, very readable and very easily applied to other contexts. There are useful essays on anorexia.

Dreyfus, H. and Rabinow, P. (1982) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Brighton: Harvester.

A very thorough yet readable introduction to Foucault's ideas. It is worth reading this book before you read any of Foucault's works because it provides you with a framework within which to approach the 'development' of his ideas. It traces the stages of Foucault's intellectual career in a productive way without oversimplifying Foucault's work.

Kendall, G. and Wickham, G. (1999) *Using Foucault's Methods*, London: Sage.

Despite an extremely irritating series of interspersed comments supposedly by their students, this is a very useful (but very prescriptive) book about how to use Foucault's ideas. There are a series of exercises, some of which are useful and enable you to think through how Foucault's ideas might be applied, and others which are not.

Kritzman, L. (ed.) (1988) *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977–1984*, London: Routledge.

Contains a number of interviews with Foucault, most notably 'The minimalist self', and 'Critical theory/intellectual theory', 'Power and sex', 'Iran: the spirit of the world without', together with a useful introduction by Lawrence Kritzman. There is also an essay by Foucault 'The dangerous individual' in which he examines the role of the confession and knowledge of the criminal in trials, and the pathologisation of criminals. Because this book collects together a number of interviews by Foucault which are not easily available, and because the interviews are generally more accessible than his major works, and comment usefully on the ideas he has developed in those works, this book is a very good introduction to Foucault's ideas.

Macdonnell, D. (1986) *Theories of Discourse*, Blackwell: Oxford.

Sets Foucault's ideas about discourse against other theorists such as Pecheux, Volosinov/Bakhtin, Althusser, and Hindess and Hirst. A very clear explication of some of Foucault's ideas and useful in that it gives details of other theorists against whom Foucault defined himself and/or who have defined themselves in relation to Foucault.

Macey, D. (1994) *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, London: Verso.

This is a very thorough, beautifully written and extremely well researched book on Foucault and his ideas. It is a very readable book and acts as an introduction to his biography and his ideas in the context of the different personae that Foucault adopted.

Mills, S. (1997) *Discourse*, Routledge: London.

A survey of Foucault's definitions of the term discourse in relation to other discourse theorists' work.

Morris, M. and Patton, P. (1979) *Michel Foucault: Power/Truth/Strategy*, Sydney: Feral Publications.

A collection of interviews with Foucault and critical essays on him by Morris and Patton and others. Despite being a fairly early collection of theoretical essays the standard of critical analysis here is very high and the essays by Patton and by Morris are excellent.

Smart, B. (1985) *Michel Foucault*, London: Tavistock.

A readable introductory text which discusses the major texts and which contains sizable extracts from Foucault's works with commentaries.

## **INTERNET RESOURCES**

There are many internet sites on the works of Michel Foucault and these can be accessed by typing Michel Foucault into any search engine such as 'google'; many of the sites only consist of rehashing of Foucault's basic ideas; the following consist of resources on Foucault and bibliographical material:

[www.theory.org.uk/foucault](http://www.theory.org.uk/foucault)

This contains a good introduction to Foucault's ideas, a bibliography and a fair selection of links to other sites devoted to Foucault. Possibly the best internet site on Foucault.

[www.thefoucauldian.co.uk](http://www.thefoucauldian.co.uk)

A good up-to-date bibliography of books by, and on, Foucault together with a Frequently Asked Questions page for those new to Foucault's work.

[www.nakayama.org/polylogos/philosophers/foucault/index-e.html](http://www.nakayama.org/polylogos/philosophers/foucault/index-e.html)

Contains a full bibliography of Foucault's works and interviews compiled by Michael Karskens, together with a number of on-line papers on Foucault by a variety of scholars.

[www.excite.co.uk/directory/society/philosophers/foucault-info](http://www.excite.co.uk/directory/society/philosophers/foucault-info)

Contains a well organised site on Foucault's works and life; with links to other sites of interest; there are quite a few down-loadable extracts from texts by Foucault.

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