

## Discipline

We can think of discipline in two main ways which, on the face of it, seem rather different from each other. One is tied to punishment—for instance, the idea of disciplining a disobedient child. The second relates to a body of skills and knowledges: we can identify an academic discipline such as history or sociology, or we can speak of the variety of disciplines to be mastered if you want to become a rock guitarist, a ballet dancer or a professional footballer. So the first meaning understands discipline as a verb—an action we perform on other people or ourselves. The second meaning sees discipline as a noun—a set of qualities that we need to master in order to be recognised and valued within a particular field. The first meaning also views discipline as a negative force, tied up with punishment and coercive behaviour. The second values discipline as a positive force, something tied up with self-empowerment and achievement.

Foucault connects these two understandings of discipline through his concept of power-knowledge. He goes beyond the fairly conventional view that the development and acquisition of knowledge necessarily makes people more powerful, or is 'good for them'. Rather, knowledge is something that makes us its subjects, because we make sense of ourselves by referring back to various bodies of knowledge. For instance, to be a student at a school or university we must enter into different academic disciplines, and gain certificates and degrees that provide credentials which will help make us suitable for various jobs. But to be a student is also to make ourselves known to the school system, so that it can monitor our progress, pass judgements upon us, and mould our attitudes and behaviours in various ways. In these ways, discipline and knowledge 'make' us certain kinds of people.

One of discipline's concerns is with producing docile, healthy bodies that can be utilised in work and regulated in terms of time and space. In an institution like a school, for instance, a timetable regulates students' and teachers' work patterns by structuring their time so that they move from one

set of skills to another throughout the day. And we can see how space can be used to regulate people by thinking of how a factory constructs different spaces, such as the different areas of an assembly line, in which people work; each person with their own tasks requiring particular skills and conferring a particular rank (floor manager, head machinist, bolt cutter). The staff can, of course, move (or be moved) from one place to another on the assembly line, depending on the needs of the institution and the abilities of the people concerned, and with each move their position in the literal and metaphorical space of the institution changes. So disciplinary power accords a person a space within an institution and a rank within a system. Such ranking enables institutions to regulate both the movement of people throughout its space and the progress they can make from one task to another. In this way, discipline individualises bodies by providing them with a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations, and in terms of time and space.

Foucault stresses that such discipline was not simply imposed from above. Rather, people submitted themselves to be able to operate effectively in the new social and economic conditions that were emerging in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The new demands of factory production meant that people had to acquire the skills necessary to operate machinery, to manipulate implements and to endure the long days in gruelling conditions. A comparison is how an aspiring guitarist will willingly give up time to long, arduous, often repetitive and physically demanding practice in order to master the discipline. Discipline worked through such a system of punishment and gratification. People could be punished, or they could punish themselves for various indiscretions, but, at the same time, through disciplinary work it was possible to gain rewards and move up the scale—becoming a more senior factory worker (or a better guitarist).

## Prison as a central disciplinary site

In the previous chapter we discussed how Foucault understands society as being divided into various fields and institutions. Disciplinary power, along with its accompanying discourses, progressively colonised these fields and the subject bodies that occupied them. Foucault emphasises that this was not a unified, coherent project or deliberate policy, but rather happened piecemeal, being evident early on in some areas and slower to emerge in others. For Foucault, the development of the prison system in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a particularly rich site in which to see the emergence of disciplinary forces.

The prison emerged as a central institution in society because it was a site in which the coercive force of disciplinary power could be used in a direct and overt way. As offenders against the values of society, prisoners could legitimately be regarded as subject bodies upon which the disciplinary forces of society could be imposed. So the supposed rehabilitation of prisoners involved them being coerced, monitored, trained, made to perform routine tasks in a repetitive manner, subject to various tests and psychological studies, and repeatedly questioned about their behaviours, attitudes and values.

A great deal of effort (discursive and otherwise) was expended on how prisons could most effectively treat their inmates. Plans were drawn up for regulating the space of prisoners, isolating them from one another in cells, or giving them different tasks dependent on such factors as their time of incarceration or severity of offence. A whole array of machinery was created to work through the prisoners' bodies. Prisoners had to operate treadmills, were 'drilled' in labour gangs and on parade grounds, were subject to routine checks and physical examinations, and were required to perform menial tasks such as mopping floors.

The prison basically became a micro-society within the larger society. It had its own experts, hierarchies, ranks and network, and its own codes of conduct, protocols and procedures. For instance, it had an internal legal system which

could punish prisoners and add years to their sentence, or alternatively award good behaviour with special favours and early parole. The prison also created its own fields of knowledge (such as criminology), while at the same time providing a focus for emerging fields of knowledge such as psychology.

As well as being a micro-society, the prison provided a model for the rest of society. In its dense web of disciplinary coercions, the prison developed and used procedures which, with modification, could be adopted in other fields. Foucault calls this trend of penal procedures moving into and colonising the wider society a 'carceral continuum', and he mentions factories, schools and military barracks as being particularly influenced by the disciplinary techniques devised in the prison. But we could go further and note how these coercive forces occur, in various ways, throughout the social body: sports and family life, religion, and systems of transport and communication all discipline the people in these institutions, organising their behaviour and regulating the place of bodies by the way they structure time, space and relations.

## The panopticon

One of the ways of disciplining and managing bodies is surveillance, and to discuss this Foucault refers to the 'panopticon', which was designed by Jeremy Bentham in the late eighteenth century. Bentham's major project was to calculate how the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people could be achieved and, given this, it is significant that he should have been interested in prisons. It tends to confirm Foucault's view that penal reform and prison development were central to nineteenth-century thought.

Bentham's model of the panopticon was a tower placed in a central position within the prison. From this tower, the guards would be able to observe every cell and the prisoners inside them, but it was designed in such a way that the prisoners would never know whether they were being observed or not. Prisoners would assume that they could be

observed at any moment and would adjust their behaviour accordingly.

In fact, the panopticon idea was not implemented in many prisons, but Foucault sees its logic as an example of the disciplinary forces at work. In previous penal regimes, prisoners had been removed from sight either in dungeons or by transportation, but the panopticon worked on an entirely different principle—that the best way of managing prisoners was to make them the potential targets of the authority's gaze at every moment of the day. And this authoritative gaze didn't reside in a particular person; rather, it was recognised as part of the system, a way of looking that could operate as a general principle of surveillance throughout the social body. This logic of the gaze, like that of discipline, was not confined to the prison, but moved throughout the various institutional spaces in society. We can see this in the way in which authorities watch over us and monitor our behaviours: school teachers use this authoritative gaze as they move about a classroom, and so do security cameras in shopping malls and night clubs. Surveillance techniques have become a fundamental part of life in modern western societies.

The gaze, though, is not something that is simply directed against us by others—it also becomes a way of looking at our own behaviours. Part of our socialisation influences us to make ourselves the subject of our own gaze, and so we are constantly monitoring our bodies, actions and feelings. There is a gender dimension to this authority of the gaze. In modern western societies, women or girls have often been positioned as desirable objects of what is called the male gaze. In other words, a fundamental part of how females are valued within such societies, and how they value themselves, is associated with how they look. In modern western societies magazines, whether they are directed to male or female readerships, will generally have photographs of females on the cover. Heterosexual male readers are disposed to see these female models as objects of their desire, while heterosexual female readers are disposed to see them as role models who, if they work upon themselves enough, they might resemble and, accord-

ingly, become desirable to the male gaze. Indeed, adolescent girls' magazines are extensively devoted to areas such as beauty hints, slimming tips, how to look great in a bikini this summer, and also promote various aids and pieces of equipment that are designed to provide a desirable look or body image. Like discipline, the acquisition of a desirable look involves a gentle (and sometimes not so gentle) punishment that females ritualistically carry out upon their bodies, plucking out facial hairs, exercising grimly in aerobics classes, pouring hot wax upon themselves, and so on. Indeed, the notion of 'tanning' seems quite literally to suggest a form of self-punishment. The point of this regime of punishment is so that the female might attract the gaze of a desirable male and be valued accordingly.

This is not to say that males are not also subject to the gaze. Adolescent males in modern western societies build their bodies up in such a way as to effectively perform sporting disciplines. Many boys aspire to become sporting heroes, such as a Superbowl-winning quarterback or a soccer star. Accordingly, they will be inclined to devote great effort to developing a body image and set of physical capacities that might allow them to achieve this goal. This male-sport, female-beauty focus is, however, subject to change. Women are increasingly inclined to regard male bodies as the objects of their desiring gaze, a theme explored in the film *The Full Monty*. And women also adjust their image of their bodies as they engage with traditionally male activities such as sport. For example, early in her career the American tennis player Chris Evert said that she was disinclined to do weight training in case it affected her femininity. Later she took up weight training in order to make herself more competitive against her rival, Martina Navratilova. The role of the gaze has also played a significant part in the field of health. In books such as *The Birth of the Clinic* and *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault discussed the way in which medical and psychiatric patients have been subjected to an institutionally validated gaze that monitors their every move. Doctors and psychiatrists embody this institutional gaze as they carry out their

work of evaluating their patients in terms of their bodies, behaviours and attitudes. This monitoring can take the form of 'routine questioning' of patients in terms of how they are feeling, what they are thinking about and so forth. Or it can take a more direct and intrusive form of looking over and into a patient through mechanisms such as x-rays, internal probes and gynaecological examinations. Thus biomedicine acts as the most (socially and institutionally) privileged knowledge of the body.

Other health workers, such as nurses, often stand in for doctors in performing this monitoring role. When we say people are acting out the role of the doctor's eyes and ears, we are pointing to their role as monitors and embodiments of the gaze.

On a wider social level, the gaze is a mechanism for the monitoring and control of public health. In the nineteenth century, for example, there were consistent efforts by civil authorities to 'clean up' urban spaces which had become repositories of disease and other manifestations of social unease, such as crime, unemployment, poverty and substance abuse. This involved organising surveys of the conditions of life and moral attitudes among people living in slum areas of large cities such as London, New York and Sydney. These surveys made public health into a moral as much as a social problem.

In other words, if the lower classes who resided in these areas were found to exhibit symptoms of alcohol abuse or crime, it was these factors that were perceived to threaten the public health and which then needed to be addressed and 'cleaned up'. In this way the lower classes were made subject to, and subjected themselves to, the moralising gaze of civil authorities. We see this tendency today in the way in which fields such as the popular press make their readers ever subject to 'moral threats' from within their own areas, such as paedophilia, drugs and crimes against property. Only by constantly monitoring these moral threats, it is implied, can the public health of the community be maintained.

In short, the power of the gaze, taken from the prison

project, establishes an 'economy of looks' that distributes value throughout the social body. Not only are people valued in terms of their looks; valuable activities, such as acquiring knowledge, are understood in terms of a series of visual metaphors, such as insight and vision, so that the idea of looking (or gazing) is associated with power, knowledge and value.

All these disciplinary procedures, and the panoptic gaze, emerged at an historic moment when it had become necessary to produce a pliable, healthy and sober workforce to service the factories of the Industrial Revolution. More recently, at least in western societies, the need for workers in industrial factories has declined, and there has been a growth in post-industrial, high technology fields such as computer science. With this reduced need for an industrial-style workforce, have we seen a decline in the disciplinary techniques that produced such a workforce? What we can argue is that these techniques are now not so directly apparent in fields of work, but rather they have become more evident in fields of play. The emergence of a particular culture associated with gymnasiums is an example of this trend. Gyms employ a whole range of activities, machinery, techniques and subject positions that entail the gentle punishment and quiet coercion of disciplinary power. Gym users are monitored by professionals as they go about transforming their bodies through lifting weights, walking on treadmills, riding exercise bikes and so on. And the presence of mirrors throughout many gyms disposes users to monitor themselves, to develop a disciplinary gaze that they direct upon themselves in order to gain a sense of self-empowerment. That the techniques of discipline and 'gentle punishment' have crossed the threshold from work to play shows how pervasive they have become within modern western societies.

### Descending individualism

The power of the gaze helps activate one of the fundamental principles of modern western cultures, which Foucault calls

introduced in the name of the ideals of reform, but actually functioned to dominate and mould people in order to make them more serviceable for the state.

It is interesting to speculate as to how this attitude of seeing people as resources or commodities tied in with the development of capitalism. There are obviously strong connections, but Foucault is unwilling to reduce the rise of biopower to being a side-effect of capitalism. On the contrary, he claims that to no small extent it was the disciplinary technologies of biopower which facilitated the development of capitalism. Foucault's argument is that biopower helped capitalism in two important ways: first, by providing a healthy, active, disciplined population as a workforce; and second, because the very detailed and function-specific arrangements of space and people that occurred in places like schools and army barracks provided the organisational models for nineteenth-century factories.

### Power—general propositions

In elaborating his notion of biopower, Foucault put forward a number of general propositions about how power actually works, and can be characterised, in the post-Renaissance period.

His first major point is that power isn't a thing that is either held by, or belongs to, anybody. In the time of absolute monarchs the king or queen was able to exercise power because it belonged to them—they had received the 'gift' of power from God. But, in the Classical and Modern ages, the place of power is evacuated—power belongs to no-one. Even when monarchs continued to reign, they no longer held a position of power on the basis of their 'person'. When the English parliamentarians executed Charles I in 1649, and the French revolutionaries executed Louis XVI in 1793, they were demonstrating, among other things, that they certainly didn't believe in the divine right of kings—Charles and Louis were not God's representatives as far as they were concerned.

Neither, it was felt, did God authorise and decide who was to hold power—the state, through its various clusters of forces, did. There is a wonderful example of this change of attitude in an old film about the French Revolution. Some of the king's devoted servants are trying to help Louis XVI flee from the revolutionaries, but he is caught and taken back to Paris to be executed. One of the revolutionaries goes back to the king's room and finds his maid kneeling in front of what looks like the king, but it is just his uniform—his crown, his glittering clothes, his jewellery, his shoes—'dressed' on a clothes-horse. From now on, the 'uniforms' of power will remain in place, but they will be empty.

As far as Foucault is concerned, power now functions in terms of the relations between different fields, institutions, bureaucracies, and other groups (such as the private media and other businesses) within the state. What characterises these relations of power is that they are not set in stone. Power can flow very quickly from one point or area to another, depending on changing alliances and circumstances. In other words, power is mobile and contingent. Think of the situation which brought about the fall of the former USSR. Newspapers in the West seemed to think that the various Soviet presidents—Khrushchev, Breznev, Andropov, Gorbachev—were like absolute monarchs, whereas, in fact, their decisions always depended on negotiations and alliances between influential party members, the military, scientists, bureaucrats, the presidents' families and close friends, media figures, people who ran the black markets, diplomats, the KGB and politicians. Gorbachev's attempts to reform the Soviet system depended on him being able to bring institutions such as the party, the military and the secret police with him. When the alliances between these different groups broke down, Boris Yeltsin stepped in because he could claim to be speaking for, and have the support of, 'the ordinary people'. This swung things his way—it seemed as if the momentum was with him, so many groups and individuals moved to support him. Mikhail Gorbachev went, in a very short time, from being one of the most powerful men on earth to being 'an empty suit'.

Power had moved elsewhere, and Boris Yeltsin ended up in Gorbachev's 'uniform'.

Why is power, in post-Renaissance ages, so fluid and changeable, and dependent on alliances, negotiations and circumstances? We have pointed out that the site of power—say, the 'emperor's clothes'—is now empty and potentially able to be filled by anybody. One of the reasons for this is that prior to and during the Renaissance there was, what we could call, a relative homogeneity and unity of authorised discourses. Put simply, what this means is that there were only a few people or institutions which were authorised to, or could, communicate in a public way—the monarchy, the church, the universities, artists. And most of what was written, spoken, painted or sculpted tended to support and reproduce the status quo—that is, the authority of church and monarchy. For a long time the church had a virtual monopoly over writing, and if there was a person or institution that spoke against the authorised discourses of the time, the consequences could be quite drastic.

In Chapter 2 we pointed out that, for Foucault, the Renaissance episteme saw the world as God's book. This world-view was reinforced because of the domination of writing, knowledge and culture by the church. When the church lost its power to monopolise and authorise discourses, a large number of fields, disciplines and institutions sprang up and competed with one another to authorise and produce truth and knowledge. However, because none of these groups were 'authorised by God', their claims were always being contested. No one institution, field or discourse could claim undisputed access to 'the truth', and so groups that were trying to control or influence matters of state had to negotiate and gain support for their agendas, policies or ideas.

There is an idea that, in the modern age, power comes from the people. This is based on the idea that, at least in democracies, the people elect their leaders. However, if we look at history in the twentieth century we will find that it is not a case of the people holding power, or even delegating power to individuals or groups, but a case of groups becoming

powerful by 'standing in' for the people, or by claiming to speak for or represent the people. In a sense 'the people' don't really exist—politicians and other groups are continually inventing 'the people' to support and authorise their causes and claims to power. Hitler claimed to be the only truly authentic representative of 'real Germans'. In the United States during the 1950s Senator McCarthy was able to exercise great influence over American internal affairs by setting himself up as someone who spoke and acted on behalf of the people. And today, throughout the world, populists grab political office because they have set themselves up as 'standing in for' and 'sharing' the hopes, aspirations and values of the people. Of course none of this lasts very long. The people soon discover that the group who promised to look after them have ended up looking after themselves. And the party that gets elected on an anti-politician platform ends up acting like politicians.

The point Foucault would make, however, is that the people cannot 'hold' power any more than politicians or businesspeople or even, as the public demonstrations and riots in Indonesia in the late 1990s demonstrated, the military. Power moves around and through different groups, events, institutions and individuals, but nobody owns it. Of course certain people or groups have greater opportunities to influence how the forces of power are played out. Silvio Berlusconi, the former Italian prime minister, owned nine television stations, and so had considerable ability to influence what people knew or thought. Rupert Murdoch influences politicians and governments throughout the world because of his extensive media interests. Boris Yeltsin remains (1999) in power in Russia largely because of the support of business, the media and foreign governments. At the same time, there is no guarantee that having media or business interests or support will translate into, say, electoral success. In Russia the media lost influence over popular opinion because it was so clearly aligned with Yeltsin—and its claims of impartiality or to be 'telling the truth' have suffered because of this. And in Australia public opinion strongly went against the introduction of

a goods and services tax precisely because the tax was supported by powerful business people and the media.

The other reason that power isn't held by and doesn't belong to the people is that, for Foucault, not only are the people, as an organic group, 'invented' by politicians and others, but people are themselves produced by, and subject to, the forces of biopower. The way people come to understand the world, the way they behave, the values and aspirations they develop and the way in which they react to events: all these things are fashioned out of the various apparatuses and technologies of biopower. So it's not as if people have independent minds and free will which might allow them to choose who will represent them, or what political system will best look after their interests, or even what their best interests are. Those kinds of things—what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls 'habitus' and 'dispositions'—are already 'the effects' of power or, to be more specific, the effects of biopower.

This leads to another important point that Foucault makes about power, which is that although power acts on people in a non-egalitarian way (that is, some groups are dominated and exploited and abused by the workings of power), at the same time it acts on everybody—the dominant as well as the dominated. As we pointed out in the previous paragraph, everybody is, to some extent, the product of biopower, because everybody is worked and 'written on' (in the sense outlined in the first section of Chapter 4—that the way in which we live within our bodies is already shaped) by institutions such as the family, schools, universities, bureaucracies, medical and health agencies, prisons, youth organisations, religions or the army, either directly (through being part of that institution) or indirectly (through the circulation of discourses throughout the culture). Even the most dominant of groups or individuals in a state or culture (say billionaire business people in America) are 'written' by various institutional contexts, ideas and discourses.

The media magnate Rupert Murdoch is a good example here. Murdoch's seemingly insatiable desire to expand his

business interests, take over companies, control the media and influence governments looks very much like an uncontrollable drive, a kind of empire building for its own sake. What Murdoch wants, it seems, is to control things, which could be read as an indication that he is not autonomous—in control of himself—but is being 'written' by discourses of business and economic power. This obsession with the workings of business, the media and economics exists side-by-side with a barely concealed disdain for other areas of the state or society such as bureaucracies, welfare mechanisms, and the field of cultural production (particularly high culture such as ballet or opera). Everything Murdoch touches is reduced, in a sense, to a part of his strategy of empire building. Even supposedly culturally sacred areas such as baseball (in America) and soccer (in Britain) are 'alienated' by Murdoch's take-overs (buying the Los Angeles Dodgers, controlling the televising of soccer games). The very idea of Murdoch, or other business empire builders, understanding or treating sport or the arts or welfare as ends in themselves, rather than as something to be overcome or the means to extend their empires, is almost unthinkable. And this, ironically enough, from a group whose collective motto, as high capitalists, might be 'freedom of choice'.

Rupert Murdoch provides an excellent example of Foucault's contention that the process of producing 'docile' bodies and minds is not confined to state institutions and discourses watching over, regulating and controlling people's thoughts and behaviour. The basic idea of biopower is to produce self-regulating subjects. In other words, once our bodies and minds have been formed and formulated in particular ways, we then take it upon ourselves to make sure that we function in these ways, and remain good, healthy subjects. Schools, universities, psychologists, the courts, businesses and the police can only keep us under surveillance some of the time. Keeping people under surveillance all the time is a very costly exercise.

Biopower partly overcame this problem by transferring, in the nineteenth century, many regulatory functions (that had

been the responsibility of the state) partly or wholly to the family and, in particular, to the mother of the family. So mothers became surrogate agents, in a sense, for schools, religions and medical agencies. In Britain in the nineteenth century, mothers were assigned the national responsibility of ensuring that the future and current resources of the state were properly developed and kept on the straight and narrow. Husbands and daughters and sons had to be healthy, disciplined and efficient workers, and mothers had much greater direct and continuous access to these 'resources' than did the institutions of the state.

But the most economical form of surveillance is, of course, self-surveillance. Once people have become docile, they continually check to make sure that they are not doing things that are unhealthy. There is an excellent example of this in the British science fiction comedy series *Red Dwarf*, where the main character, Lister, a working class 'lad', confides to the robot Kryten that he once did a 'disgraceful thing'—he 'visited a wine bar'. When Kryten enquires what is so terrible about wine bars, Lister explains that visiting a wine bar would have been the first step in becoming a class traitor. Next thing, he says, he would be 'having relationships' instead of 'going out with someone', and 'playing squash every Tuesday night with someone called Gerald'. Lister is never likely to become anything but a working-class lad with working-class values and aspirations, because he watches himself closely, night and day, for signs of 'unhealthy tendencies' (such as drinking wine, appreciating high culture or playing 'middle-class' sports such as squash).

### Power and resistance

Up to this point we have given the impression that, for Foucault, there is very little escape from the forces of power, and that biopower and its technologies and apparatuses do exactly what they claim to do—regulate and control human thoughts and behaviour. However, for Foucault that is only

one side of things. If we return to the opening paragraph of *Discipline and Punish*, with its description of the public torture and execution of the regicide Damiens for his attempted assassination of the king, we see an old-fashioned example of the exercising of power (a public spectacle, the 'sin' written in blood on the offender). But this still points out one important principle that Foucault insists upon—that power never achieves what it sets out, or claims, to do.

In the opening to *Discipline and Punish* we are presented with a bit of a puzzle. What do we make of these accounts of juridical violence that Foucault puts before us? As Damiens is 'written' (out of existence) by the sovereign's implements of torture, we are presented with another side of this 'horror show'—it doesn't function very well. The law comes across as an ass that can't even work out how many horses it takes to tear a body apart, and the dozens of torturers and technologies only seem to be getting in one another's way. What we are shown, in the Damiens' section, is both underkill (the body just can't be made to behave) and overkill (why do so many people with so much technology achieve so little?).

Now of course this is why, after the Renaissance episteme, the public spectacle was replaced by biopower—it promised to be more private, efficient and effective. But Foucault points out that there are at least two major problems with this claim. First, as we noted earlier in this chapter, there is no one authoritative discourse, institution or group in a state, but instead a number of competing discourses and groups which produce different versions of events. For instance, Foucault elaborates, in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, on the ways in which the bodies of the various categories of 'the people', including children, became scrutinised for signs and symptoms that would show their health and normality—or otherwise. From birth, the body is evaluated, measured, tested and categorised (by doctors, nurses, parents, extended family, educators, health officials, agents of religious groups) with the purpose of reading and determining its 'truth'. That truth—or those truths—can be obtained by comparing the body and its markers to the various discourses of knowledge produced by



different institutions. While this did result in the scientifically authorised production of general categories of age (child, adolescent, juvenile), these different institutions and knowledges didn't go undisputed. While categories such as 'childhood' were generally understood as being stable ('everybody knows what a child is'), in reality they were subject to transformation and revision as new forms of knowledge were developed. Foucault writes, for instance:

In the sexualization of childhood, there was formed the idea of a sex that was both present (from the evidence of anatomy) and absent (from the standpoint of physiology), present too if one considered its activity, and deficient if one referred to its reproductive finality; or again, actual in its manifestations, but hidden in its eventual effects, whose pathological seriousness would only become apparent later. (1978: 153)

This condition of the 'truth' of childhood (and doubtless the same applies to categories such as adolescence and youth) can be understood as both stable and unproblematic, on the one hand ('the truth of childhood is the sum of those knowledges that take it as their object') and, more problematically, as a site of discursive and institutional 'battles' (and therefore lacking in final authorisation, not the truth but a set of 'truths').

Foucault's point is that while we all think we know what a child or an adolescent is, in fact these categories have histories (childhood as we know it was probably 'invented' in the seventeenth century), and are always in the process of being transformed. Because children and youth are increasingly being targeted as markets in advertising texts, and because advertising largely functions in terms of the production of desirable lifestyles, activities and fashions, a connection is established between what was, to some extent, an inalienable part of society and culture (for instance, the de-commoditised and desexualised child) and the 'irrepressible drive' of capitalism. This means that popular culture and youth/child culture have become saturated with a new set of

categories and subjectivities (based on the newly and overtly sexualised child, for instance) which run straight into more traditional and unalienable (and usually official) categories and discourses about childhood and youth. The result is a cultural crisis, played out in the media, government, bureaucracies and the public sphere, about the 'threat' to children and childhood. Foucault's point, however, is that these crises are always with us, because these categories and discourses aren't natural—they are part of the 'effects of power'. And one of the reasons that people are able to resist the forces of power is precisely because people recognise this. Without any final authority to 'make people believe' (say, a belief that God has authorised these discourses or categories), we are in a sense partly free to shop around for what we will believe or accept.

There is a second reason why power doesn't live up to its claims to completely dominate our thinking, behaviour and lives. Foucault points out that power should never be thought of in purely negative terms—that it is, first and foremost, productive. Biopower and its technologies, institutions and discourses produces an almost infinite variety of categories and sub-categories of people and behaviour which compete with one another to regulate and control populations. But of course, as soon as you produce categories of what is normal, healthy and good, you produce other categories—the pervert, the deviant, the trouble-maker, the problem child, the homosexual, the hysteric, the kleptomaniac, the pyromaniac, the psychotic. In some ways, forms of social-scientific knowledge and research make these people up—bring into being the categories into which they fit, and hence produce their subjectivities—as they go along.

Perhaps the best example of how power produces something other than 'docile bodies' is the prison system. Foucault points out that while the technologies of power used in prisons are supposed to produce 'compliant' bodies and behaviour, in reality the opposite happens. Prisons, in fact, function as 'criminal factories'. Prisoners become convinced that they are all the things (deviant, lazy, evil, useless, human

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rubbish) that the system says they are. So prisoners are brought together where they can exchange ideas, experiences, techniques, contacts, strategies—in other words, where they can learn to be effective and efficient criminals. This is reinforced because the prison system treats them like criminals. And what we suggested about people's self-surveillance probably applies to an even greater extent to those outside the categories of normal and healthy. In this respect, power is successful in 'writing' people, but the effects are not what was intended.

### Conclusion

In this chapter we have introduced one of the most important areas of Foucault's work—his ideas on power. We made the point that Foucault doesn't think of power as a thing to be owned or held by somebody, but as a ubiquitous, and ever-changing flow. The way in which this flow moves around depends very much on how different groups, institutions and discourses negotiate, relate to and compete with one another.

Foucault argues that, after the Renaissance, the notion of power being held by or identified with a single person or group such as the king/queen or church (and authorised by God) is replaced by what he calls biopower. Biopower developed with the coming of the social or human sciences, which took the human body and behaviour as its object of knowledge. This knowledge gave rise to institutions and administrative techniques for measuring, regulating and controlling people and behaviour in order to ensure that states got the most out of their human resources.

Foucault does not suggest, however, that biopower has completely regulated bodies and behaviour. Because there are so many competing ideas, institutions and discourses, no single authorised truth ever emerges to dominate a society. And, in a sense, biopower is never able to completely control things because it always produces resistance.

We can sum up the main points of this chapter as follows:

## Relations of power

- The change in the idea of the seat of power—where power is located—from the divine rule of kings to the empty place of democracy, where power is 'owned' by no-one;
- The change in the exercise of power, from brutal and public force to hidden coercions;
- The central role of 'biopower' in controlling the bodies and the minds of subjects—but, in the process, the rules by which some people are produced as normal or healthy, and others are excluded, ensures that opposition and resistance are built in effects.

### Further reading

- Deleuze, Gilles 1988, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand, Athlone Press, London, see 'Strategies or the non-stratified: the thought of the outside'
- Foucault, Michel 1978, *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1, an Introduction*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, see Part 1
- McNay, Lois 1992, *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self*, Northeastern University Press, Boston, see Chapter 1