

## MICHEL FOUCAULT "TWO LECTURES" (1976)

While Foucault notes the "increasing vulnerability to criticism of things, institutions, practices, discourses" (80), he is wary of "global, totalitarian theories" (80) which have in fact proved a hindrance to research. Hence, his sense that criticism over the last few years has been local and less theoretical than reality-oriented. In addition, Foucault argues that we have been witness to the "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (81), that is, of the "historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functional coherence or formal systematisation" (81): it is a semiology of the life of the asylum or a sociology of delinquency which would have prevented an effective "criticism" (81) of the asylum. By 'subjugated knowledges,' Foucault also means "naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required levels of cognition and scientificity" (82). It is through the reappearance of such knowledges that criticism performs its work.

For Foucault, it is in the "specialised areas of erudition as in the disqualified, popular knowledge" (83) that there lies the "memory of hostile encounters . . . confined to the margins of knowledge" (83), and it is precisely this that genealogy is concerned to uncover: it "allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today" (83) by entertaining the claims of illegitimate knowledges versus the claims of that "unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchise and order them in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes a science and its objects" (83). There is no question here of a naive return to "direct cognition" (84) or "immediate experience" (84), but rather a concern with the insurrection of knowledges opposed to the "effects of the centralising powers which are linked to the institution and functioning of an organised scientific discourse within a society such as ours" (84). Genealogy reactivates local knowledges against the scientific hierarchisation of knowledges and the effects intrinsic to their power" (85). Together, archaeology is the "methodology of this analysis of local discursivities" (85) while genealogy is the "tactics whereby, on the basis of the descriptions of these local discursivities" (85), such subjected knowledges could be located in opposition to the forces of centralisation and hierarchisation.

Hence, Foucault's objection against Marxism is located precisely in the pretension to make a science out of it. For Foucault, it is vital to "question ourselves about our aspirations to the kind of power that is presumed to accompany such a science" (84). "What types of knowledge do you want to disqualify. . . . Which speaking, discoursing subjects – which subjects of experience and knowledge – do you then want to diminish? . . . Which theoretical-political avant-garde do you want to enthrone in order to isolate it from all the discontinuous forms of knowledge that circulate about it?" (85).

Foucault's concern is that once these unvalorised knowledges are brought to light and put into circulation, they "run the risk of re-codification, re-colonisation" (86), annexed and taken back into the fold, as it were. Indeed, he warns that the silence with which unitary theories avoid the genealogy of knowledges is no indication of fear on their part, indeed, it could be the "index of our failure to produce any such fear at all" (87).

What is at stake in such genealogies is that "power which has surged into view in all its violence, aggression and absurdity" (87) in recent years. Foucault is at pains to discover the nature of this power while avoiding the "kind of theoretical coronation of the whole" (88) which he has already warned about:

What are these various contrivances of power, whose operations extend to such differing levels and sectors of society and are possessed of such manifold ramifications? What are their mechanisms, their effects and their relations? (88)

These are the key questions for Foucault who wants to avoid reducing the analysis of power to effects of the economy.

Traditional theories of power, Marxist and non-Marxist, are guilty of a certain "economism" (88) in this regard. In the case of what he terms 'juridical / liberal' theories of power, power is conceived of as a right, treated as a commodity that can be exchanged from one person to another by legal contract: "power is that concrete power which every individual holds, and whose partial or total cession enables political power or sovereignty to be established" (88) and which is based on the idea that the "constitution of political power obeys the model of a legal transaction involving a contractual type of exchange" (88), there being a clear analogy between power and commodities/wealth. In the Marxist conception of power, it is conceived "primarily in terms of the role it plays in the maintenance simultaneously of the relations of production and of a class domination which the development and specific forms of the forces of production have rendered possible" (88-9). Foucault's contention is that while it is the case that "power is profoundly enmeshed in and with economic relations" (89), such models of "functional subordination" and "formal isomorphism" (89) do not see that power is not always in a position of subordination relative to the economy, nor that power is not to be modelled on the commodity, something that one possesses, acquires, cedes, alienates, recovers and circulates.

In seeking a non-economic analysis of power, Foucault asks: "If power is exercised, what sort of exercise does it involve? . . . What is its mechanism?" (89). He considers the two major schema of power, on the one side, both the notions of "power as repression" (90) and power as struggle / conflict / war, that is, power as the "hostile engagement of forces" (91), which he opposes to the contractual notion of power which "risks becoming oppression whenever it over-extends itself, whenever – that is – it goes beyond the terms of the contract" (91). Acknowledging that much of his work to this point is located within the former struggle-repression schema, he argues that this model is now in need of being rethought, the mechanisms of power facilitating something more than just repression.

Foucault suggests that to this point his work has been concerned with the 'how' of power, an attempt to relate its mechanisms to the "rules of right that provide a formal delimitation of power" (93) and the "effects of truth that this power produces and transmits, and which in their turn reproduce this power" (93). Foucault asserts that the traditional question is how the "discourse of truth" is "able to fix limits to the rights of power?" (93). Foucault's question is, by contrast, "what rules of right are implemented by the relations of power in the production of discourses of truth?" (93). In other words, "what type of power is susceptible of producing discourses of truth that in a society such as ours are endowed with such potent effects?" (93). He continues:

in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body. . . . These relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth. . . . We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. (93)

We are "forced to produce the truth of power that our society demands, of which it has need, in order to function: we must speak the truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess or discover the truth. Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition and its registration of truth: it institutionalises, professionalises and rewards its pursuit" (93). Indeed, we must produce truth as we produce wealth, indeed, in order to produce wealth. We are "subjected to truth" (94) in the sense that it is truth which makes the laws, "we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power" (94).

Foucault argues that in Western societies it is "in response to the demands of royal

power, for its profit and to serve as its instrument or justification, that the juridical edifice of our own society has been developed. Right in the West is the King's right" (95). The king is the central personage in the whole legal edifice of the West: Roman law was resurrected to establish the authoritarian, administrative and absolute power of the monarchy. When this legal edifice is turned against the monarch's control in later centuries, it is "always the limits of this sovereign power that are put into question, its prerogatives that are challenged" (94). The king is central to the general organisation of the legal system in the West, and discourse centres around either justifying the absolute nature of the sovereign's power as befitted his fundamental right, or advocating the necessity of imposing certain limits upon this sovereign power, submitting it to rules of right. However, the "essential function of the discourse and techniques of right has been to efface the domination intrinsic to power" (95). Foucault's goal up to this point has been to invert this discourse of right, to expose the fact of domination, its latent brutality. Right, not simply the laws but also the whole complex of apparatuses, institutions and regulations "transmits and puts into motion relations that are not relations of sovereignty but of domination" (95-6). Foucault's object is not the domination of the king in his central position, but the "manifold forms of domination" (96), that of "his subjects in their mutual relations" (96).

Foucault wants to substitute the question of the problem of domination and subjugation for that of sovereignty and obedience. Right should be understood "not in terms of a legitimacy to be established, but in terms of the methods of subjugation that it instigates" (96). Foucault is not concerned with power in its central locations, but "power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, . . . those points where it becomes capillary" (96). For example, he is not interested in researching how the right of punishment is founded on sovereignty (whether monarchical or democratic right), but rather "in what ways punishment and the power of punishment are effectively embodied in a certain number of local, regional, material institutions . . . concerned with torture and imprisonment, and to place these in the climate – at once institutional and physical, regulated and violent – of the effective apparatuses of punishment" (97). Foucault wants to eliminate the consideration of power "from its internal point of view" (97), that is, 'who has power and what has he in mind to do with it?'. Rather, Foucault wants to study power as it is "completely invested in its real and effective practices . . . at the point where it is in direct and immediate relationship with that which we can provisionally call its object" (97). The goal is to grasp how "subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc. We should try to grasp subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects" (97).

Power, moreover, is not to be considered as a "phenomenon of one individual's consolidated and homogeneous domination over others, or that of one group or class over another" (98). In fact, power

must be analysed as something which circulates . . . which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application. (98)

The individual is not crushed by power: it is the "effect of power" (98) at the same time that it is the element of its articulation: "The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle" (98).

The task is not deduce power starting from its centre, but rather to "conduct an

ascending analysis of power, starting . . . from its infinitesimal mechanisms . . . and then see how these mechanisms of power have been . . . invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended etc. by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination" (99). For example, one could start with the hegemony of the bourgeois class in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and conclude that since lunatics are useless to industrial production, one is obliged to dispense with them. Similarly, all activity (such as sexual) which did not lend itself to the furtherance of the productive forces were banned, repressed and excluded or that sex was encouraged in order to provide a greater labour force. The alternative suggested by Foucault is to start at the other end, seeing "how mechanisms of power have been able to function" (100): the goal is to understand the confinement of the insane or the repression of sexuality in terms of the "immediate social entourage" (101), such as the family, parents, doctors, rather than lumping them under the formula of a generalised bourgeoisie, in order to perceive how they became economically and politically useful. What is important is to see that the bourgeoisie did not think that madness ought to be excluded or infantile sexuality repressed, so much as they stumbled upon mechanisms of exclusion and surveillance that revealed their political usefulness and economic profitability, and subsequently came to be colonised and maintained by the entire state system.

The major mechanisms of power have not so much been accompanied by ideological productions (such as an ideology of education of the monarchy, of democracy etc.). It has rather been a question of the "production of effective instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge – methods of observation, techniques of registration, procedures for investigation and research, apparatuses of control" (102). Power "when it is exercised . . . cannot but evolve, organise and put into circulation a knowledge, or rather apparatuses of knowledge, which are not ideological constructs" (102).

In short, Foucault argues that we "must eschew the model of Leviathan in the study of power. We must escape from the limited field of juridical sovereignty and State institutions and instead base our analysis of power on the study of the techniques and tactics of domination" (102).

As long as a feudal type of society survived, the mode in which power was exercised is definable in terms of the relationship sovereign-subject. In the seventeenth and subsequent centuries, one witnesses the emergence or the invention of a different mode of power. It is a power more dependent on bodies and their activities, than what they produce, more on their labour than the wealth produced; one exercised via surveillance rather than levies. It presupposes a "tightly knit grid of material coercions rather than the physical existence of a sovereign" (104). It is a form of power in which there is minimum investment and maximum return. This non-sovereign form of power is the invention of the bourgeoisie: it is a disciplinary power that is practiced, in effect. The theory of sovereignty persists as an ideology and as an organising principle of the major legal codes because the "juridical systems . . . have enabled sovereignty to be democratised through the constitution of a public right articulated upon collective sovereignty, while at the same time this democratisation of sovereignty was fundamentally determined by and grounded in mechanisms of disciplinary coercion" (105), the legislation and discourse of public right thereby disguising the "disciplinary coercions whose purpose is in fact to assure the cohesion" (106) of the social body. These disciplines each cater to the rule of the sovereign while simultaneously generating multiple apparatuses of knowledge that operate to normalise and to homogenise. Each discipline exists at the point of intersection between the two heterogeneous levels of discipline and sovereignty. Indeed, sovereignty and disciplinary mechanisms are integral components of the general mechanism of power in modern society. The way out of this is not a return to sovereignty but to a "new form of right, one must indeed be anti-disciplinary" (108).