

POWER/KNOWLEDGE

*Selected Interviews and Other Writings
1972–1977*

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3 BODY/POWER

Interviewers: editorial collective of *Quel Corps*?

You depict in *Discipline and Punish* a political system where the King's body plays an essential role

In a society like that of the seventeenth century, the King's body wasn't a metaphor, but a political reality. Its physical presence was necessary for the functioning of the monarchy.

And what about the Republic, 'one and indivisible'?

That's a formula that was imposed against the Girondins and the idea of an American-style federalism. But it never operated in the same manner as the King's body under the monarchy. On the contrary, it's the body of society which becomes the new principle in the nineteenth century. It is this social body which needs to be protected, in a quasi-medical sense. In place of the rituals that served to restore the corporal integrity of the monarch, remedies and therapeutic devices are employed such as the segregation of the sick, the monitoring of contagions, the exclusion of delinquents. The elimination of hostile elements by the *supplice* (public torture and execution) is thus replaced by the method of asepsis—criminology, eugenics and the quarantining of 'degenerates'

Is there a fantasy body corresponding to different types of institution?

I believe the great fantasy is the idea of a social body constituted by the universality of wills. Now the phenomenon of the social body is the effect not of a consensus but of the materiality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals.

The eighteenth century is usually seen under the aspect of liberation. You describe it as the period when a

network of forms of control (*quadrillage*) is set in place. Is the liberation possible without the *quadrillage*?

As always with relations of power, one is faced with complex phenomena which don't obey the Hegelian form of the dialectic. Mastery and awareness of one's own body can be acquired only through the effect of an investment of power in the body: gymnastics, exercises, muscle-building, nudism, glorification of the body beautiful. All of this belongs to the pathway leading to the desire of one's own body, by way of the insistent, persistent, meticulous work of power on the bodies of children or soldiers, the healthy bodies. But once power produces this effect, there inevitably emerge the responding claims and affirmations, those of one's own body against power, of health against the economic system, of pleasure against the moral norms of sexuality, marriage, decency. Suddenly, what had made power strong becomes used to attack it. Power, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counter-attack in that same body. Do you recall the panic of the institutions of the social body, the doctors and politicians, at the idea of non-legalised cohabitation (*l'union libre*) or free abortion? But the impression that power weakens and vacillates here is in fact mistaken; power can retreat here, re-organise its forces, invest itself elsewhere . . . and so the battle continues.

Would this account for the much-discussed 'recuperation' of the body through pornography and advertising?

I don't agree at all with this talk about 'recuperation'. What's taking place is the usual strategic development of a struggle. Let's take a precise example, that of auto-eroticism. The restrictions on masturbation hardly start in Europe until the eighteenth century. Suddenly, a panic-theme appears: an appalling sickness develops in the Western world. Children masturbate. Via the medium of families, though not at their initiative, a system of control of sexuality, an objectivisation of sexuality allied to corporal persecution, is established over the bodies of children. But sexuality, through thus becoming an object of analysis and concern, surveillance and control, engenders at the same

time an intensification of each individual's desire, for, in and over his body.

The body thus became the issue of a conflict between parents and children, the child and the instances of control. The revolt of the sexual body is the reverse effect of this encroachment. What is the response on the side of power? An economic (and perhaps also ideological) exploitation of eroticisation, from sun-tan products to pornographic films. Responding precisely to the revolt of the body, we find a new mode of investment which presents itself no longer in the form of control by repression but that of control by stimulation. 'Get undressed—but be slim, good-looking, tanned!' For each move by one adversary, there is an answering one by the other. But this isn't a 'recuperation' in the Leftists' sense. One has to recognise the indefiniteness of the struggle—though this is not to say it won't some day have an end

Doesn't a new revolutionary strategy for taking power have to proceed via a new definition of the politics of the body?

The emergence of the problem of the body and its growing urgency have come about through the unfolding of a political struggle. Whether this is a revolutionary struggle, I don't know. One can say that what has happened since 1968, and arguably what made 1968 possible, is something profoundly anti-Marxist. How can European revolutionary movements free themselves from the 'Marx effect', the institutions typical of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Marxism? This was the direction of the questions posed by '68. In this calling in question of the equation: Marxism = the revolutionary process, an equation that constituted a kind of dogma, the importance given to the body is one of the important, if not essential elements.

What course is the evolution of the bodily relationship between the masses and the State apparatus taking?

First of all one must set aside the widely held thesis that power, in our bourgeois, capitalist, societies has denied the reality of the body in favour of the soul, consciousness, ideality. In fact nothing is more material, physical, corporal

than the exercise of power. What mode of investment of the body is necessary and adequate for the functioning of a capitalist society like ours? From the eighteenth to the early twentieth century I think it was believed that the investment of the body by power had to be heavy, ponderous, meticulous and constant. Hence those formidable disciplinary régimes in the schools, hospitals, barracks, factories, cities, lodgings, families. And then, starting in the 1960s, it began to be realised that such a cumbersome form of power was no longer as indispensable as had been thought and that industrial societies could content themselves with a much looser form of power over the body. Then it was discovered that control of sexuality could be attenuated and given new forms. One needs to study what kind of body the current society needs

Would you distinguish your interest in the body from that of other contemporary interpretations?

I think I would distinguish myself from both the Marxist and the para-Marxist perspectives. As regards Marxism, I'm not one of those who try to elicit the effects of power at the level of ideology. Indeed I wonder whether, before one poses the question of ideology, it wouldn't be more materialist to study first the question of the body and the effects of power on it. Because what troubles me with these analyses which prioritise ideology is that there is always presupposed a human subject on the lines of the model provided by classical philosophy, endowed with a consciousness which power is then thought to seize on.

But the Marxist perspective does include an awareness of the effect of power on the body in the working situation.

Certainly. But whereas today political and economic demands are coming to be made more on behalf of the wage-earner's body than of the wage-earning class, one seldom hears the former being discussed as such. It's as though 'revolutionary' discourses were still steeped in the ritualistic themes derived from Marxist analyses. And while there are some very interesting things about the body in Marx's writings, Marxism considered as an historical reality

has had a terrible tendency to occlude the question of the body, in favour of consciousness and ideology.

I would also distinguish myself from para-Marxists like Marcuse who give the notion of repression an exaggerated role—because power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, if it worked only through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockage and repression, in the manner of a great Superego, exercising itself only in a negative way. If, on the contrary, power is strong this is because, as we are beginning to realise, it produces effects at the level of desire—and also at the level of knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it. If it has been possible to constitute a knowledge of the body, this has been by way of an ensemble of military and educational disciplines. It was on the basis of power over the body that a physiological, organic knowledge of it became possible.

The fact that power is so deeply rooted and the difficulty of eluding its embrace are effects of all these connections. That is why the notion of repression which mechanisms of power are generally reduced to strikes me as very inadequate and possibly dangerous.

Your study is concentrated on all those micro-powers that are exercised at the level of daily life. Aren't you neglecting the State apparatus here?

It's true that since the late nineteenth century Marxist and 'Marxised' revolutionary movements have given special importance to the State apparatus as the stake of their struggle. What were the ultimate consequences of this? In order to be able to fight a State which is more than just a government, the revolutionary movement must possess equivalent politico-military forces and hence must constitute itself as a party, organised internally in the same way as a State apparatus with the same mechanisms of hierarchies and organisation of powers. This consequence is heavy with significance. Secondly, there is the question, much discussed within Marxism itself, of the capture of the State apparatus: should this be considered as a straightforward take-over, accompanied by appropriate modifications, or should it be the opportunity for the destruction of

that apparatus? You know how the issue was finally settled. The State apparatus must be undermined, but not completely undermined, since the class struggle will not be brought to an immediate end with the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Hence the State apparatus must be kept sufficiently intact for it to be employed against the class enemy. So we reach a second consequence: during the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the State apparatus must to some extent at least be maintained. Finally then, as a third consequence, in order to operate these State apparatuses which have been taken over but not destroyed, it will be necessary to have recourse to technicians and specialists. And in order to do this one has to call upon the old class which is acquainted with the apparatus, namely the bourgeoisie. This clearly is what happened in the USSR. I don't claim at all that the State apparatus is unimportant, but it seems to me that among all the conditions for avoiding a repetition of the Soviet experience and preventing the revolutionary process from running into the ground, one of the first things that has to be understood is that power isn't localised in the State apparatus and that nothing in society will be changed if the mechanisms of power that function outside, below and alongside the State apparatuses, on a much more minute and everyday level, are not also changed.

Could we now turn then to the human sciences, and psychoanalysis in particular?

The case of psychoanalysis is indeed an interesting one. Psychoanalysis was established in opposition to a certain kind of psychiatry, the psychiatry of degeneracy, eugenics and heredity. This practice and theory, represented in France by Magnan, acted as the great foil to psychoanalysis. Indeed, in relation to that psychiatry—which is still the psychiatry of today's psychiatrists—psychoanalysis played a liberating role. Moreover, in certain countries (I am thinking of Brazil in particular), it has played a political role, denouncing the complicity of psychiatrists with political power. Again, take what is happening in the Eastern countries: the people there who take an interest in psychoanalysis are not the most disciplined among the psychia-

trists. But the fact remains that in our societies the career of psychoanalysis has taken other directions and has been the object of different investments. Certain of its activities have effects which fall within the function of control and normalisation. If one can succeed in modifying these relationships of power into which psychoanalysis enters, and rendering unacceptable the effects of power they propagate, this will render the functioning of the State apparatuses much more difficult. Another advantage of conducting a critique of relations existing at a minute level would be to render impossible the reproduction of the form of the State apparatus within revolutionary movements.

Your studies of madness and the prisons enable us to retrace the constitution of an ever more disciplinary form of society. This historical process seems to follow an almost inexorable logic.

I have attempted to analyse how, at the initial stages of industrial societies, a particular punitive apparatus was set up together with a system for separating the normal and the abnormal. To follow this up, it will be necessary to construct a history of what happens in the nineteenth century and how the present highly-complex relation of forces—the current outline of the battle—has been arrived at through a succession of offensives and counter-offensives, effects and counter-effects. The coherence of such a history does not derive from the revelation of a project but from a logic of opposing strategies. The archaeology of the human sciences has to be established through studying the mechanisms of power which have invested human bodies, acts and forms of behaviour. And this investigation enables us to rediscover one of the conditions of the emergence of the human sciences: the great nineteenth-century effort in discipline and normalisation. Freud was well aware of all this. He was aware of the superior strength of his position on the matter of normalisation. So why this sacralising modesty (*pudeur*) that insists on denying that psychoanalysis has anything to do with normalisation?

How do you see the intellectual's role in militant practice?

The intellectual no longer has to play the role of an advisor. The project, tactics and goals to be adopted are a matter for those who do the fighting. What the intellectual can do is to provide instruments of analysis, and at present this is the historian's essential role. What's effectively needed is a ramified, penetrative perception of the present, one that makes it possible to locate lines of weakness, strong points, positions where the instances of power have secured and implanted themselves by a system of organisation dating back over 150 years. In other words, a topological and geological survey of the battlefield—that is the intellectual's role. But as for saying, 'Here is what you must do!', certainly not.

Who or what is it that co-ordinates the activities of agents of the political body?

This is an extremely complex system of relations which leads one finally to wonder how, given that no one person can have conceived it in its entirety, it can be so subtle in its distribution, its mechanisms, reciprocal controls and adjustments. It's a highly intricate mosaic. During certain periods there appear agents of liaison. Take the example of philanthropy in the early nineteenth century: people appear who make it their business to involve themselves in other people's lives, health, nutrition, housing; then, out of this confused set of functions there emerge certain personages, institutions, forms of knowledge: public hygiene, inspectors, social workers, psychologists. And we are now seeing a whole proliferation of different categories of social work.

Naturally it's medicine which has played the basic role as the common denominator. Its discourse circulated from one instance to the next. It was in the name of medicine both that people came to inspect the layout of houses and, equally, that they classified individuals as insane, criminal, or sick. But there also emerged, out of the confused matrix of philanthropy, a highly diverse mosaic comprising all these 'social workers'

The interesting thing is to ascertain, not what overall project presides over all these developments, but, how, in terms of strategy, the different pieces were set in place.

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