“The Institutional Construction of the Sexual Self”

I. Announcements:

Midterm -- next week (Thursday will review)

Take a look at last year’s midterm
Lecture Outline

I. Where are we? Institutions & the Self

II. Foucault’s General Project.

III. Foucault’s Perspective on Sexuality.

IV. Critiques of Foucault

V. On the Institutional Centered Approach to Social Explanation
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I. Foucault’s General Project.

A. Michel Foucault (1926-1984), Who was he?

1. French Intellectual (studied psychology, went on to earn doctorate in 1961, results in *Madness & Civilization* (1961)).

• Series of Important Books:
  - *Birth of the Clinic* (1963)
  - *The Order of Things* (1966)
  - *Discipline & Punish* (1975)
II. Foucault’s General Project.
A. Michel Foucault (1926-1984) Who was he?

2. Eventually moved to top tier of French intellectual world (Professor of the History of Systems of Thought at the College de France, 1970).


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II. Foucault’s General Project.

B. Pushed a very strong “Institutional-Centered” Theory of Society.

- In many ways carried forward “Linguistic Relativity” thesis. But instead of “language” focuses on “Discourse”.

- Discourse -- what is said or what is say-able, know-able, meaningful.
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II. Foucault’s General Project.

B. Pushed a very strong “Institutional-Centered” Theory of Society.

(Opening Passage *The Order of Things*)

“A certain Chinese encyclopedia’ in which it is written that ‘animals are divided into:
(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies’.” (from Borges).
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II. Foucault’s General Project.

• Rather than looking at what was possible in grammar or verb structure or available words (e.g. snow terms)

• Foucault looked at what was possible in what counted as true (everyone knows that...), who had the authority to know (or name) truth, and ...

• the Conditions for “Truth” — What counts as truth, what can be said, what counts as knowable, what conditions the possibility of what is knowable.
II. Foucault’s General Project.

• Argued that every historical period had its own “Episteme” = historical a’priori that grounds knowledge and discourses and represents the conditions for their possibility.

• Truth/Power tightly coupled. Who can know? They have power. Argues that what can be known or said has immense implications for conditions of people’s lives.
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II. Foucault’s General Project.

C. Easier to understand -- start w/ Focus on Power.

*Discipline and Punish:*

Provocative Thesis, the movement from a system of Punishment to a system of Discipline was a result of (and accompanied) general increase in deployment of Social Power.

Why Provocative?
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II. Foucault’s General Project.

C. Focus on Power.

1. Punishment was brutal:
Offenses against the King were treated as symbolic affronts and the response had to be spectacular so as to convincingly demonstrate the mighty power of the King.

Poor Damiens:
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II. Foucault’s General Project.

C. Focus on Power.

Punishment was brutal:
First half of the book fascinating account of the history of torture. Explains that this was not just unconstrained violence, but a careful and complicated theory (episteme) of how pain and truth were connected.

Elaborate rules about who would be tortured in what ways.
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II. Foucault’s General Project.

C. Focus on Power.

2. Discipline came later:
   • He Documents the turn against torture and public executions.
   • Rise of the Prison system as an alternative (attack on the free self rather than on the body)
   • But central, is the idea that power could come more effectively through careful knowledge, analysis, and re-making of the subject.
   • Panopticon
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II. Foucault’s General Project.

• Panopticon

• Invented by Jeremy Bentham

• Model for a number of actual prisons.

• Perfect knowledge

• Surveillance
• More Generally he documents the change from “Punishment” to “Discipline”.

• A movement from power as symbolic display to the rise of power as a system of control over the small details of movement of the body and ultimately the attentions of the mind and our ability to think or to be a self.

• The Soldier …..
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II. Foucault’s General Project.

C. Focus on Power.

3. Discipline started in monastery:

- Focused attention on individual commitment to God in every tiny aspect of the self
- Time Tables for every minute of the day
- Practiced recitations
- Body in special motion, posture, control
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II. Foucault’s General Project.

C. Focus on Power.

4. Discipline moved to other Organizations:

- Army — detailed drilling and control of the body
- Schools — Control of students in space, in ranks, in files.
- Factories — Ordering production, locating people in space, in time, in sequence, controlling bodily movements
• For Foucault — That which counts as deviant is produced through the rise of systems of Truth/Power.

• Professionally produced scientific systems of knowledge about us, our inner selves, our pathologies, our essential selves.
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II. Foucault’s General Project.

C. Focus on Power.

5. So from the horrible power of the king, to the subtle and pervasive powers of discipline.

- Foucault argued that greatest power is in modern society.
- Knowledge/Power tight couplet.
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III. Foucault’s Perspective on Sexuality.

A. The History of Sexuality:

1. Against the Repressive Hypothesis:

- Beginning of the Text:

  “For a long time, the story goes, we supported a Victorian regime, and we continue to be dominated by it even today…”

- Notice here — he is telling a story, he will differ with…
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III. Foucault’s Perspective on Sexuality.

A. The History of Sexuality:

1. Against the Repressive Hypothesis:

- At the beginning of the 17th century a certain frankness was still common...”

- “But twilight soon fell upon this bright day, followed by the monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoise...”

- “Everyone knew children had no sex..”

- “The brothel and the mental hospital ... places of tolerance”
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III. Foucault’s Perspective on Sexuality.

A. The History of Sexuality:

1. Against the Repressive Hypothesis:

- (Giddens):
- Sex was turned into a secret

- An extension of the religious confession (the origins of this form of control)

- Taken over by other regimes of Truth (Science, psychiatry, etc.)
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III. Foucault’s Perspective on Sexuality.

A. The History of Sexuality:

1. Against the Repressive Hypothesis:

   • Campaigns against Masturbation in children

   • Campaigns against sexual pleasure in women (seen to be properly a man’s domain).

   • With Freud, movement to seeing sex and its urges as foundational of all that is psychological.
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III. Foucault’s Perspective on Sexuality.

A. The History of Sexuality:

2. What is the Repressive Hypothesis?

- Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)

- Austrian, founder of modern psychotherapy

- Id, ego and super-ego
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III. Foucault’s Perspective on Sexuality.

• Id = impulsive, child-like portion of the psyche that operates on the "pleasure principle" and only takes into account what it wants and disregards all consequences.

• Superego = is the moral component of the psyche, which takes into account no special circumstances in which the morally right thing may not be right for a given situation

• Ego = attempts to exact a balance between the impractical hedonism of the id and the equally impractical moralism of the super-ego; it is the part of the psyche that is, usually, reflected most directly in a person's actions.
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III. Foucault’s Perspective on Sexuality.

A. The History of Sexuality:

2. What is the Repressive Hypothesis?

• *Civilization and its Discontents*: Freud argued that The Ego has to control the Id in order to enable civilization to happen.

• Victorian era was about the superego running wild, controlling all the natural pleasures of life.

• All natural sexual desires and urges were repressed.

• Freud was a part of the solution, showing sex was natural.
III. Foucault’s Perspective on Sexuality.

A. The History of Sexuality:

3. Foucault disagrees:

• Foucault thinks there may be no clear “natural”. Sees sexuality as culturally produced.

• Moreover, sees an ironic quality to Victorian prudishness, in an attempt to banish perversion, suddenly it is everywhere in our minds, in our actions, in our attention. (Chp. “A veritable discursive explosion”, p. 125 Reader)

• Power is not repressing sex, power is creating sex.
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III. Foucault’s Perspective on Sexuality.

A. The History of Sexuality:

- Foucault sees the rise of sexual discourse as another component of the rise of *disciplinary society*.

- Like the workers in the factory, discourse on sex controls our bodies in the most minute and intimate ways. It is a huge acceleration of social power.
IV. Critiques of Foucault.

A. Giddens has some disagreement:

- Gender not just Sexuality matters
- Changes in institution of marriage
- Rise of romance
- Change in the home
- Rise of contraception
- Creates “Plastic Sexuality”
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IV. Critiques of Foucault.

A. Giddens has some disagreement:

- Sexuality becomes a resource, feature of the self
- Rise of homosexuality as open lifestyle
- Contributes to overall sense of modernity as self as a project.
- Reflexivity (is about taking the self as object for the self) (Think back to Mauss).
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V. The Institutional Centered Approach to Social Explanation

A.