

seriously Marx's observation in the 'Theses on Feuerbach' that sensuousness is practical, human-sensuous activity.

Structuralism

In modern social theory, it is pre-eminently in the work of Michel Foucault that the human body is located centrally as an issue of knowledge. The importance of the body and desire in modern structuralist thought has often been recognized (Benoist, 1978), but the question of the body has a peculiar persistence in Foucault's approach to historical analysis. His ideas are difficult to grasp, but one important feature of his perspective is that, while in most conventional philosophy and social theory power is seen to repress desire, Foucault treats power as constructive and productive: desire is brought about by power/knowledge. While modern societies often appear to be characterized by sexual repression, in fact sexuality is constantly produced and examined by contemporary discourses, but these have come under the control of medical and psychiatric professions. The will to know has become the will to know sexuality and, since to know is to control, the sexual body has become the specific object of politics (Lemert and Gillan, 1982). There is, therefore, a very real difference between the approaches of Marcuse and Foucault in relation to the repression and representation of sexuality. For Marcuse, the repression of sex in capitalism is real and constitutes part of the surplus repression of libidinal pleasures. For Foucault, sexual repression is a myth, since sex has in fact become the object and product of endless scientific discourses – psychoanalysis, demography, biology, medical science – which aim to control and normalize sexuality. Knowledge produced desire in order to control it. In this respect, Foucault avoids the pitfall of treating desire as a unified phenomenon in history precisely because he treats desire as the product of certain historical discourses. However, this creates an ambiguity in Foucault's theory. At times he treats the body as a real entity – as, for example, in the effects of population growth on scientific thought or in his analysis of the effect of penology on the body. Foucault appears to treat the body as a unified, concrete aspect of human history which is continuous across epochs. Such a position is, however, clearly at odds with his views on the discontinuities of history and with his argument that the body is constructed by discourse. Thus, one interpretation of Foucault asserts that:

Clearly Foucault does not adopt Merleau-Ponty's solution. The body of desire is not, for him, the phenomenal, lived body. It is not a corporeal, incarnate subjectivity. ... Desire, for Foucault, is neither expressed in the body, nor is the body the lived form of desire. (Lemert and Gillan, 1982: 105)

On the other hand, Foucault has also said that, rather than starting with the analysis of ideology, it would be 'more materialist to study first the question of the body and the effects of power on it' (Foucault, 1981: 139). Such a materialist project would appear to take the corporeality of life seriously.

What is 'the body'? is thus a question which is central to Foucault's thought, but one which is not clearly answered.

Foucauldian structuralism is, at one level, a response to Cartesian rationalism. By splitting people into body and mind, Descartes represents an important stage in Western thought. The Cartesian revolution gave a privileged status to mind as the definition of the person ('I think, therefore I am') and an underprivileged status to the body which was simply a machine. To some extent Foucault reversed this situation by denying any centrality to subjectivity (the thinking, Cartesian subject) and by treating the body as the focus of modern discourse. Having rejected the transcendental Subject as merely a modern substitute for God or Logos, Foucault appears reluctant to have the Body as a controlling centre of social theory. The body is thus problematic for his theory. It looks as if Foucault wants to write the history of discourses about the body, of how the body is theoretically constructed, but this is specifically denied when he claims not to be producing a 'history of mentalities' which,

would take account of bodies only through the manner in which they have been perceived and given meaning and value; but a 'history of bodies' and the manner in which what is most material and most vital in them has been invested. (Foucault, 1981: 152)

To some extent, part of these difficulties is a product of his prior commitment to certain epistemological problems and thus the difficulties may be somewhat artificial. To reject Cartesianism it is not necessary to deny the corporeal nature of human existence and consciousness. To accept the corporeality of human life it is not necessary to deny the fact that the nature of the human body is also an effect of cultural, historical activity. The body is both natural and cultural.

Foucault and the Origins of Sociology

Foucault's approach to the history of ideas has major implications for the sociology of knowledge, but specifically for the history of sociology. Foucault has rejected the conventional view that sociology had its origins in French positivism:

Countless people have sought the origins of sociology in Montesquieu and Comte. That is a very ignorant enterprise. Sociological knowledge (*savoir*) is formed rather in practices like those of the doctors. For instance, at the start of the nineteenth century Guepin wrote a marvellous study of the city of Nantes. (Foucault, 1980a: 151)

The rise of modern medicine was associated with the development of new bureaucratic techniques in the panopticon system, the utilization of social surveys to map the distribution of diseases, the adoption of clinical methods for case-records and the elaboration of societal surveillance. Modern medicine is essentially social medicine as a policing of populations