

Marx, Foucault & Bodies

Bearing in mind the transparency of discourse, that is to say discourses need no external party to assign meaning as they speak their own truths, in answer to the question of power regarding discourse, i.e. who does discourse serve? Foucault replies:

“Where Soviet socialist power was in question, its opponents called it totalitarianism; power in Western capitalism was denounced by the Marxists as class domination; but the mechanics of power in themselves were never analysed. This task could only begin after 1968, that is to say on the basis of daily struggles at grass roots level, among those whose fight was located in the fine meshes of the web of power. This was where the concrete nature of power became visible, along with the prospect that these analyses of power would prove more fruitful in accounting for all that had hitherto remained outside the field of political analysis...” (Gordon, 1980, 116)

Whether or not the mechanics of power were ever analysed by Marx is not my concern. It is enough to have demonstrated that discourse serves the people as well as the establishment. Rather than critiquing the political economy, Foucault seeks to analyse the mechanics of power here. For Marx, the labour that goes into the production of a commodity constitutes its true worth, not the amount for which it may be exchanged. In our present age of electronic automation his theories become necessarily dated, as the relationship between technology and culture has changed immeasurably since the

historically situated moment he was writing from. However, as a Marxist position on modernity is adopted by many critics who produce sustained attacks on postmodernism, Marxism cannot be dismissed altogether and warrants further discussion in relation to modernity as the age of production. As a Marxist, Callinicos rejects postmodernism (Callinicos, 1989) as a move beyond the capitalist mode of production, treating it instead as a purely theoretical construct.

In the 1844 manuscripts, Marx develops the idea of alienation from modern society being rooted in production:

“If then the product of labour is alienation, production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation... Labour is *external* to the worker, i.e. it does not belong to his essential being; ... in his work therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his mental and physical energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind...” (72: cited in Arthur, 1970, 17)

If we extend Marx’s argument to looking at cyberspace as a class society despite all the utopian ideals that have been imposed onto it, then we can begin to draw conclusions about the information rich/poor divide. When the modern proletariat enter cyberspace in significant numbers we may indeed be faced with a global revolution. It is however, necessary to qualify this statement by asking the question, is there a modern proletariat? To which we shall assume the answer is yes, although Jameson’s observation that in

today's global marketplace the proletariat is displaced into the third world is relevant here, as there are entire nations dependent on factory labour.

“...Jameson sees correlation's between postmodernism and the globalisation of the world's economy. The transition from nationally based economies to a multinational economy has been accompanied by a change in both the form of production and regimes of capital accumulation”

(<http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/academic/N-Q/psysc/staff/sihomer/limits.html>, 4).

As the global economy becomes unified it is not difficult to see that the poorer countries will make up an immense workforce, as the globe itself becomes a class society. Stuart Hall observes that this trend of globalisation also employs a strategy of disguise to ensure its own 'regime of capital accumulation':

“Hall observes that the global now situates itself as the local. There is now undeniably a global culture whilst at the same time we find a resurgence of ethnic conflicts and nationalism. Whilst multinational corporations spread themselves across the globe they package and market themselves through specific national identities within individual countries. As a strategy to combat multinationalism, more properly national companies are also increasingly emphasising their local and regional identities. In other words, globalisation masquerading as regionalism” (Ibid.).

So with global companies packaging themselves within national identities it would appear that capitalism has indeed entered a new phase. However it is not within my current project to define whether this constitutes evidence of postmodernity or not; my aim here has been to establish a view of the world framed through the notion of class with evidence of there being a modern proletariat. However this is problematic in that there is an underclass which divides Marx's proletariat into two distinct groups. The best example I can think of is that of the community fostered underneath the streets, in the old sewers of New York where poverty is rife. Consisting of nomads, alcoholics, crackheads and rejects from the surface society, this microcosmic community has its own folk laws and legends.

A vision of the future where this underclass has technological capabilities may not always be the realm of science fiction (Stephenson, 1992, is an excellent example of this, in which cyberspace is called the 'Metaverse'). If we realise the inequality in class terms then Marx's doctrine can be applied:

“He sees the basis of partial revolution in that a particular class frees itself, and hence society in general, from the limitations imposed by certain privileges held by another class. But in so far as the class carrying through the emancipation has class interests based on its own particular place in civil society, e.g. that it possesses or can easily acquire money or culture, it will cease its radical efforts at the point at which the field is free for the people sharing this *particular situation* to advance themselves” (Arthur, 1970, 13).

The noteworthy idea here is that revolution will cease once the oppressed class has the means to advance themselves. In the following illustration this could take the form of access to cyberspace. Emancipation from social conditions will/would destroy class boundaries in the traditional sense, as the underclass could potentially become middle class in such a revolution, leaving the working class where it always was (in the third world).

“Marx argues that no class in Germany has the courage to carry through such a partial emancipation. It follows therefore that emancipation can only be achieved by a class *forced to* it by its immediate situation, by material necessity” (Ibid.).

The desperation necessary as a precursor to undertaking such a revolution, according to Marx, ensures that it will be made by a universal class. In Marx’s thinking only the proletariat has no interest in upholding the society by protecting the existing order, as it is so desperate as to have nothing to lose by revolution. However he never analyses the mechanics of power that uphold society. The closest he gets is ‘historical materialism,’ which works in terms of uncovering class interests beneath surface events to understand why people do certain things. For example, rather than out of any humanitarian grounds as we were led to believe by the media, the Gulf war was started by the United States to protect its own political and economic interests; namely oil reserves. The media’s strategy of disguising the real intention of the war illustrates how it ultimately serves capitalist ideology, as it applied heroic status to the actions of the United States.

In this context historical materialism could uncover a sinister purpose behind virtual world technology which is firmly rooted in capitalism, as it is becoming big business; a vision somewhat removed from the utopian virtual society.

“Foucault's underlying challenge to Marxist thought is waged at its ‘sovereign’ notion of power – which he claims it shares with Liberalism” (Featherstone, Hepworth & Turner, 1991, 249).

Foucault posits that the relationship between language, power and discourse is ambiguous and plurivocal. Whereas a Marxist analysis of power conceives it as possessed, repressive and flowing from a centralised source cascading down from top to bottom; a Foucauldian analysis would see power as exercised rather than possessed, productive rather than primarily repressive and flowing from the bottom of society (micro) upwards (macro).

“Foucault’s “bottom-up” analysis of power is an attempt to show how power relations at the microlevel of society make possible certain global effects of domination’s such as class power and patriarchy” (Sawiki, 1991, 23).

This analysis of power is easily applicable to cyberspace as each individual that makes up one node of the network is subject to power relations at the micro level. Foucault states that power can only be exercised over free subjects, otherwise power can not be said to create an ‘effect’ (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, 221). While some form of power is

necessary in all societies where human beings have relationships, at the micro-level it includes sexuality and bodies as areas where it is possible to hold power.

“It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallisation is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies”

(Foucault, 1990, 92-3).

Foucault is talking about a sinister strategy of power here in that its effects are subliminal. By crystallising itself into the institutions that define us, power is able to operate without the layman thinking twice about it. At the macro-level however, ideology and discourse exercise power in far subtler and far reaching ways. Tensions between individual and collective consciousness can therefore be interpreted as tensions between the micro and macro operations of power. As a macro power structure, the Californian Ideology is evident at the micro level in the attitude of Internet marketers and freelance web designers, as they are people who have an economic interest in promoting the wired ideology. The macro power structure of cyberspace has been founded upon this ideology, which accounts for the decentred nature of a space in which a business empire

may become more powerful than national government. The notion of public and private space is also relevant here, as while cyberspace may be construed as both public and private in the same temporal moment, by allowing existence in two spaces at once (virtual and physical), the operations of power work concurrently together. That is to say, micro-level power operations may influence the body while macro-level operations influence the mind.

At the microlevel of society power is inscribed upon the human body:

“The History of Sexuality is expressly a genealogy of sexuality: therefore, bodies will be situated in this text in relation to sexuality and sex... the axes along which bodies are theorised. Bodies are understood in relation to the production, transmission, reception and legitimation of knowledge about sexuality and sex” (Ramazanoglu, 1993, 102).

Foucault sees bodies as historically situated products of time, space and social forces. With this in mind we are compelled to view avatars in a different light as they are the audio-visual electronic bodies that one inhabits to facilitate interaction within a virtual world (see Section Two of this thesis for a full discussion). In *Worldsaway* for example, bodies may be individually tailored to give a desired impression, much as in real life. However the relevance of this application must be problematised as there are different needs or uses of virtual and physical bodies. For example, the remote context of cyberspace encourages extremes that one might otherwise not go to. As digital

constructions of identity there are limited consequences to experimenting with different identities when compared to real life.

“For a man to present himself as female in a chat room, on an IRC channel, or in a MUD, only requires writing a description. For a man to play a woman on the streets of an American city, he would have to shave various parts of his body; wear makeup, perhaps a wig, a dress, and high heels; perhaps change his voice, walk and mannerisms” (Turkle, 1996, 212).

To pass as a woman for any length of time however involves understanding gender inflections of social grace. Addressing digital constructions of identity, avatar theory, although not subject to the same value and pressure of bodies in real life, must therefore at the micro-level involve some discussion of Foucault’s treatment of bodies.

“Bodies, and the discourses centered on understanding them, have been permanently altered by the power / knowledge machinery, erected on, around and through human sexuality and sex. As a result, it is not possible to separate sexual identities from the cultural construction of bodies” (Ramazanoglu, 1993, 108).

I would argue that in the virtual worlds of cyberspace, bodies are multiply invested by different competing interests, as in real life. Foucault offers a theory of bodies as social constructions produced by the effects of power, and saw sexuality as a primary determinant of identity. Both of the latter are historically and socially constituted. The

Freudian revolution in ethics had imposed the obligation to be honest and open about one's sexual desire onto society, as personality defects were thought to be caused by concealment of internal desire.

“Foucault argued that our modern obsession with a recondite desire was not so important in antiquity. Primarily it was an invention of Christianity. It is in Christian cultures that sex would start to be linked to an arcane encoding of inner impulses that it takes a “hermeneutic of the self” to unriddle. The fundamental contribution Christianity would make would not reside in its code of forbidden and permitted acts, but in the type of experience one was thought to have of oneself as an erotic being” (Rajchman, 1991, 89).

Foucault presents sexuality as a ‘scientifico-legal discourse’ (Foucault, 1990) affecting the social body within the areas of religion, medicine, social policy and law. Its genealogy can be traced to various institutional power mechanisms including the church, the state and other smaller institutionalised practices that pronounce sexual knowledge and practice.

So within the Marxist Phenomenologist methodology that helped define this problematic, Foucault situates his genealogical approach thus:

“I wanted to see how these problems of constitution could be resolved within a historical framework, instead of referring them back to a constituent object (madness, criminality or whatever). But this historical contextualisation needed to be something more than the

simple relativisation of the phenomenological subject... One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that's to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework” (Gordon, 1980, 117).

This genealogical approach situates all class struggle within a historical context, while attempting to understand the very mechanisms of power, which constitute the subject. This is relevant to the thesis of simulation and power, as in cyberspace subjectivity is largely constituted through the defining discursive practices with which an individual chooses to engage. That is to say, subjectivity can be taken to mean the position we inhabit within a particular discourse. At the macro level the subject is interpolated within the ideology that the discourse serves. In this case, by identifying with the discourse of technology the subject is interpolated within the Californian Ideology.

In this sub-chapter I have discussed the notion of a global class society as framed through the mechanism of Marxian theory. This model of globalisation involves the proletariat being displaced into the third world. It is perhaps worth mentioning Hall's observation of global multinationals packaging themselves into regional identities here, as this would provide evidence to support the notion of the globalisation of capital. Perhaps historical materialism will uncover a virtual class interest in retrospect of where we are now from the future. Virtual world technology is big business in the global marketplace, and it is still very much in its infancy, as is cyberspace itself. I've discussed tensions between the

individual & collective as being tied up with the micro and macro operations of power. This is exemplified in the constitution of virtual world identity.

From here the discussion touches on Baudrillard's definition of power, and the deeply critical nature of his commentary on the Foucauldian stance on power. This helps us to weigh up the significance of power in relation to simulation, as these are the notions that the whole thesis depends on.

Power & Baudrillard

Foucault raises the point in interview (Gordon, 1980, 118) that if power were purely repressive we would never be brought to obey it; power also produces knowledge and ultimately discourse, using truth as a strategy of seduction.

“I would suggest rather... (1) that power is co-extensive with the social body; there are no spaces of primal liberty between the meshes of it's network; (2) that relations of power are interwoven with other kinds of relations (production, kinship, family, sexuality) for which they play at once a conditioning and conditioned role; (3) that these relations don't take the sole form of prohibition and punishment, but are of multiple forms; (4) that their interconnections delineate general conditions of domination... (5) that power relations do indeed 'serve'... (6) That there are no relations of power without resistances...” (Gordon, 1980, 142)

This summary of Foucault's thinking on power can be used as a context for Baudrillard's position that Foucault's theory on power is dead, similar to power itself, which is:

“...dissolved by reversal, cancellation, made hyperreal through simulation” (Baudrillard, 1987, 12: cited in Kellner, 1994, 108).

According to Baudrillard, Foucault's critique of power is still contained within a conception of the political that displays a nostalgic longing, belonging to a "productivist" mode of thinking that lost its relevance with the advent of hyperreality. Power has become merely the simulation of power.

"Power, then, is still turned toward a reality principle and a very strong truth principle; it is still oriented toward a possible coherence of politics and discourse... while it is no longer despotic in nature, it still belongs to the despotic order of the real... It never ceases being the term" (Ibid.).

Baudrillard's privileging of seduction over production seems to be based on misreading Foucault, as Baudrillard can't prove the real to be despotic (and can be no more privileged than we are to experience it) we must assume that this is another instance of self negating theory. Power ceases to be despotic at the micro level of bio-politics.

"...Baudrillard positions consumption and production as dialectically polar moments... In Baudrillard's depiction of the theoretical terrain he and Foucault inhabit, we are given another set of adversarial pairings: production, power, the real vs. consumption, seduction, the hyperreal" (Kellner, 1994, 109).

If we are to assume that seduction is dialectically polar to power there must be a strategy of justification to account for the fact that as well as seducing through media, power is exercised through productive means at the micro-level of society. There is also the fact

that a strategy of seduction must involve 'someone' actually doing the seducing, or are we expected to allow for autonomous media operation for the sake of argument?

Baudrillard would attempt to justify this by saying that it all belongs to the real, when his theory addresses hyperreality. However we have seen the epistemologically unsound nature of hyperreality in the previous chapter. As Baudrillard has already been discussed through the notion of simulation I intend to depart with him here, and take up a Foucauldian stance once again to discuss community bonds and the notion of self-fashioning through discourse.

Community

When Foucault conceived of his power/knowledge theory (power produces knowledge) there was no computer network to rival cyberspace, with its utopian ideal of every point on the network being both producer and consumer. Thus when Foucault talks of power relations at the micro-level of society, he means power acting upon individuals, which in this context are sitting in front of monitors engaged in interfacing with cyberspace.

In cyberspace community bonds are both affective and political. The question of what exactly forms these bonds though deserves some deeper analysis here, in order to answer the ideological questions of community formation with no material existence.

Are cybercommunities held together by a common ideological matrix, or simply discursive similarities in a space that is an arena for free floating discourse?

“...the question of how and why people band together, of how and why they are bound to one another; the question of the passion or eros of our identity... Foucault held that the answer to this question was not to be sought in a single generic ‘nature,’ sociological, theological or philosophical. For our ‘subjectivity’ is in fact given to us through many ‘dispersed’ contingent and changing ‘systems of thought’ – bodies of discourse and practice that enable us to identify ourselves both as individuals and as collectivities” (Rajchman, 1991, 99).

Foucault's rejection of an 'absolute' theory of community formation ties in with the notion of subjectivity as constituted through discourse here. Individual subjectivity and how we think of ourselves inevitably affects the way we bond with others. As 'truth' is always variable depending on which discourse it belongs to, so must subjectivity be also, as the truth of our identity is constituted through discursive practices. This helps us think about identity as fluid, rather than fixed. If we think about systems of thought in cyberspace looking for evidence of discourse, then newsgroups (a service used over the Internet like electronic bulletin boards where messages may be posted according to topic for all to read), immediately spring to mind. As discursive formations, each one (there are over 30,000) has a particular style of conversation and content that constitutes a system of thought to a greater or lesser extent.

In an article on the Internet (<http://jcmc.mscc.huji.ac.il/vol1/issue2/aycock.html>) Alan Aycock of the Department of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, presents a Foucauldian analysis of postings to the group 'rec.games.chess' (RGC). He acknowledges a certain problematic before beginning in that ethnography is harder to carry out when you only have access to what people say to each other, not what they actually do, as the context of interaction is remote. The paper utilises Foucault's notion of "technologies of self" (Foucault, 1988b) as devices which enable personal identity construction such as the Internet. The author devises a Foucauldian based model with four components. *Inner substance*; reflects the way people speak about themselves, involving a blurring of styles in the case of RGC, that combines language of personal progress with inner feelings. *Degree and kind of commitment*: comments on the degree to

which posters' lives revolve around chess and their level of commitment. This includes devices like the consumption of chess goods involving a financial commitment to chess, indicating the owners' personal involvement in chess discourse. *Personal routines or disciplines*, indicates the way in which words themselves become resources for self-fashioning. As newsgroups are text based referentiality is relatively impossible to determine. Aycock notes here the irony that most postings claim factuality as their main source of legitimacy. The *goal of personal transformation*, in this case would be the mastery of chess. Internet postings to this group differ from other chess literature however in that emphasis is placed on the computer as chess master, which most group members find fascinating. Through mapping out this model of online fashioning of personal identity, Aycock takes RGC to be an example of online discourse and finds the sense of community to be explicitly friendly and informal.

“As the Internet moves rapidly toward a private enterprise model, the limits and possibilities of self-fashioning proliferate”

(<http://jcmc.mscc.huji.ac.il/vol1/issue2/aycock.html>, 8).

This self-fashioning through discourse encourages aspects of community by forcing consciousness of interaction. In his discussion of bonds, Foucault discerns three distinct types or phases of community before going on to address issues of normalisation as vehicle for social control. The first of these is *given community*, the community people think into existence after identifying themselves within a system of institutional practices. Then follows *tacit community*, where people maintain their belonging to a group by identifying with the systems that define them; and *critical community*, where an

identification system is unacceptable to the extent that it is problematised and the subject refuses to participate in it.

Thus identity defines subjectivity as both individual and collective through the defining bodies of discourse one identifies with. Normality is identified as a key bio-political strategy for social control here, and is clearly evident at the level of tacit community. This is also the primary effect of ideology; normalisation makes people believe their agency is incontestable and natural.

“Normality... was rather a way of identifying us, and getting us to identify ourselves in such a way as to make us governable. It was a “singular form of thought” from which individual and collective experience arose” (Rajchman, 1991, 104).

The mechanism of normality cannot exist without exclusion, as otherwise there is no ‘other’. Exclusion works at the micro level within the individual as a form of bio-power, to suppress unacceptable behaviour to society. Its macro level functions are evident in those who society deprives of a discourse to verify alternate identity. Exclusion has always been part of what defines community, as even our national identity is exclusive of people born outside the nation state.

“Thus, we would identify ourselves as good, normal, rational people only by excluding from ourselves, our society or our acceptable discourse, what we take to be abnormal, irrational or dangerous about ourselves” (Ibid., 105).

Thus the technology of exclusion belongs to a particular discourse or system of thought. Critical community therefore, is made up of those who refuse to maintain defining discursive practices. An example would be a splinter organisation of the Ku Klux Klan; their Internet discourse is intensely racist. Refusing to maintain a belief in white supremacy yet agreeing with their other right wing policies would constitute a critical community.

In this final subchapter I have discussed community bonds, taking RGC as an example of a cyberspace community. Foucault's notion of self fashioning through discourse, and the technologies of normality and exclusion have been applied here to gain an understanding of his position on subjectivity within community. The next section specifically addresses a certain 'type' of virtual world, using four popular examples to illustrate my argument that simulation and power are the theoretical axis on which to map this particular cyberspace phenomenon. While this investigation may appear speculative at times, I aim to offer a theoretical interpretation of self contained cyberspace worlds.