

International Workshop “Power-Knowledge” or “State Apparatus”?

## The Theory and History of the Subject and Domination of the Self and Others: From Althusser to Foucault

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**ABSTRACT:** In this paper, I attend to the problem of domination with the aim of re-examining the relationship between Althusser and Foucault. Consequently, I suggest that the research and writings of Michel Foucault in the 1970s were largely responses to Louis Althusser’s “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (1970). At the end of the 1970s, Foucault recognized two turns in the evolution of his own work over a decade. The first turn relates to Foucault’s texts on the functions of the mental hospital, which, as this paper shows, focused on the dominating subject. The paper shows that the second turn, revealed in Foucault’s discussion of the family, focused primarily on the subject pursuing the domination of others through self-domination. While a great number of issues remain to be resolved, this examination suggests that Foucault engaged in sustained reflections on the problems posed by Althusser. Based on the above discussion, the paper suggests that the relations between the writings of Foucault and Althusser or Marxism should be revisited and questioned anew.

**KEYWORDS:** state apparatus, *dispositif*, subjection, subjectivation, dominant ideology, domination

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## 1. Foucault's Two Shifts in the 1970s

In this essay, I argue that the research activities and writings of Michel Foucault in the 1970s evolved as responses to Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970). Althusser's name evidently does not feature in Foucault's texts that appear to engage with the former's concepts. Consequently, the responses seem to be largely indirect. However, paying attention to the problems of the subject and domination that are common in the works of Althusser and Foucault leads to the recognition that Foucault's perspectives in various writings were indeed responses to Althusser. Consequently, there is a large body of text concerned with this interaction. Because it is beyond the scope of this short essay to consider all of these, here I focus chiefly on Foucault's *Lectures at the Collège de France*, delivered in the 1970s.

In *On the Government of the Living (1979–1980)*, Foucault reflected on his lectures delivered over a period of a decade, noting "two successive shifts" during this period. The first was a shift from the notion of dominant ideology to that of knowledge-power, and the second was from the notion of knowledge-power to that of government by truth.<sup>1</sup> Speaking of the former shift, Foucault observed:

in spite of the word 'dominant,' the concept of dominant ideology makes us overlook all actual mechanisms of subjection (*assujettissement*), and, as it were, throws away the cards to the others' hands, saying: after all, it's for the historians to find out how and why some in a society dominate others. As opposed to this [...] I tried to establish the notions of knowledge and power.<sup>2</sup>

For Foucault, to depend upon the "dominant" ideology was to miss the actual mechanism, history, and cause of domination and subjection. This is because he held that domination and subjection should be studied concretely. He, therefore, thoroughly investigated relations of knowledge and power. As Foucault was considering the problem of the reproduction of domination that Althusser had earlier raised, it is not appropriate to summarize the first shift as one of a transition from theorizing state power to theorizing micro power relations. In the second shift, Foucault discarded the concept of knowledge-power in turn. He explained his intention as follows:

I would try to show you [...] how one cannot lead men without performing the operations in the sphere of truth, and operations that are always in excess of what is useful and necessary to govern in an effective manner.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *Du gouvernement des vivants (1979–1980)*, Gallimard/Seuil, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

This shift should not be interpreted as marking any discontinuity between the 1970s and 1980s. Certainly, both the dominant ideology and the knowledge-power concepts failed to fully capture operations within the order of truth. Neither succeeded in adequately capturing actual domination; therefore, both had to be discarded. However, with the second shift, Foucault introduced a new concept of “subjectivation”<sup>4</sup> as opposed to subjection. In order to reconstruct the problem of domination, Foucault raised a searching question, namely, that of “how, in our civilization [...] the relationship between the government of men, the manifestation of truth in the form of subjectivity and the salvation for everyone has been established.”<sup>5</sup> To respond to the problem of government or domination, it is necessary to analyze truth and salvation in relation to subjectivation. This question covers the various forms of subjectivity, ranging from the Christian<sup>6</sup> to the revolutionary,<sup>7</sup> further the collective. It can be argued that Foucault attended to Althusser’s problem of domination in his reconstruction of the theory of the subject. In place of his earlier emphasis on the bivalence of subjection, Foucault now wrote about “the double meaning of the word ‘subject’, a subject in a relationship of power, subject in a demonstration of truth.”<sup>8</sup> His inquiry was as follows:

It has now been almost tightened up the problem: why and how does the exercise of power in our society, the exercise of power as a government of men, demand not only acts of obedience and submission, but acts of truth in which individuals who are subjects in the relationship of power, are also subjects as actors, witnessing spectators or as objects in the process of manifestation of truth? Why, in this great economy of power relations, has developed a regime of truth indexed to subjectivity? Why is it that the power (and this for thousands of years in our societies) asks individuals to say not only ‘here I am, me who obey,’ but request them, further, to say ‘this is what I am, me who obey, that’s what I am, this is what I have seen, this is what I have done’?<sup>9</sup>

Certainly, individuals respond to “interpellation” from the power by saying “here I am,” as well as through obedience and submission. In other words, through subjection, they become the subject. However, to fully become the subject within power relations requires more than this. It requires of them a confession of the truth of their existence, experience, and action. Through such subjectivation, individuals become subjects. What Foucault was trying to systematically and historically analyze was the capability of the subject, as such, to dominate

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, *L’Herméneutique du sujet (1981–1982)*, Gallimard/Seuil, p. 200.

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, *Du gouvernement des vivants (1979–1980)*, Gallimard/Seuil, p. 79.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 80–81.

both the self and others. In this sense, it can be said that Foucault consistently considered the problem of domination posed by Althusser. To validate my argument, I will focus on only two points extracted from Althusser's paper. The first is that Ideological State Apparatuses (re)produce not only the dominated but the dominating. The second point is that in their capacity as Ideological State Apparatuses, families have special functions.

In Althusser's paper, the question of the conditions of reproduction of a capitalist social formation is transposed onto those of the relations of production, while the latter are transposed onto those of the labor force. Acceptance of the vulgar opinion that salaries are determined so as to ensure the reproduction of the labor force leads to the reframing of a new question of how the reproduction of the qualifications of the labor force can be ensured. Althusser's response to this question was that this was warranted by the capitalist school system. However, the question of the purpose of school education remains. According to Althusser, the purpose of education is to ensure "a reproduction of their submission to the dominant ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to properly handle the dominant ideology for the agents of exploitation and repression."<sup>10</sup> The school system is thus an Ideological State Apparatus that reproduces domination and subjection, as well as the dominating and dominated classes.

However, Althusser argued further that "Family clearly fulfills other 'functions' as an Ideological State Apparatus. It intervenes in the reproduction of labor power."<sup>11</sup> This raises the question of how the reproduction of labor power is fulfilled within the family in any sense other than caring for children who will be future workers. Regarding this point, Althusser emphasized the reproduction of adult workers who submitted to the dominant ideology. This meant that the ruling class "properly handles the dominant ideology" within the family too. Who then is the subject exercising its hegemony over the family? This leads us precisely to the problem of patriarchy.

In his analysis and transformation of these two problems, Foucault accepted and revised Althusser's theory during the 1970s.

## 2. Fact of Domination

In two of his lectures delivered in the early 1970s, Foucault examined the history of state apparatuses, tracing the origin of modern state apparatuses. In *Penal Theory and Institutions (1971–1972)*, he traced the course of the Va-Nu-Pieds Rebellion in detail, drawing an explicit comparison with the situation after 1968. Thus, he attempted to consider the problem of domination after the defeat of the revolutionary movement or civil war.

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<sup>10</sup> Louis Althusser, *Sur la reproduction*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1995, p. 273.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

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In short, it is important to analyze in this situation, 'repressive pomp,' as a 'manifestation of power': how to understand the subjection, the re-subjection of the class oppressed and uprising, and then, at the same time, the first major deployment of the 'arms' of the State irrespective of the person of the king.<sup>12</sup>

This raises the question of the type of arms or apparatuses of the state that develop after a rebellion. Foucault's response was that this was "the governing body of the State." The targets of this new type of repressive system were no longer rebellious criminals or political revolutionaries, but rather the entire population that bore the possibility of being delinquent.<sup>13</sup> In reactionary times, the mode of domination changed and the new subjection was imposed upon all individuals. Broadly speaking, under the influence of the theories of absolutism, and state monopoly capitalism, Foucault perceived domination as entailing obedience to the sovereign and the law.

In the mid-1970s, it appears that Foucault revised his original arguments presented in his lectures delivered in the early 1970s, because they did not extend beyond the level of legal theory centered in sovereignty. As he noted in *Society must be defended* (1976), "I'd like to close, to make, up to a point, an end to the series of research [...] that we have been working for four or five years, almost since I've been here."<sup>14</sup> He subsequently developed the following criticism:

To say that the issue of sovereignty is the central problem of law in Western societies, this means that the discourse and technology of law have essentially functions of dissolving, inside the power, the fact of domination. [...] The system of law is entirely centered on the king, that is to say, it is ultimately an elimination of the fact of the domination and its consequences. [...] I have been trying to do the opposite, that is to say, to stress the fact of domination in all its secrecy as well as in its brutality.<sup>15</sup>

For Foucault, the very fact of domination is concealed by legal and liberal conceptions as well as Marxist conceptions.<sup>16</sup> The former theories, in particular, should be discarded, because their application within analyses and their explanation of subjection by voluntary consent or autonomous recognition render *de facto* domination invisible. Foucault explained this as follows:

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<sup>12</sup> Michel Foucault, *Théorie et institutions pénales (1971–1972)*, Gallimard/Seuil, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault, *"Il faut défendre la société" (1976)*, Gallimard/Seuil, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

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the theory of sovereignty presupposes the subject; it aims to establish the essential unity of power, and it is always deployed within the prior element of the law. It therefore assumes triple ‘primitiveness’: that of the subject to subject (*assujettir*), that of the unity of the power to be founded and that of legitimacy to be respected. Subject, unity of power and law: the theory of sovereignty comes into play, I think, among these elements, and it takes them as given as well as seeks to found them.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, Marxism is to be criticized in so far as it plays the same game as liberalism does. On the contrary, it is necessary to adopt the realism of *de facto* force, to theorize the origins of the three elements described by Foucault, and to render visible the fact of domination that liberalism and Marxism attempt to diminish or mask. Thus, as Foucault himself declared, “politics is the continuation of war by other means.”<sup>18</sup> He asked:

if power is indeed the game play and deployment of a relationship of power, rather than analyzing it in terms of transfer, contract, and alienation, or further, rather than analyzing it in functional terms as the reproduction of the relations of production, shouldn’t we be analyzing it first and foremost in terms of conflict, confrontation or war?<sup>19</sup>

As Foucault pointed out, “we have to decipher war beneath peace.”<sup>20</sup> Now, it is important to posit and analyze a subject that differs from the subject of law or rights. In contrast to “the universal subject that is totalizing or neutral” posited in the theory of law, it is necessary to locate “the subject that talks, speaks the truth, tells the history, rediscovers the memory and conjures oblivion,” that is, a “warring” subject.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the new duality of subjectivation that differs from the bivalence of subjection must also be analyzed. The new subject that emerges from subjectivation is, for example, a “subject of history, both talking about the history and talked about in history.”<sup>22</sup> Consequently, within Foucault’s research project in the mid-1970s, there were two separate and co-existing subjects: one submitting to law and sovereignty by an act of free will, and the other submitting to the truth of history or the existence of itself. Thus, new historical and theoretical studies of various modes of domination corresponding to particular subject forms were required. Here, I present just one aspect of the Foucauldian research project concerning the mental hospital and the family.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 45–46.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

### 3. A Normal Man as a Subject that Dominates the Self and Others

Whereas Althusser conceived of the school and family as principal apparatuses for producing the ruling class, Foucault viewed the mental hospital as a “*dispositif* of knowledge,”<sup>23</sup> constituting the epistemological subject that dominates others. In *On the Punitive Society (1972–1973)*, Foucault observed:

Thus, the psychiatric hospital is the institutional place where and by which crazies are excluded; at the same time and by the same function of this expulsion, it is a hotbed of constitution and reconstitution of a rationality that is authoritatively established in the context of power relations within the hospital and that will be reabsorbed [...] even outside the hospital in the form of a scientific discourse that will circulate as knowledge about madness, for which the condition of possibility of it to be rational is precisely the hospital.<sup>24</sup>

Of interest to Foucault was certainly the exclusion of the mad from society, their confinement in the hospital, and their subjection to the power of the hospital. At the same time, however, and extending beyond this, Foucault's interest lay in the fact that the subject as psychiatrist dominates the mad, making madness into an object to be understood or explained and exercising knowledge-power. Such a subject, established through the objectification of mental illness within the psychological sciences, makes the entire population an object of rational knowledge, and occupies a position intended to “properly handle the dominant ideology.” Thus, the *dispositif* of knowledge as the psychiatric hospital is more effective than that of the school for strengthening the “dominant” ideology. This point deserves special emphasis, as confirmed by Foucault in both *Psychiatric Power (1973–1974)* and *Abnormal (1974–1975)*, which argue that the insane, the sick, the criminal, and women and children are not considered as subjects, but as objects of the subject of knowledge-power. Moreover, they are described, so to speak, as human materials to be individualized. Thus, the subject and the object of knowledge indirectly enter into a relationship of domination. Contrary to prevailing opinion, Foucault's focus was on the former rather than on the latter.

Whereas Althusser considered the family to be an Ideological State Apparatus, Foucault analyzed this within the conceptual framework of sovereignty theory. In other words, he conceptualized the modern family within a patriarchal framework aligned with the disciplinary *dispositif* of the school, army, and prison. Thus, Foucault asserted:

Just as the disciplinary type of power existed in medieval societies, in which schemas of sover-

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault, *La Société punitive (1972–1973)*, Gallimard/Seuil, pp. 5–6.

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eignty nevertheless outweighed, so too, I think, forms of the power of sovereignty can still be found in contemporary society. Where can we find them? Well, I would find them in the only institution, not in the traditional dynasty of schools, barracks, prisons, etc., that I have not yet spoken about, and the absence of which may have surprised you; I mean the family. I was going to say that the family is a remnant, but this is not entirely the case. At any rate, it seems to me that the family is a kind of cell within which the power exercised is not, as is usually said, disciplinary, but rather of the same type as the power of sovereignty.<sup>25</sup>

Foucault regarded the family as “the hinge point of connection absolutely essential to the functioning of all disciplinary systems,” and “constraint instance that will set individuals on disciplinary apparatuses.”<sup>26</sup> Here is the core of Foucault’s theory of patriarchy. It remains unchanged in his books written in the 1970s and 1980s. In *The Use of Pleasure*, the sexual subject, whose history was traced by Foucault, is, in fact, the ethical subject, and, what is more, it is essentially constituted in relation to the self. This subject is of course male and, it should be once again emphasized, it is the normal, heterosexual, and (active) homosexual. How such a subject is produced, logico-historically, raises a new question in the struggle to develop a new research field of domination. For the moment, Foucault’s response has been only negative. He rejected a series of concepts, notably incest prohibition, male domination, and the subjection of women, considering them useless.<sup>27</sup> However, it must not be understood that the male subject does not have a bearing on those concepts. He is the subject who exchanges women in conformity with the incest prohibition, dominates others by taking advantage of his male status, and submits women to oneself. Even though this is the case, what Foucault intended to say was that as long as we used these concepts, patriarchal domination and submission could not explain the history and origin of the male subject. It is widely known that Foucault repeatedly asserted that power not only denies but also induces pleasures and produces desires. If this was not the case, people could not be expected to submit to power.<sup>28</sup> This point is clarified as follows. Even if there are men who regard themselves as neither owning nor ruling women; men whom we could view in terms of the liberal and democratic subject, the problem still remains as to how such men are constituted and reproduced. The reason why this problem has to be tackled on its own is precisely because such men dominate others through self-domination, although the logic and history of this line of thought were not yet fully elucidated by Foucault. In some ways, it could be said that Foucault attempted to theorize the different formations and development of (normal

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<sup>25</sup> Michel Foucault, *Le pouvoir psychiatrique (1973–1974)*, Gallimard/Seuil, p. 81.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>27</sup> Michel Foucault, *L’usage des plaisirs : Histoire de la sexualité 2*, Gallimard, 1984, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> Michel Foucault, “Entretien avec Michel Foucault” (no. 192, 1976/1977), *Dits et Écrits* (Quarto) II, pp. 148–149.



heterosexual) man differently from Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex and Althusser's theory of the subject.

Evidently, in *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault studied the history of the forms of male power and freedom, the history of the forms of moral subjectivation, that is, male subjectivation. In *Subjectivity and Truth (1980–1981)* too, Foucault examined the “male act and the social privilege of the male,”<sup>29</sup> and “a man's status and a status of manhood.”<sup>30</sup> He then analyzed “the man's relation of self-control” and considered “the relationship mastery of a man over his wife or another.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, from the late 1970s to the 1980s, Foucault continued to engage with the problem of domination, and with patriarchal domination, in particular, as “the hinge point” of all disciplinary systems.

As the above discussion suggests, Foucault consistently reflected on the problems posed by Althusser's paper. Consequently, the relation between Foucault and Althusser or Marxism should be questioned anew.

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<sup>29</sup> Michel Foucault, *Subjectivité et Vérité (1980–1981)*, Gallimard/Seuil, p. 260.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.