

Reading questions: *Discipline and Punish*, “Panopticism”

At the opening of this chapter Foucault describes a transition from what he’ll later call “discipline-blockade” and “discipline-mechanism.” What are these two forms of discipline? (Hint: the Panopticon represents the second.)

The Panopticon was a plan for an ideal prison (or any similar institution) developed in a series of letters by the English utilitarian philosopher and social reformer Jeremy Bentham in the 1780’s and published in 1791 under the title *Panopticon* (with the unwieldy subtitle: “*Or, The Inspection-House: Containing the Idea of a New Principle of Construction applicable to Any Sort of Establishment, in Which Persons of Any Description are to be Kept Under Inspection; and in Particular to Penitentiary-Houses, Prisons, Houses of Industry, Work-Houses, Poor-Houses, Lazarettos, Manufactories, Hospitals, Mad-Houses, and Schools*”).

You can read the letters on-line at: <http://cartome.org/panopticon2.htm>. Skim Letters II, V, and VI at least to get a sense of Bentham’s original design.

Drawing on these letters and on Foucault’s rendition of them, make sure you understand the basic architectural principles of the Panopticon.

“The Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building: it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction, must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system: it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use.” [205]

What is the ideal form of power that the Panopticon represents, and how is that power enacted through it?

Through the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Foucault suggests, the disciplines change. They become “functionally inverted” (210), “de-institutionalized” (211), and they move into state control (213). Make sure you understand each of these points.

Disciplinary power also coincides with and amplifies other historical trends: economic (218-221), juridico-political (221-224), and epistemological/scientific (224-227). Paraphrase what Foucault says about each.

“Is it surprising that the cellular prison, with its regular chronologies, forced labour, its authorities of surveillance and registration, its experts in normality, who continue and multiply the functions of the judge, should have become the modern instrument of penalty? Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?” [227-8]. Do they? Is it?

“The carceral”

Mettray was a prison colony for delinquent boys and young men that opened in 1840 (and closed in 1937). Why, according to Foucault, is it exemplary of disciplinary penalty?

This short chapter is the closing statement of Foucault’s preceding extension of his analysis of prisons. He argues that the penal system is continuous with the rest of society; far from being distinctively different institutions that confine distinctively different individuals, prisons are of a piece with discipline throughout society. To make his point he uses, at various moments, the phrases “carceral archipelago” (presumably a reference to Solzhenitsyn’s critique of Soviet repression, *The Gulag Archipelago*, published in 1973), “the carceral continuum,” and “the carceral net(work).” The techniques of the prison are “transported,” he says, “to the entire social body” (298). What happens as a result? (Six things.)