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Power

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It seems that there are two senses to the word "power." The first sense consists in having the force to oppress and repress others. Here, as indicated by the verb "have," power is a possession, and it aims at possession. If critique aims its weapons at anything, it is this sort of possessive power. As we shall see, repressive and possessive power appears to be a reaction to what in power cannot be controlled, predicted, and programmed in advance, like freedom.

Indeed, repressive power always implies some modicum of freedom; no one exercises power over another unless the other has possibilities of action (Foucault 2000, 342). There is no reason to repress and possess, unless the other is able to do something arbitrarily. Because all human and nonhuman animals have at least a modicum of freedom, we are very familiar with regimes of power that repress. However, thanks to Foucault, we know that forces do not only repress (1977, 27). The very same forces are able to produce. Through a kind of technique, these forces are able to make forms of subjectivity, they make an interior life or a soul, through which a person represses his own powers. These are techniques of habituation. These techniques can be so powerful that the habits they form, including habits of thinking, work upon us almost unconsciously. Through the idea of habituation techniques, Foucault famously reverses the

traditional relation of the body and the soul (30). Under a regime of productive power (an educational system, for example), it is not the body that is the prison of the soul. It is the soul that is the prison of the body, of what the body can do. For Foucault, both repressive and productive powers require a kind of "micro-analysis" (or genealogy), which would disclose the complex relations through which power passes; it would disclose a whole "microphysics" of power (29).

Through the productive side of repressive power, we come to power's second sense. The second sense of "power" is potentiality. We must not immediately associate the word "potentiality" to the Aristotelian schema of potentiality-actuality. Of course, like Aristotle, we must speak of the actualization of power. However, in this sense of power, the actualization is not teleological. Because actualization is not aimed at a determinate purpose, Gilles Deleuze, for instance, calls actualization "counter-actualization" (1990, 148–153). Counter-actualization outstrips any possibility we are able to imagine (148–153). The non-teleological nature of counter-actualization gives the word "power" a profound sense. To understand this more profound sense, we must turn to Sigmund Freud.

"Power" is not part of Freud's psychoanalytic lexicon (Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis do not list "power" in their account of Freud's vocabulary [1973]). Instead, Freud speaks of drives (*Triebe*, a term also translated into English as "instincts") and "forces" (*Kräfte*) (Freud 1997, 83–103). Freud shows how unconscious drives and their force set up barriers but also break through the barriers (128–134). These forces are unconscious, that is, they are not given to consciousness. They never present themselves as such in visibility. Never present as such, the forces grant us access to them only through their effects. Our access to them is only ever mediated. Because our access to the forces is only ever mediated, we cannot control them. Out of our control, the forces seem to run on their own. Here, we can appropriate dream **experience**, which, for Freud, is the crucial example of our

access to these forces. In dreams, of course, the images that are produced come from elsewhere; we cannot make or consciously will dream images to come to our minds while asleep. In addition, the images that do appear in dream never fail to surprise us. The forces that produce dream images seem to be like **technologies** – especially our contemporary technologies –, which all too frequently run against our conscious desires and will, producing effects we could have never predicted. Power in the sense of potentiality, therefore, produces effects that we can neither control nor predict.

The potentiality sense of power produces effects that go beyond our own forces and powers. The effects that the above-mentioned technologies automatically produce are like texts that continue to produce readings that the author cannot control and could not have predicted. As Derrida would say, like writing, power, in the sense of potentiality (a kind of "archi-writing"), effectuates or actualizes itself; and, it actualizes itself without a purpose and never entirely (2011, 73). Like the machines that run without human intervention, potentiality always has a reserve of virtual effects. Therefore, we can see now that the second sense of power involves two components.

On the one hand, there is the automatic component; on the other, there is the unpredictability component. Potentiality happens on its own, and it happens in unforeseen ways. Happening on its own, potentiality, when it is experienced, forces us to ask what happened. And, happening unpredictably, potentiality makes us ask the question of what is going to happen. But we do not know with certainty the answer to these two questions. What "might be" is a question that remains unanswered and unanswerable in any definitive way. With its sense of chance, "perhaps" is the only answer we can formulate. In fact, in order to have even a sense of the potentiality sense of power, we must, with Derrida, imagine that what remains virtual in power is something that is impossible. The impossible within the possible is the meaning of the word "*peut-être*" for Derrida (1997, 28–29). Therefore,

including the possibility of what is impossible, power seems to be even more powerful than a collection of pre-formed possibilities simply waiting for realization. We come now to one of the most important conclusions of the analysis in which we have been engaged: through its automaticity and through its unpredictability, the experience of potentiality is at once both the experience of power and the experience of powerlessness. It is the experience of power because when one produces a repeatable form (as in writing), one knows that it will produce unforeseen events; it is the experience of powerlessness because the events, being unforeseeable, cannot be controlled. Powerlessness in the face of unpredictable power is power's most profound sense.

If the potentiality sense of power is really powerlessness, then one question becomes pressing. What sorts of reaction are possible to the experience of that which we cannot dominate and predict? This question is the question of critique. As we have seen already, one reaction is the negative reaction of repression. It strives to control, predict, and program in advance that which cannot be controlled, predicted, and programmed. This negative reaction is a sort of counter-actualization. But here the word "counter" is taken in its most destructive sense. It is a reaction of hatred. Thankfully, there is another reaction, which is **affirmative**.

The affirmative reaction looks like this: the work of critique consists in unearthing or deterritorializing the unconscious techniques that function in us. They must be made thinkable, even if only in a mediated mode. We must bring to light the ways we have been controlled, how we have been made to control ourselves, and especially how we have compromised with the forces of destruction. Through this process of deterritorializing, we experience pain, anguish, or perhaps shame. In fact, there is no deconstruction without the experience of pain. Pain is even perhaps the sign of a "successful" deconstruction. Then, as conscious or at least semi-conscious, the techniques themselves

must be investigated. We must investigate them in order to bring to light what still lies potential or virtual within them. For example, any natural language contains possibilities of speaking, which are latent within the taught and imposed forms of the language. As Deleuze and Guattari have shown, a major and dominant language like English must not be treated in terms of constants and universals. It must be treated in terms of variables and variations (1987, 75–110). When we expose latent possibilities of variation, when we make a language "**stutter**," as Deleuze and Guattari would say, we experience the variations as beyond our control. When we experience this powerlessness, we must not repress the possibilities; we must release them and let them go as far as they are able to, farther than any possibility we can imagine. "Perhaps," they will go so far as to actualize the impossible, producing a counter-actualization.

Like the repression of the forces, the liberation of them is a counter-actualization. But here the sense of "counter" is not that of repression but of "up against." We must make ourselves be exposed, and come to be as close as possible to what the techniques are able to produce. We must put ourselves in the closest proximity to the possibilities as possible – in order to release them and let them be free. Letting the forces be free is the true meaning of affirmation. And it might be the true meaning of **responsibility**.

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