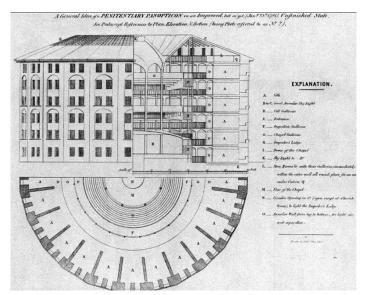
Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon and Michel Foucault

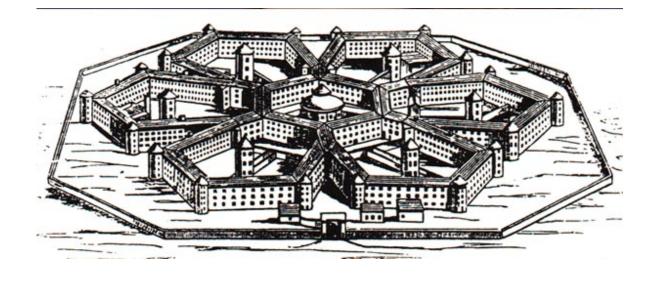
Who is Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)?

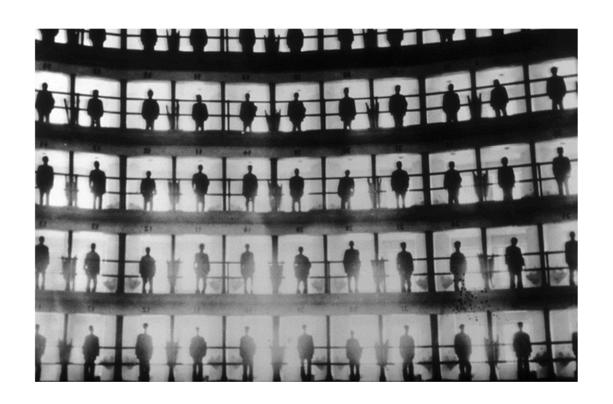


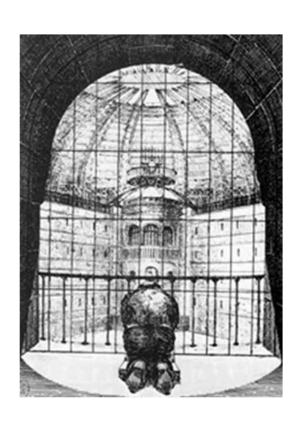
"Jeremy Bentham was an English philosopher and political radical. He is primarily known today for his moral philosophy, especially his principle of utilitarianism, which evaluates actions based upon their consequences. The relevant consequences, in particular, are the overall happiness created for everyone affected by the action. Influenced by many enlightenment thinkers, especially empiricists such as John Locke and David Hume, Bentham developed an ethical theory grounded in a largely empiricist account of human nature. He famously held a hedonistic account of both motivation and value according to which what is fundamentally valuable and what ultimately motivates us is pleasure and pain. Happiness, according to Bentham, is thus a matter of experiencing pleasure and lack of pain." (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy)



"Panopticon, architectural form for a prison, the drawings for which were published by Jeremy Bentham in 1791. It consisted of a circular, glass-roofed, tanklike structure with cells along the external wall facing toward a central rotunda; guards stationed in the rotunda could keep all the inmates in the surrounding cells under constant surveillance. Although Bentham's novel idea was not fully adopted in the plans for penal institutions built at that time, its radial plan was immediately influential, and its design clearly had an impact on later construction. For example, the Stateville Correctional Center, a prison near Joliet, Ill., U.S., incorporates essential features of the panopticon." (Encyclopedia Britannica)



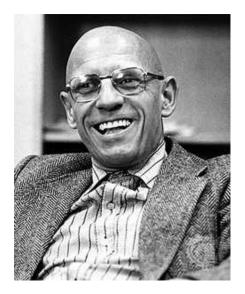




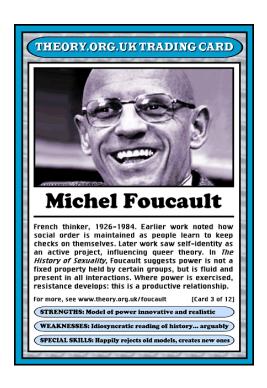
Presidio Modelo prison, Cuba, inside one of the buildings, 2005



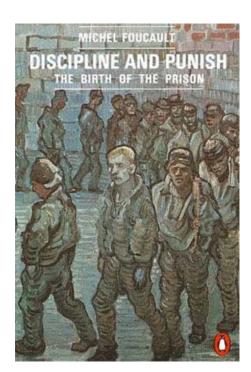
Who is Michel Foucault (1926-1984)?



"Michel Foucault was a major figure in two successive waves of 20th century French thought--the structuralist wave of the 1960s and then the poststructuralist wave. By the premature end of his life, Foucault had some claim to be the most prominent living intellectual in France." (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy) "Foucault's work is transdisciplinary in nature, ranging across the concerns of the disciplines of history, sociology, psychology, and philosophy. At the first decade of the 21st century, Foucault is the author most frequently cited in the humanities in general." (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy)



Most influentially, the idea of the panopticon was invoked by Michel Foucault, in his Discipline and Punish (1975), as a metaphor for modern "disciplinary" societies and their pervasive inclination to observe and normalise. "On the whole, therefore, one can speak of the formation of a disciplinary society in this movement that stretches from the enclosed disciplines, a sort of social 'quarantine', to an indefinitely generalizable mechanism of 'panopticism'". The Panopticon is an ideal architectural figure of modern disciplinary power. The Panopticon creates a consciousness of permanent visibility as a form of power, where no bars, chains, and heavy locks are necessary for domination any more. Foucault proposes that not only prisons but all hierarchical structures like the army, schools, hospitals and factories have evolved through history to resemble Bentham's Panopticon. The notoriety of the design today (although not its lasting influence in architectural realities) stems from Foucault's famous analysis of it. (Wikipedia entry on the Panopticon)



Reflection

- How would thinking about the Panopticon be useful for us as we read 1984?
- To what extent does the world that we live in resemble the Panopticon?