

**Power, politics and environmental change**  
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## Class 4: The power “from within”

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# Introduction

- Purpose of the class
  - Explain how power operates besides coercion...
  - ...focus on 'power-less' but in a different way than Class 3...
  - ...and how this may influence environmental change
- Why should you know this?
  - A key idea of how power operates
  - Approach (post-structuralism) popular in social sciences and PE (with some)
- Outline
  - Discuss answers to question
  - Explaining the power from within approach and its premises on other theories
  - Exercise
  - Analytical implications: the role of nature and the role of humans in environmental change

# Class question

- *“According to Robbins and his study, lawn managers who are **more aware** of the environmental impacts of chemicals, and are **more socially involved and concerned** about their communities, are those who **apply more intensively chemicals** on their lawns*
- *“**How** do Robbins’ middle-class lawn maintainers (“lawn people”) end up using chemicals which they know that are harmful not only for the environment but also to their own health?”*
- *“**Why** do they do this to themselves and the environment?”*

# Why do they do it?

- Three reasons
  - Hectic lives: no free time
  - Economic/ instrumental logics
  - The good citizen: moral responsibility to the community

# Hectic lifestyles

- “When I first moved here I was traveling a lot so I didn’t have time to do much in my yard. I thought, my lawn must need something, so I was treating it . . . I think of yard work as a fun activity . . . But I just don’t have the time anymore.”
- Residents stated, with some degree of **pride, how busy** they and their families are with careers, hobbies, sports, and travel
- This often translated into a feeling that they **did not have time** to worry about lawn chemicals

# Economic/ instrumental logics

- Association of chemicals inputs with **housing values**...
  - which reach the homeowner
  - as well as neighborhood
- ...suggests obvious **instrumental motivations**
- Lawn upkeep: relatively **inexpensive investment** for maintaining property values
  - Note: SES system where homeowners **rewarded** for environmentally detrimental behavior!
- But instrumental thinking *only a small part* of this set of logics

# Beyond instrumentalism: community

- Despite risks, using chemicals
  - Sign of a **good character**
  - Sign of **social responsibility**
- Consider: **ecological character** of lawn problems: if you eliminate plague it can move next door, so next door needs to apply same level of care
  - Disregard for lawn care: **free-riding** and **moral neglect**
- Most **important driver** for lawn chemical use:
  - Sense there is a “neighborhood **norm**” (rule) of lawn management
- Decisions about lawn chemical use in terms of something that they **owed** to their **neighbors**
  - “I wouldn’t insult my neighbors by not keeping my house up”

# The good citizen: moral responsibility

- Lawn chemical use as something they felt they had to do to meet the **expectations** of their neighbours
  - *...imperative to mow in time for the recent high school prom. Limousines came to the cul-de-sac to pick up several high school students, **pictures** were taken on front lawns, and everyone wanted their yards **to look** perfect*
  - *Suzanne: why she continued lawn chemical treatments even though her dog's paws were bleeding, she replied: I guess we didn't want the yard **to look** bad when everybody else's looked so nice . . . You try to make it **look** as nice as you can, without offending other people*
- Reveals: ways in which **neighborhood forced** certain kinds of lawn management onto individuals



# Disciplining

- In place: system of monitoring (when to “improve” lawn), which relies heavily on a notion of **the view of his lawn by the neighbors**
- When weeds grow prominent:
  - “I would feel really out of place. It’s not only how the yard looks to me, but how it looks to the neighbors. If it’s not in keeping with the neighborhood [then I’d have to spray more]”
  - “[in his mom’s neighbourhood] if you don’t cut twice a week you are a communist!”
  - “We get kind of irritated when people don’t do something with their yard. I get mad if people don’t put plants out to make their front yard look nice”

# Lawn people: power shaping **subjects**

The argument (Robbins’):

- *Maintenance* of lawn yard landscapes through environmentally harmful lawn chemicals: **internalized** environmental *practice*...
- ...which is:
  - Rooted on **socially enforced** environmental aesthetic
  - That **associates** good citizenship with **environmentally harmful activities** (use of chemicals)

# Lawn people: power **shaping** subjects

- Such behaviors **benefit** the corporate entities that produce, package, and market the goods and services that maintain such an aesthetic
- But it cannot be said that these companies **forced** anyone, in any simple way, to act as they do
- Rather, the exercise of **power** is enacted **internally**
- Through **production** of a certain kind of “**subject**,” whose identity as a **good citizen** is **associated** with a set of specific **environmental activities**
- **Subject** (Foucault, 1982): There are two meanings of the word "subject":
  - subject to someone else by control and dependence;
  - and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge.
  - Both meanings suggest a form of power which **subjugates** and **makes subject to**.

Do you agree with this?

Do you follow?

Q: Who is this subject?

- The subject: **Lawn People!**

# Note

- what we have in place (with "Lawn People") is a SELF-CONDUCTED SYSTEM OF MONITORING AND ENFORCEMENT (SURVEILLANCE?)
  - i.e. the chemicals corporation does not need to pay any money to achieve that lawn managers behave the way it wants
- Although corporation pays money to maintain links between good citizen and chemicals use, e.g. through advertising
  - still, it needs no waste resources for MONITORING & ENFORCEMENT as Lawn People do it themselves to themselves and to others (their neighbours)!

# Foucault: exercising power

- Power can be exercised in more **subtle** ways than outright oppression and coercion
- i.e. by establishing **normalised** and '**deviant**': behaviours (homosexuality), processes (democracy is inefficient), actions (stealing = crime), persons (lepers=unhealthy), places (Africa is dangerous, e.g. disease, crime), etc.
- People integrate these as **personal principles** that guide their behaviour -> you no more need to punish or compensate
- In this way governments (or those 'in power') **discipline** behaviour, processes, actions, people, places, etc. **without coercion**
- Power = **relational** not necessarily a capacity (quantity) to be "held", "taken", or "transferred"

# Foucault: disciplining subjects

- Central problem of modern govt.: “the **conduct of conduct** or else the power to act on the actions of others”
  - Modern governments develop **technologies of power** to achieve
- **Panopticon**: what is it?
  - Prisoner feels he’s been watched and has to behave at all times in case guard is watching (Sharpe, 2009)
  - By feeling he’s been watched all the time he **internalises the rule** of discipline (behave as he is required)
  - Guard doesn’t even need be there!



Presidio Modelo prison, Cuba (Source: Friman, 2005)



Question: What’s this??

# What's the importance of this?

- Power imposed through the 'construction' of
  - **Subjects**, e.g. self-monitored prisoners; lawn managers or lawn people
  - The **meaning** of (what it means to be) a chemicals-intensive lawn manager (subject) = i.e. a responsible citizen
- Through **internalisation of rules** which then guide behaviour, so that you voluntarily do and don't do certain things **without external coercion**

# Governmentality term

Used in the bibliography to signify/ refer to:

- The “how” of governing (Jeffreys & Sigley, 2009)
  - Calculated means of directing how we behave and act
- Way in which governments try to produce citizens (subjects) best suited to the ends + objectives of those governments
  - A style of exercising power
- Organised practices through which subjects are governed (Mayhew, 2004)
  - Mentalities, rationalities, techniques



# Class exercise

- Does what the approach describe sound familiar?
- Get into groups
- Discuss and write down one real-world application of governmentality and disciplining through internally-imposed rules
  - Explain **how** power operates in your example
  - (You can use personal or common/ every-day life, or even well-known examples)
  - (They can be related or unrelated to environmental issues/ management)
- Present to the rest of the class