Babylon Teach-in

“Who’s interested in ...?”:

9 January 2014,
11:00-12:30, room D119

Who’s interested in ... Michel Foucault's ‘abnormal’?

In 1974-1975, Foucault’s course at the College de France focused on the ‘productive’ aspects of power: power as something that operates not by stricture and repression but by positive injunctions and interventions. The course on ‘Abnormal’ thus represents an important moment in Foucault's development, halfway between ‘Discipline and Punish’ and ‘History of Sexuality’. In his lectures, he argues how premodern existing images of ‘monsters’ – physical monsters, criminal and sexual ones – gradually merged over a period of several decades into an entirely new type of ‘abnormal’ subject, whose existence and features could be anticipated, identified, rectified and eliminated by means of intricate systems of knowledge and power, encapsulated in the budding social sciences of modernity, and no longer just by institutions but also by the subjects themselves. Modernity, thus argues Foucault, revolves around one major and critical distinction: that between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ people and forms of life. And this distinction has become the main axis of social life at all levels.