Chapter Seven

Genealogy, Discourse and Hierarchies
Power in the Domain of Mentality
I. Introduction: Politics, Discourse, and the Post-1968 Foucault

a. A Preamble to Hierarchies in the Domain of Mentality

The last section of the thesis, when one was, what I have called, 'In Foucault', looked into five of his early texts, and pointed to two important features of Foucauldian thought. The first concerns that of tripartition of modes of social formation and representation, and I examined how Foucault builds up the three domains, which I, for convenience's sake, dub as mentality, materiality, and physicality. The second feature involves the play of power structures in these three domains, laying the foundation for what I have called trihierarchization. Foucault talks about the relationship between power and knowledge in this phase too, but it can be noted that he does not go all out to show the overwhelming presence of politics in all discursivization. My last chapter ended with Foucault's promise, at the end of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, of talking about this relationship in his later works. This section of the thesis takes up works of the later Foucault, with 1968 acting as a watershed, and shows how, very much in compliance with his promise, Foucault discusses how politics constitutes formations in the three domains he had isolated earlier. In an interview in 1977, Foucault says how this indulgence with power in the true sense could begin only after 1968:

> When I think back now, I ask myself what else it was that I was talking about, in *Madness and Civilisation* and *The Birth of the Clinic*, but power? Yet I'm perfectly aware that I scarcely ever used the word and never had such a field of analyses at my disposal… This task could only begin after 1968, that is to say on the basis of daily struggles at grass roots level, among those whose fight was located in the fine meshes of the web of power.¹

Accordingly, the three chapters in this section picks up, three bodies of work in which Foucault talks about the role of hierarchies in the three domains, so that this section becomes a treatise in how one can move 'From Foucault' to current theoretical postulates about the trihierarchized relationship between politics and representation. The first chapter of the section takes up the case of power play in the domain of mentality, i.e. that of linguistic discourses and knowledge. This chapter analyses numerous articles and interviews of Foucault between 1968 and 1984, where he talks about linguistic discourse and literature, and most of which are included in three English anthologies of Foucault—*Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (1977), *Power/Knowledge* (1980), and *Politics, Philosophy, Culture* (1988). Only a couple of the pieces discussed in this chapter predate 1968, and in their case, the rationale behind their inclusion has been provided for. What follows is therefore a study in how the later Foucault, sensitized about politics in a much stronger way after 1968, identifies the workings of hierarchies in the domain of mentally conceived representational discursive formations.

In May 1968, a major students' unrest started at the French universities, which made all academics, including Foucault conscious, in a direct way, of the political implications of their trade. Incidentally, after May 1968, the French government decided to disperse the total concentration of the University of Paris in the Latin Quarter to several autonomous institutions in the periphery of the city. Foucault was made the head of the philosophy department at Vincennes where Foucault started rethinking and soon decried many of his, by now celebrated, methodological categories. In an interview given later, in 1983, Foucault shows how he would no more equate power and knowledge, one of his earlier mainstays:

...you have to understand that when I read—and I know it has been attributed to me—the thesis, "Knowledge is power", or "Power is knowledge", I begin to laugh, since studying their relation is precisely my problem. If they were identical, I would not have to study them and I would be spared a lot of fatigue as a result. The very fact that I pose the question of their relation proves clearly that I do not identify them.2

Similarly, in a conversation in 1977, Foucault shows how his earlier notion of the episteme was inadequate, and how he would introduce, in its place, a new concept of the apparatus:

In seeking in The Order of Things to write a history of the episteme, I was still caught in an impasse. What I would like to do now is to try and show that what I call an apparatus is a much more general case of the episteme; or rather, the episteme is a specifically discursive apparatus, whereas the apparatus in its general form is both discursive and non-discursive, its elements being much more heterogeneous.3

In a similar fashion, in an interview in 1978, Foucault criticises an upholding of a discontinuist notion of history that one might infer from his earlier works:

This idea of "discontinuity" in relation to Les Mots et les choses has, indeed, become a dogma. Am I, perhaps, responsible for this? The fact remains, however, that the book says exactly the opposite...you only have to know the areas I was concerned with in that book—that's to say, the history of biology, the history of political economy, or the history of general grammar—to see at once, at first sight, what looked like breaks or great ruptures... In Les Mots et les choses I set out, therefore, from this self-evident discontinuity and tried to ask myself the question: is this discontinuity really a discontinuity? Or, to be precise, what was the transformation needed to pass from one type of knowledge to another type of knowledge? For me, this is not at all a way of declaring the discontinuity of History; on the contrary, it is a way of posing discontinuity as a problem and above all as a problem to be resolved. My approach, therefore, was quite the opposite of a "philosophy of discontinuity".4

All this points towards a change in Foucault, which I now take up to show how this shift constitutes an understanding of hierarchization in the domain of, what I call, mentality.

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b. *Of Marx and Nietzsche: Politics of the Local and of Truth*

One of the first shifts that one would notice in the post-1968 Foucault, is his moving, in a very explicit way, into Nietzschean thought. This means a direct invocation of Nietzsche's notions of the omnipresence of power and its locatability not in any grand totalitarian schema of globally deterministic base of power, but in dispersed peripheral entities, and one would be tempted to show how Foucault undermines, at this phase, the global economism of Marxism. However, it is not all that simple, and Foucault's post-1968 political turn is not constituted by a simple, black and white, rejection of Marxism in favour of Nietzscheanism as some would project it to be. It is rather a strengthening of some of the basic premises of Marxian thought, often 'corrupted in practice by party-politics and Stalinism, with input from the more local Nietzschean concepts of power. In an interview given in 1975, Foucault clearly shows how one cannot but relate to Marx's thought in the current situation, while one definitely needs to be wary of dogmatic 'communistological' positions:

It is impossible at the present time to write history without using a whole range of concepts directly or indirectly linked to Marx's thought and situating oneself within a horizon of thought which has been defined and described by Marx. One might even wonder what difference there could ultimately be between being a historian and being a Marxist... And it's within this general horizon of thought defined and coded by Marx that the discussion must take its starting-point with those who call themselves Marxists because they play a game whose rules aren't Marxist but communistological, in other words defined by communist parties who decide how you must use Marx so as to be declared by them to be a Marxist.5

Foucault also personalizes this problem with certain misappropriations of Marxian thought in terms of the lukewarm response official Marxist circles accorded Foucault's avowedly 'leftist' earlier works. In an interview in 1977, Foucault gives three reasons for this to show how traditional Marxist approaches are quite divergent, in their totalitarian schema from his type of political work. He says,

I think there were three reasons for this. The first is that...Marxist intellectuals in France...wanted to take up the 'noblest', most academic problems in the history of the sciences: mathematics and physics... Medicine and psychiatry didn't seem to them to be very noble or serious matters, nor to stand on the same level as the great forms of classical rationalism.

The second reason is that post-Stalinist Stalinism...would not permit the broaching of uncharted domains... The price Marxists paid for their fidelity to the old positivism was a radical deafness to a whole series of questions posed by science.

Finally, there is perhaps a third reason, but I can't be absolutely sure that it played a part. I wonder nevertheless whether among intellectuals in or close to the PCF there wasn't a refusal to pose the problems of internment, of the political use of psychiatry and, in a more general sense, of the disciplinary grid of society.6

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Theorizing his differences with traditional Marxist approaches even further, he shows, in a conversation recorded in 1977 and already referred to earlier, how while his type of work involves the ‘little’ struggles one has to wage against dominant systems of power all the time, most of communist praxis involves only global binary hierarchies:

What I find striking in the majority—if not of Marx’s texts then those of the Marxists (except perhaps Trotsky)—is the way they pass over in silence what is understood by struggle when one talks of class struggle... This is just a hypothesis, but I would say it’s all against all. There aren’t immediately given subjects of the struggle, one the proletariat, the other the bourgeoisie... We all fight each other.²

Based on the arguments already presented, it is clear that the new political turn in Foucault is not necessarily anti-Marx, but it is definitely quite contrary to most of the received trends in traditional Marxism in practice. Foucault, accordingly, minces no words to claim that his perspective is different from both Marxist and para-Marxist approaches. In an interview given in 1975, Foucault states that his primary difference with Marxists concerns the primacy they accord to the role of ideology, while that with para-Marxists is about the way they view power as necessarily repressive. He says,

I think I would distinguish myself from both the Marxist and the para-Marxist perspectives. As regards Marxism, I’m not one of those who try to elicit the effects of power at the level of ideology. Indeed I wonder whether, before one poses the question of ideology, it wouldn’t be more materialist to study first the question of the body and the effects of power on it. Because what troubles me with these analyses which prioritise ideology is that there is always presupposed a human subject on the lines of the model provided by classical philosophy, endowed with a consciousness which power is then thought to seize on... And while there are some very interesting things about the body in Marx’s writings, Marxism considered as an historical reality has had a terrible tendency to occlude the question of the body, in favour of consciousness and ideology.

I would also distinguish myself from para-Marxists like Marcuse who give the notion of repression an exaggerated role—because power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress... If, on the contrary, power is strong this is because, as we are beginning to realise, it produces effects at the level of desire—and also at the level of knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it... It was on the basis of power over the body that a physiological, organic knowledge of it became possible.³

While his objection against the para-Marxists regarding the often non-repressive role of power will be discussed in detail later, one can note how Foucault highlights his objection against the Marxist preoccupation with ideology in an interview given in 1977. Here he gives three reasons for his problems with the use of ideology as a constitutive category—that it presupposes a fixed truth, that it presupposes a subject as the centre of perpetration of ideological formations, and that it roots itself in the deterministic economic base:

The notion of ideology appears to me to be difficult to make use of, for three reasons. The first is that, like it or not, it always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth... The second drawback is that the concept of ideology refers, I think necessarily, to something of the order of a subject. Thirdly, ideology stands in a secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its material, economic determinant, etc.9

This rejection of some of the basic presuppositions of traditional Marxist praxis, without questioning the validity of Marxian thought per se, entails two possible courses for post-1968 Foucauldian thought: either of trying to restore to Marxism its 'original essence', or of devising a different method altogether. In an interview given in 1976, Foucault clearly rules out the possibility of the former, saying that such an attempt would presuppose Marxism as a totalitarian abode of the whole truth, and be a return to the very objections he raised:

But I am not all the sort of philosopher who conducts or wants to conduct a discourse of truth on some science or other... I'm not sure that one doesn't find a similar temptation at work in certain kinds of 'renovated' Marxism, one which consists in saying, 'Marxism, as the science of sciences, can provide the theory of science and draw the boundary between science and ideology'. Now this role of referee, judge and universal witness is one which I absolutely refuse to adopt, because it seems to me to be tied up with philosophy as a university institution.10

He makes his intentions clearer in the same interview where he qualifies such attempts at iconizing Marx as misconceiving Marxian thought itself. He says,

As far I'm concerned, Marx doesn't exist. I mean, the sort of entity constructed around a proper name, signifying at once a certain individual, the totality of his writings, and an immense historical process deriving from him... It's always possible to make Marx into an author, localisable in terms of a unique discursive physiognomy, subject to analysis in terms of originality or internal coherence. After all, people are perfectly entitled to 'academise' Marx. But that means misconceiving the type of break he effected.11

Accordingly, Foucault turns to another figure in Western thought, who also dealt with power, albeit in a different way: Nietzsche, and, as he states in an interview in 1983, it is the Nietzschean concern for truth that determines the Foucauldian method after 1968. He says,

My problem is the relation of self to self and of telling the truth. My relation to Nietzsche, or what I owe to Nietzsche, derives mostly from the texts of around 1880, where the question of truth, the history of truth and the will to truth were central to his work.12

This use of Nietzsche, along with Marx, has to be discussed to understand how the post-1968 Foucault analyses the role of hierarchies in discourse, and this is what I will do soon.

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11 Ibid., 76.

c. Knowledge, Discourse, and Structures of Power

It has already been observed that after 1968, Foucault's works take a distinctive political turn, and this turn is epistemologically constituted by a fusion of Nietzschean thought with certain Marxian paradigms. Now, I would look into the ontological implications of this shift, or how Foucault perceives this shift in method to have changed his understanding of the role of power in institutions of knowledge and language, the immediate subject matter of this chapter. In an interview given in 1971, Foucault observes that the class that controls structures of knowledge sees to it that an actual understanding of power and events is left inaccessible in dominant dispensation of knowledge, while a true proletarian resistant knowledge is ideally constituted by just its reverse. He says,

In the broadest sense, both the nature of events and the fact of power are invariably excluded from knowledge as presently constituted in our culture. This is to be expected since the power of a certain class (which determines this knowledge) must appear inaccessible to events; and the event, in its dangerous aspect, must be dominated and dissolved in the continuity of power maintained by this class, by a class power which is never defined. On the other hand, the proletariat develops a form of knowledge which concerns the struggle for power, the manner in which they can give rise to an event, respond to its urgency, avoid it, etc.; this is a knowledge absolutely alien to the first kind because of its preoccupation with power and events.¹³

In the same interview, he also notes how power structures use an institution like the university to perpetrate themselves, and if at all hierarchies in the domain of knowledge have to be questioned, it can come from a resistance that does not bother about social conservation:

The university stands for the institutional apparatus through which society ensures its uneventful reproduction, at the least cost to itself. The disorder within institutions of higher learning, their imminent demise (whether real or apparent), does not extend to the society's will for conservation, identity, and repetition.¹⁴

These two points—that dominant power structures regulate knowledge through certain apparatuses with an objective to conserve themselves, and that a resistant knowledge has to arise from within this—underline the post-1968 Foucauldian understanding of the role of hierarchies in the mental domain of knowledge and representational discourse.

Therefore, the ontology of the current Foucauldian understanding of power play in the discursive domain involves an understanding of the role power structures play in controlling the production, circulation and consumption of discursive formations. In 1970, Foucault was offered a professorial chair at the prestigious Collège de France, and in his first course on the 'History of Systems of Thought' offered there, he summed up his observations about the same. In a description of this first course of his at the Collège, Foucault shows how discursive practices are all about 'regularities', which cannot be understood in terms of a

¹⁴ Ibid., 224.
single author or discipline, and their 'transformations' in relation to socio-political formations or other discursive practices. He writes,

Discursive practices are characterized by the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories... Furthermore, these sets of "regularities" do not coincide with individual works; even if these "regularities" are manifested through individual works or announce their presence for the first time through one of them, they are more extensive and often serve to regroup a large number of individual works. But neither do they coincide with what we ordinarily call a science or a discipline even if their boundaries provisionally coincide on certain occasions... Discursive practices are not purely and simply ways of producing discourse... Finally, they possess specific modes of transformation. These transformations cannot be reduced to precise and individual discoveries; and yet we cannot characterize them as a general change of mentality, collective attitudes, or a state of mind. The transformation of a discursive practice is linked to a whole range of usually complex modifications that can occur outside of its domain (in the forms of production, in social relationships, in political institutions), inside it (in its techniques for determining its object, in the adjustment and refinement of its concepts, in its accumulation of facts), or to the side of it (in other discursive practices).  

Control over discursive formations by systems of power is thus based on patterns of exclusion, and as Foucault points out in his course outline, these principles of exclusion are not based on the individual choices of a historical or transcendental subject as the independent agent of knowledge, but on an anonymous and polymorphous will to knowledge, which itself undergoes regular transformations. Highlighting this will and its difference with the will to truth as his basic points of departure, Foucault says,

For the moment, we can indicate in a very general way the direction in which this study should proceed: establishing a distinction between knowledge and the rules necessary to its acquisition; the difference between the will to knowledge and the will to truth; the position of the subject and subjects in relation to this will.  

However, as one can observe, this still presupposes a repressive role for power structures and a study based on mainstream discursive knowledge alone. The second point in the post-1968 Foucauldian understanding of discourse lies in a debunking of the same.

Foucault notes in a lecture given in 1976, that the main trend in criticism to have emerged in the last ten or fifteen years is a 'certain fragility', which replaced global 'totalitarian theories' with 'particular and local criticism', so that theoretical production can no more be considered to emerge from the centralized source of repressive and cautious approval of the establishment. In short, the even later Foucault rejects his earlier repressive hypothesis, to talk instead of the local character of discursive practices, where the relation between power and knowledge is no more unidirectional. He says,

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16 Ibid., 201.
So, the main point to be gleaned from these events of the last fifteen years, their predominant feature, is the local character of criticism... I believe that what this essentially local character of criticism indicates in reality is an autonomous, non-centralised kind of theoretical production, one that is to say whose validity is not dependent on the approval of the established regimes of thought.  

What this insistence on local criticism and the non-globally-repressive character of power structures vis-à-vis knowledge corollarily points towards, is a turning away from traditionally accepted global bodies of knowledge, as objects of study, to those marginal discursive formations, which have been left out of this institutionalized schema. Foucault calls these bodies 'subjugated knowledges', and states how his type of analysis would be more concerned about these in its attempt to study the local relation between power and knowledge.

In the lecture already mentioned above, Foucault defines this body of 'subjugated knowledges' on the basis of two criteria. As per the first, all forms of historical knowledge which have been buried under the overwhelming desire of dominant historiography to look for a functionalist coherence or a formal systemisation, qualify as subjugated knowledges. As per the second criterion, those bodies of knowledge which have been disqualified as inadequate and naïve, and accordingly have in placed lowly in the hierarchy of ideas and been very little elaborated upon, also qualify as subjugated knowledges. For Foucault, his type of criticism can only work by looking into these local popular knowledges and these disqualified knowledges. Foucault goes on to say that this is particularly important, as it has always been these subjugated knowledges that have provided a 'historical knowledge of struggles', and therefore if one has to question hierarchies in the domain of knowledge, one has to look into the 'genealogies' of these types of knowledges. He says in the lecture,

In the two cases—in the case of the erudite as in the case of the disqualified knowledges—with what in fact were these buried subjugated knowledges really concerned? They were concerned with a historical knowledge of struggles... What emerges out of this is something one might call a genealogy, or rather a multiplicity of genealogical researches, a painstaking rediscovery of struggles together with the rude memory of their conflicts. And these genealogies, that are the combined products of an erudite knowledge and a popular knowledge, were not possible and could not even have been attempted except on one condition, namely that the tyranny of globalising discourses with their hierarchy and all their privileges of a theoretical avant-garde was eliminated.

Thus, it can be noted, how two different stages organize the post-1968 Foucault's understanding of the role of hierarchies and power structures in discourse dispensation, one looking into a repressive model working for linguistic discourses, and the other looking for a local action of power in other 'subjugated' bodies of knowledge.


18 Ibid., 83.
d. Epistemology, Ontology, and Ethics for the New Study

What have been examined in the preceding pages of this chapter are how May 1968 introduced new challenges and newly emerging political perspectives to Foucault, how he accordingly revised his earlier, not all that explicitly political, stance regarding discourse, how this involved a recourse to Nietzsche, and how this introduced, into the domain of Foucauldian understanding of discursive formations, on the one hand, a notion of repressive control of power structures over knowledge, and, on the other, an idea of employing local criticism to study the more complex relation power has with marginal subjugated knowledges. It has also been observed how this entire process involves a study of means individuals adopt to attain truth and knowledge, and means systems of power adopt in shaping and reacting to the same. In an interview given in 1983, Foucault sums up his objective very succinctly:

Yes, what interested me...were precisely the forms of rationality applied by the human subject to itself. While historians of science in France were interested essentially in the problem of how a scientific object is constituted, the question I asked myself was this: how is it that the human subject took itself as the object of possible knowledge? Through what forms of rationality and historical conditions? And finally at what price? This is my question: at what price can subjects speak the truth about themselves?19

It can be appreciated that if one attempts to schematize the observations laid down so far into a theoretically tenable statement, one has to classify these points into the three heads of epistemology, ontology and ethics that this political philosophy entails. At the level of epistemology, one can observe, how Foucault talks about relying heavily on Nietzsche, and involving in the process the Nietzschean method of ‘genealogy’, as a complement to his earlier reliance on Marx and the method of archaeology. At the level of ontology, the Foucauldian perspective under discussion involves a looking into the relationship of structures of power with systems of thought in two different stages. At one stage, it has to be examined how Foucault identifies the repressive role of power in controlling linguistic discourse, and at the other it has to be seen how he credits categories like truth, rationality, and other agencies of ‘capillary power’ in forwarding other ‘subjugated’ discourses. At the level of ethics, it should be noted how Foucault gives the intellectual a critical role, where, in identifying the role of hierarchies in at least the mental domain of knowledge, he or she can question the politics of discursive practices. Finally, one should also, to relate this chapter to the broader thesis of this dissertation, link these findings to those that would be used for the next where Foucault takes up the case of hierarchies in the material socio-politico-economic domain. The remaining parts of the chapter will thus follow this four-point structure.

II. Nietzsche and Genealogy: towards an Epistemology to Discursive Power

a. Arriving at Nietzsche as the Thinker of Power

Before discussing what features of Nietzschean philosophy Foucault inducts in his method, and how he uses genealogy as a means to conduct a study of hierarchies in the domain of discursive formations, I would like to see how Foucault arrives at Nietzsche, via Kant, and identifies in him the ‘philosopher of power’ as opposed to Marx, for whom the epithet is normally reserved. In this context I would first like to cite a few points Foucault makes in his 1963 article on Georges Bataille, which, in spite of predating the period I have delimited for this chapter, sheds invaluable light on his future use of Nietzsche. The primary break that is required in a dominantly idealist paradigm of ideas, for the type of questioning of normative hierarchies Foucault does, is of introducing the notion of nonpositive affirmation into the schema whereby one can arrive at contestation and the consequent questioning of a priorities. Foucault shows, in his article mentioned above, how this was achieved by Kant:

Perhaps when contemporary philosophy discovered the possibility of nonpositive affirmation, it began a process of reorientation whose only equivalent is the shift instituted by Kant when he distinguished the nihil negativum and the nihil privatium—a distinction known to have opened the way for the advance of critical thought. This philosophy of nonpositive affirmation is, I believe, what Blanchot was defining through his principle of “contestation”.20

While ‘critical thought’ was introduced in the dominant idealist schema with this shift achieved by Kant, which later the Frankfurt School would identify as the bifurcation of Reason into instrumental reason and moral reason, the real use of this negative positivity begins, as Foucault shows in the article, with Nietzsche, when finally both Hegelian dialectics and the idea of a transcendental subject could be questioned on the grounds of a search for their ‘origin’. Foucault shows how it is thus Nietzsche, who can be credited with the beginnings of contemporary ‘transgressive’ thought—thought that can question the being and the a priorities it entails from the limits of its finitude. Foucault says,

...philosophy has been well aware since Nietzsche (or it should undoubtedly know by now) that it questions an origin without positivity and an opening indifferent to the patience of the negative. No form of dialectical movement, no analysis of constitutions and of their transcendental ground can serve as support for thinking about such an experience or even as access to this experience. In our day, would not the instantaneous play of the limit and of transgression be the essential test for a thought which centers on the “origin”, for that form of thought to which Nietzsche dedicated us from the beginning of his works and one which would be, absolutely and in the same motion, a Critique and an Ontology, an understanding that comprehends both finitude and being?21

21 Ibid., 37-38.
Foucault shows how this secondary shift achieved in Western thought by Nietzsche, whereby the promises of an origin and a unified subject were both debunked into an absence, entails the beginning of a new type of philosopher, the like of Foucault—who can question the premise of philosophy itself, and a new type of philosophical language, which can question the sanctity of language, unmask the very hierarchies it posits. Foucault asks,

But what language can arise from such an absence? And above all who is the philosopher who will now begin to speak?... In a language stripped of dialectics, at the heart of what it says but also at the root of its possibilities, the philosopher is aware that "we are not everything," he learns as well that even the philosopher does not inhabit the whole of his language like a secret and perfectly fluent god. Next to himself, he discovers the existence of another language that also speaks and that he is unable to dominate... Most of all, he discovers that he is not always lodged in his language in the same fashion and that from the location from which a subject had traditionally spoken in philosophy...a void has been hollowed out in which a multiplicity of speaking subjects are joined and severed, combined and excluded... The breakdown of philosophical subjectivity and its dispersion in a language that dispossesses it while multiplying it within the space created by its absence is probably one of the fundamental structures of contemporary thought. Again, this is not the end of philosophy, but rather, the end of the philosopher as the sovereign and primary form of philosophical language.22

All this points towards what has already been pre-empted, that Foucault would turn to Nietzsche in the new type of work he embarks on after 1968. In an interview given in 1975, Foucault makes his agenda quite explicit. He says, borrowing the phrase from the title of an 1887 Nietzsche book, that his current enterprise can qualify as 'the genealogy of morals'. He also clarifies how it is Nietzsche, and not Marx, who first focussed on power relation, and states that he would therefore like to appropriate Nietzsche in all his later works. He says,

If I wanted to be pretentious, I would use 'the genealogy of morals' as the general title of what I am doing. It was Nietzsche who specified the power relation as the general focus, shall we say of philosophical discourse—whereas for Marx it was the production relation. Nietzsche is the philosopher of power, a philosopher who managed to think of power without having to confine himself within a political theory in order to do so... But I am tired of people studying him only to produce the same kind of commentaries that are written on Hegel or Mallarmé. For myself, I prefer to utilise the writers I like. The only valid tribute to thought such as Nietzsche's is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest. And if commentators then say that I am being faithful or unfaithful to Nietzsche, that is of absolutely no interest.23

Thus, it is established how Foucault arrives at Nietzsche from amongst all the philosophical stalwarts who preceded him, on grounds of him being the original philosopher of power. It is also established how Foucault proposes to appropriate the Nietzschean genealogical method as his tool. What I will look into next is how Foucault defines this newly adopted method of genealogy, and how it relates to the already established Foucauldian method of archaeology.

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22 Ibid., 41-42.
b. Genealogy Defined in Relation to Archaeology

It can be noted from what has been observed so far that genealogy is a method to historically study the constitution of discursive formations in relation to power structures, without such a study regressing to either the transcendental subject or a totally objectivist dissolution of the subject into nothingness. Keeping these points in mind, Foucault defines genealogy in an interview given in 1977 in the following way:

I wanted to see how these problems of constitution could be resolved within a historical framework, instead of referring them back to a constituent object (madness, criminality or whatever). But this historical contextualisation needed to be something more than the simple relativisation of the phenomenological subject... One has to dispense with the constituent subject...to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework. And this is what I would call genealogy, that is, a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history.24

One should also remember two further features of genealogy that I referred to in the earlier section of this chapter: that it combines local popular knowledges with erudite knowledge, and that it studies modes of struggle. Therefore, there is the necessity for a supplementary definition of the method, as Foucault gives in a lecture given in 1976:

Let us give the term genealogy to the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today. This then will be a provisional definition of the genealogies which I have attempted to compile with you over the last few years.25

In the same lecture, Foucault refers to another feature of genealogy, that it does not, in its denunciation of subjectivism, resort to mere empiricism or positivism, or that it does not take recourse to some kind of scientism to dethrone the subject. On the contrary, genealogy tries to constitute what Foucault calls ‘anti-sciences’, where local, discontinuous, disqualified and illegitimate knowledges are unearthed to expose the hierarchies which exclude them to form a unitary and totalitarian body of theory in the name of ‘true knowledge’ and the scientific. Genealogy is thus, as Foucault shows in the lecture a mode of struggle:

Genealogies are therefore not positivistic returns to a more careful or exact form of science. They are precisely anti-sciences. Not that they vindicate a lyrical right to ignorance or non-knowledge: it is not that they are concerned to deny knowledge or that they esteem the virtues of direct cognition and base their practice upon an immediate experience that escapes encapsulation in knowledge...it is really against the effects of the power of a discourse that is considered to be scientific that the genealogy must wage its struggle.26

26 Ibid., 84.
Genealogy is thus, as Foucault claims in the lecture, an attempt to emancipate historical knowledges from a subjection to the hierarchical order of power associated with 'science', and thereby make discursive formations capable of questioning the hierarchies they entail and struggle against the coercion of the totalitarian scheme of a unitary, scientific discourse.

This political aim of the method distinguishes genealogy from the earlier Foucauldian method of archaeology. While archaeology is more of an 'objective' employed to merely unearth subjugated knowledges, genealogy provides the theoretical framework and the political tactics for the same. In the lecture that I have quoted from above, Foucault says,

If we were to characterise it in two terms, then 'archaeology' would be the appropriate methodology for this analysis of local discursivities, and 'genealogy' would be the tactics whereby, on the basis of the description of these local discursivities, the subjected knowledges which were thus released would be brought into play.27

Thus, archaeology and genealogy are complementary, but it might be interesting to note how Foucault renounces totally, in his post-1968 phase, what he himself called 'a whole panoply of terms'28 associated with archaeology, and which he invoked most meticulously in his immediately preceding work. This merits a separate discussion of the different features of the genealogical method, in terms of how it relates itself to a search for origins, to history, and to knowledge itself. The basic premises of Foucault's Vincennes lectures, where he elaborated upon genealogy as a method, appears as an essay 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' (1971), and now I would make a detailed analysis of this essay to look into these three points.

c. Genealogy and the Search for Origins

Foucault begins the essay mentioned above with a caution that genealogy is difficult and needs erudition, and he soon adds that this method is opposed to a search for 'origins':

Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times... Genealogy, consequently, requires patience and a knowledge of details and it depends on a vast accumulation of source material. Its "cyclopean monuments" are constructed from "discreet and apparently insignificant truths and according to a rigorous method"; they cannot be the product of "large and well-meaning errors". In short, genealogy demands relentless erudition. Genealogy does not oppose itself to history as the lofty and profound gaze of the philosopher might compare to the molelike perspective of the scholar; on the contrary, it rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for "origins".29

27 Ibid., 85.
This may appear quite paradoxical, since 'genealogy' etymologically means a study of origins itself, and therefore, Foucault goes on to explain next how Nietzsche uses two different sets of terms for 'origin' and the anti-teleological method of genealogy opposes itself to one of them.

Foucault says that in Nietzsche, there are two uses of the word 'Ursprung' (i.e. 'origin'): one is unstressed, which is alternately used with other terms such as 'Entstehung', 'Herkunft', 'Abkunft', or 'Geburt'; while the other is stressed. This second use of the word refers to the origin of something as an essential a priori, and as perceived by an individual transcendental subject. Genealogy refuses to be a search for this sort of an 'origin', and instead concentrates on the first use of the word, where origin can be studied not as Ursprung, but as Herkunft (descent) or Entstehung (emergence). Foucault points out that Nietzsche himself says in the preface to his Genealogy of Morals (1887) that genealogy is an examination of the Herkunft, and not Ursprung, thus forwarding the theory as Herkunftshypothesen, which began with his Human All-Too-Human (1878). Foucault shows in the essay how Ursprung is essential and for Nietzsche, it is related to an 'invention of the ruling classes', and genealogy aims to undermine and unmask it:

[Ursprung] is an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities and their carefully protected identities, because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession. ... However, if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is "something altogether different" behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms. Examining the history of reason, he learns that it was born in an altogether "reasonable" fashion - from chance; devotion to truth and the precision of scientific method arose from the passion of scholars, their reciprocal hatred, their fanatical and unending discussions and their spirit of competition - the personal conflicts that slowly forged the weapons of reason. Further, genealogical analysis shows that the concept of liberty is an "invention of the ruling classes" and not fundamental to man's nature or at the root of his attachment to being and truth. What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is the disparity.

Genealogy as a method, thus, never roots itself in the search for this 'inviolable' origin, and instead goes, as Foucault shows far beyond it into the depths of material events and accidents:

A genealogy of values, morality, asceticism, and knowledge will never confuse itself with a quest for their "origins", will never neglect as inaccessible the vicissitudes of history. On the contrary, it will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning; it will be scrupulously attentive to their petty malice; it will await their emergence, once unmasked, as the face of the other. Wherever it is made to go, it will not be reticent—in "excavating the depths", in allowing time for these elements to escape from a labyrinth where no truth had ever detained them.

Genealogy is thus a study of the material 'descent' (Herkunft) and 'emergence' (Entstehung) from the past, and now I would show how Foucault analyses these two Nietzschean terms.

30 Ibid., 142, * this quote is from Nietzsche, The Wanderer and his Shadow, (part of Thus Spake Zarathustra, 1883-85), p. 9.
31 Ibid., 144.
Taking up the first term first, Foucault shows how *Herkunft*, as descent from a stock, talks about a notion's affiliation to a group through bonds of blood, tradition or social class. Genealogy, however, does not study this as an acquisition of solidified heritage, but as an 'unstable assemblage of faults and fissures' that continuously threatens the inheritor. It should also be noted that *Herkunft* is connected to the body, as, in such a descent of traits, the inscribed surface of events and the locus of a dissociated self is the body. I have already shown how the shift in structuration of thought that can bring in the idea of tripartition in a dominantly dual schema of things is a foregrounding of the body as a constitutive paradigm. Since, this is what happens in genealogy, it is understandable how this method paves the way for what I have called *tri-hierarchization*. Genealogy, as a study of descent, thus does not aim to construct an unbroken continuity and show that the past always exists in the present, but rather studies events in their dispersion and physical actuality. For Foucault, genealogy as a quest for *Herkunft* is, therefore, a search for accidents, deviations, reversals and errors, which give birth to things, instead of some transcendental frozen truth or being.

Taking up the second term next, Foucault shows how *Entstehung* as emergence, or the moment of arising of an event, avoids taking any emergence as the final stage in historical development. For genealogy, emergence of an event happens through the play of several forces, and the analysis of this *Entstehung* has to study the interaction and struggle between these, often contrary, forces. For Nietzsche, as Foucault shows, the place of confrontation between these forces is a 'non-place', because the opposing forces do not belong to a common space, and genealogy studies how this different forces however get united in 'the endlessly repeated play of dominations' in this 'non-place'. Foucault shows, how for genealogy, ideological constructs in the domain of mentality are results of this play of dominations, so that different values are created because of the domination of certain men over others, the idea of liberty is generated through class domination, and logic has as its origin the imposition on things of a non-intrinsic duration for their forceful appropriation in a game of survival. Moreover, Foucault shows that discursive formations emerge as humanity transforms its violences into systems of rules to perpetuate the current schema of domination. Genealogy, as a study of *Entstehung*, is thus a study of how these conflicts and power plays determine the nature of discursive formations as they emerge for the appropriation of the dominant group.

Having established how genealogy, as a study of origins, does not take up the essential inviolable Origin, but sees how events and discursive formations descend through dispersions and embodiment, and how they emerge through a series of violent combats as the tool for domination, I now move on to how genealogy relates to historiography.
d. Genealogy and Historiography: towards Counter-Memory

As he did earlier with his presentation of the archaeological method, Foucault examines now how genealogy is distinct from traditional historiography. Foucault involves in this case the Nietzschean notion of ‘wirkliche Historie’ as the object of genealogy and shows how it is different from traditional history, which is full of metaphysical notions of totality, identity, beginning, development and end. ‘Wirkliche’ literally means ‘effective’ and has the import of meaning ‘real’ or ‘true’, with ‘Wirk’ etymologically deriving itself from the same root as ‘work’. Foucault shows how genealogy avoids the notions of constancy, stability and immortality of traditional historiography by resting itself on this ‘effective’ history:

Historical meaning becomes a dimension of “wirkliche Historie” to the extent that it places within a process of development everything considered immortal in man...

“Effective” history differs from traditional history in being without constants...

History becomes “effective” to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being—as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself. “Effective” history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. 32

Foucault lists three salient features of this ‘effective history’. The first is that while traditional history dissolves the eruption of a singular event into a teleological movement of an ideal continuity, the Nietzschean notion of wirkliche Historie deals with events as unique and as having been generated by haphazard conflicts. Secondly, while traditional history, in its dependence on metaphysics, is most concerned with distances and heights, in what Nietzsche calls ‘Egyptianism’, analysing the farthest periods and highest forms, effective history studies periods nearest to it and periods normally considered decadent. Finally, while traditional historians make every effort to appear neutral and objective, trying to erase from their works marks of their context or individual stances, wirkliche Historie takes knowledge as perspective, and always takes a stance in this ‘system of injustice’ that knowledge is.

Terming the genealogical handling of history as ‘historical sense’, Foucault shows how this opposes itself to the three Platonic categories of reality, identity and truth that have governed the whole of Western historiography, thereby setting up, against the traditional historian’s play of memories, history as a ‘counter-memory’. He says,

The historical sense gives rise to three uses that oppose and correspond to the three Platonic modalities of history. The first is parodic, directed against reality, and opposes the theme of history as reminiscence or recognition; the second is dissociative, directed against identity, and opposes history given as continuity or representative of a tradition; the third is sacrificial, directed against truth, and opposes history as knowledge. They imply a use of history that severs its connection to memory, its metaphysical and anthropological model, and constructs a counter-memory—a transformation of history into a totally different form of time. 33

32 Ibid., 153-54.
33 Ibid., 160.
The first means to counter-memory, or the parodic and farcical use of history, is an attempt to tear through the traditional historian’s masquerade of the past as reality. The second means adopted by genealogy is to systematically dissociate notions of identity that traditional history derives from the past, to do away with the metaphysical promise of return to the original moment of emergence, and show instead discontinuities that constitute identity. The third step to counter-memory is to sacrifice the notion of the subject of knowledge as one committed solely to truth, and instead see all transformations in history as aspects of the ‘will to knowledge’. This leads one to the third point to be discussed in genealogy.

e. Will to Knowledge and the Death of God and Man

Nietzsche provided the notion of ‘will to knowledge’ as the human desire to know, and credited this force, with its own history of power and bitter struggles, with the agency for creating the entire body of knowledge. This driving force behind acquisition of knowledge shows that there is nothing fixed as truth, nothing as the objective domain of all knowledge. Knowledge, discourse—all constructs in the domain of mentality—are results of this desire to know more and attain more power through knowledge. Foucault does not cite this concept as a mere feature of genealogy, but actually makes it a constitutive category of his method so much, that he names the introductory volume of his last series of works (The History of Sexuality) as La Volonté de savoir (1976). In the essay I am currently discussing, he says,

The historical analysis of this rancorous will to knowledge reveals that all knowledge rests upon injustice (that there is no right, not even in the act of knowing, to truth or a foundation for truth) and that the instinct for knowledge is malicious (something murderous, opposed to the happiness of mankind). Even in the greatly expanded form it assumes today, the will to knowledge does not achieve a universal truth; man is not given an exact and serene mastery of nature. On the contrary, it ceaselessly multiplies the risks, creates dangers in every area; it breaks down illusory defences; it dissolves the unity of the subject; it releases those elements of itself that are devoted to its subversion and destruction. Knowledge does not slowly detach itself from its empirical roots, the initial needs from which it arose, to become pure speculation subject only to the demands of reason; its development is not tied to the constitution and affirmation of a free subject; rather, it creates a progressive enslavement to its instinctive violence. Where religion once demanded the sacrifice of bodies, knowledge now calls for experimentation on ourselves, calls us to the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge. “The desire for knowledge has been transformed among us into a passion that fears no sacrifice, which fears nothing but its own extinction. It may be that mankind may eventually perish from this passion for knowledge. If not through passion, then through weakness. We must be prepared to state our choice: do we wish humanity to end in fire and light or to end on the sands”34

Thus, knowledge does not have a teleology in the whole truth being known someday and the will to knowledge being satiated. Rather, the violent human desire to know more is sure, as Nietzsche feels, to kill ‘man’, who himself has arisen in the Western firmament only with the withdrawal of religion as the central category of Western life, only with ‘the death of God’.

34 Ibid., 163, the quote at the end is from Nietzsche, The Dawn, (part of Thus Spake Zarathustra, 1883-85), p. 429.
Foucault qualifies this Nietzschean concept of ‘will to knowledge’ further by distinguishing it from the Aristotelian ‘desire for knowledge’ in his description of the first course he offered at the Collège de France. He shows how while for Aristotle, the desire for knowledge is an intrinsic a priori relationship, for Nietzsche, knowledge emerges as a series of events through a bitter struggle of desire and fear which, while delivering the human subject to what power structures view as truth, always keeps the human subject in bondage:

The intrinsic desire for knowledge in Aristotle relies upon and transposes a prior relationship between knowledge, truth, and pleasure.

In The Gay Science, Nietzsche defines an altogether different set of relationships:

—knowledge is an “invention” behind which lies something completely different from itself: the play of instincts, impulses, desires, fear, and the will to appropriate. Knowledge is produced on the stage where these elements struggle against each other.

—its production is not the effect of their harmony or joyful equilibrium, but of their hatred, of their questionable and provisional compromise, and of the fragile truce that they are always prepared to betray. It is not a permanent faculty, but an event or, at the very least, a series of events;

—knowledge is always in bondage, dependent, and interested (not in itself, but in those things capable of involving an instinct or the instincts that dominate it);

—and if it gives itself as the knowledge of truth, it is because it produces truth through the play of a primary and always reconstituted falsification, which erects the distinction between truth and falsehood.35

This leads one to the allied Nietzschean notion of ‘will to truth’ which I discuss later.

In an earlier article, ‘Le non du père’, written in 1962, when he had not yet formulated his ideas about genealogy, Foucault shows how the ‘death of God’ allows, in its play of nothingness, a sovereign role to language in the post-Nietzschean era. He says,

The nineteenth century is commonly thought to have discovered the historical dimension, but it did so only on the basis of the circle, the spatial form which negates time, the form in which the gods manifest their arrival and flight and men manifest their return to their native ground of finitude. More than simply an event that affected our emotions, that gave rise to the fear of nothingness, the death of God profoundly influenced our language; the silence that replaced its source remains unpenetrable to all but the most trivial works. Language thus assumes a sovereign position; it comes to us from elsewhere, from a place of which no one can speak, but it can be transformed into a work only if, in ascending to its proper discourse, it directs its speech towards this absence. In this context, every work is an attempt to exhaust language; eschatology has become of late a structure of literary experience, and literary experience, by right of birth, is now of paramount importance.36

This connects literature and language directly to the implications of genealogy, and now I can move over to how Foucault visualises the role of power in shaping linguistic discourse.

III. Power Structures as Repressive Controllers of Linguistic Discourse

a. Language, Literature, Death, and Power

In this sub-section of the chapter, I propose to look into how the first point in the post-1968 Foucauldian ontology works itself out. But, before I go into how Foucault envisages the role of power structures in repressively controlling discourse, I would turn to an earlier article, ‘Le langage à l’infini’ (1963), where Foucault, though not yet talking explicitly of the political side of discourse, shows how language either exercises its own power or gets realigned into the ‘powerful’ positivity of literature in its reaction to death and finitude. He shows how language stretches itself to infinity to postpone the imperative of death:

Perhaps there exists in speech an essential affinity between death, endless striving, and the self-representation of language. Perhaps the figure of a mirror to infinity erected against the black wall of death is fundamental for any language from the moment it determines to leave a trace of its passage. Not only since the invention of writing has language pretended to pursue itself to infinity; but neither is it because of its fear of death that it decided one day to assume a body in the form of visible and permanent signs. Rather somewhat before the invention of writing, a change had to occur to open the space in which writing could flow and establish itself, a change, symbolized for us in its most original form by Homer, that forms one of the most decisive ontological events of language: its mirrored reflection upon death and the construction, from this reflection, of a virtual space where speech discovers the endless resourcefulness of its own image and where, it can represent itself as already existing behind itself, already active beyond itself, to infinity. Thus, Foucault shows how from the beginning of its use, language has been engaged in a power play to defeat forces of death. This is evident in the very character of alphabetical writing, which is a form of duplication, since it represents phonetic elements which in turn signify the signified, thereby acting as a mirror aimed at reaching the death-defying infinity.

Foucault notes, in the article, that towards the end of the eighteenth century, a change was produced in the relationship of language to this indefinite repetition and reduplication, and the positivity of literature was born to pose its own systems of power. Foucault shows how this shift in linguistic power play coincides with the emergence of Sadism and Gothic fiction in the literary horizon, where power became the mainstay of language use:

The date of this transformation is roughly indicated by the simultaneous appearance at the end of the eighteenth century of the works of Sade and the tales of terror... these languages which are constantly drawn out of themselves by the overwhelming, the unspeakable, by thrills, stupefaction, ecstasy, dumbness, pure violence, wordless gestures, and which are calculated with the greatest economy and precision to produce effects...

Literature thus emerges as a change in the allocation of power to language, where the initial linguistic politics of defying death gives way to an intrinsic power play. Foucault says.


38 Ibid., 60.
Perhaps that which we should rigorously define as “literature” came into existence at precisely the moment, at the end of the eighteenth century, when a language appeared that appropriates and consumes all other languages in its lightning flash, giving birth to an obscure but dominant figure where death, the mirror and the double, and the wavelike succession of words to infinity enact their roles. Thus, it is clear how even the earlier Foucault viewed language and literature to be entrenched in power, and now I can proceed to examine how he analyses the same after 1968.

It has already been mentioned how in 1970, Foucault left Vincennes with a professorship at the prestigious Collège de France, and it is his inaugural lecture at the college, published a year later as L’ordre du discours, that probably has the most precise account of the Foucauldian notion of the role of power in controlling discourse. Foucault begins the lecture with the wish of never having to ‘begin’ it, never having to belong at the very locus of its political agency, but having ‘slipped’ into one of its ‘gaps’ almost like the non-existent figure of the dead, all language tends to drive away from its architectonics:

I would really like to have slipped imperceptibly into this lecture, as into all the others I shall be delivering, perhaps over the years ahead. I would have preferred to be enveloped in words, borne way beyond all possible beginnings. At the moment of speaking, I would have liked to have perceived a nameless voice, long preceding me, leaving me merely to enmesh myself in it, taking up its cadence, and to lodge myself, when no one was looking, in its interstices as if it had passed an instant, in suspense, to beckon to me. There would have been no beginnings: instead, speech would proceed from me, while I stood in its path—a slender gap—the point of its possible disappearance.

However, this was not to be, especially in a period posterior to the literarization of language, and Foucault observes that he is denied the possibility of ‘disappearance’ into the death that language was supposed to cover up. He has to, instead, propose a hypothesis for analysing the very basis of what he sought to avoid—the role of power in the production, circulation and consumption of discourse. Foucault says,

Here then is the hypothesis I want to advance, tonight, in order to fix the terrain—or perhaps the very provisional theatre—within which I shall be working. I am supposing that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality.

The assumption, therefore, is that there are certain procedures that repressively control discursive formations, to take away from it its resistant material potential and make it subservient to the systems of power that be. Now I would examine how Foucault classifies these different hierarchic procedures that control formations and representations in the ‘mental’ domain of language, literature, and linguistically articulated knowledge and culture.

39 Ibid., 66.
41 Ibid., 340.
b. Procedures that Control Linguistic Discourse

For Foucault, the procedures that control discourse can be classified into three groups—those which control discourse from the outside through ‘exclusion’, those which limit discourse from the inside through ‘limitation’, and those which operate on the communication of discourse through ‘rarefaction’. These are assisted by a fourth group of factors based on certain philosophical themes, and I will discuss these four one by one.

i) External Procedures of Exclusion

The external procedures that control discourse through ‘exclusion’ can be of three types, the first of which is prohibition. Prohibition itself, as Foucault shows, can be of three types—the taboo of the object, or that one is not free to say just anything; the ritual of circumstance, or that one cannot say something anytime and anywhere; and the exclusive right of the speaking subject, or that just anyone cannot say something. Foucault notes that the two areas where this network of prohibition works especially well are sexuality and politics:

I will note simply that the area where this web is most tightly woven today, where the danger spots are most numerous, are those dealing with politics and sexuality. It is as though discussion, far from being a transparent, neutral element, allowing us to disarm sexuality and to pacify politics, were one of those privileged areas in which they exercised some of their most awesome powers. In appearance, speech may well be of little account, but the prohibition surrounding it soon reveals its links with desire and power. This should not be very surprising, for psychoanalysis has already shown us that speech is not merely the medium which manifests—or dissembles—desire; it is also the object of desire. Similarly, historians have constantly impressed upon us that speech is no mere verbalisation of conflicts and systems of domination, but that it is the very object of man’s conflicts.42

The second principle of exclusion is that of division and rejection, which can be understood best in the example of reason versus madness, where a lunatic’s discourse is always distinguished from that of a ‘reasonable’ person and the former is either excluded, or given some special status. Foucault shows how even when the psychiatrist apparently listens to the lunatic’s discourse, there is still this hiatus, this principle of exclusion at work:

It is curious to note that for centuries, in Europe, the words of a madman were either totally ignored or else were taken as words of truth. They either fell into a void—rejected the moment they were proffered—or else men deciphered in them a naïve or cunning reason, rationality more rational than that of a rational man. At all events, whether excluded or secretly invested with reason, the madman’s speech did not strictly exist... No doctor before the end of the eighteenth century had ever thought of listening to the content—how it was said and why—of these words... Even when the role of the doctor consists of lending an ear to this finally liberated speech, this procedure still takes place in a hiatus between listener and speaker. For he is listening to speech invested with a desire, crediting itself—for its greater exultation or for its greater anguish—with terrible powers. If we truly require silence to cure monsters, then it must be an attentive silence, and it is in this that the division lingers.43

42 Ibid., 340.
43 Ibid., 341.
The third principle of exclusion involves the opposition between the true and the false and is articulated through the will to truth. Foucault shows how while within the parameters of logic, the truth-value of a proposition is immutable, for genealogy truth is itself a construct of changing power definitions. What governs the will to knowledge is this will to truth, which in turn brands some discourses as false and excludes them from the schema of knowledge:

Certainly, as a proposition, the division between true and false is neither arbitrary, nor modifiable, nor institutional, nor violent. Putting the question in different terms, however—asking what has been, what still is, throughout our discourse, this will to truth which has survived throughout so many centuries of our history; or if we ask what is, in its very general form, the kind of division governing our will to knowledge—then we may well discern something like a system of exclusion (historical, modifiable, institutionally constraining) in the process of development.\textsuperscript{44}

This principle operates on an institutional base comprising the educational system, libraries, laboratories, and values set by different social systems, all of which privilege the search for one truth. Foucault also shows how this will to truth affects all discursive formations, so that Western literature has always privileged verisimilitude, and economic and social systems have sought to base themselves on reason, and the notion of 'Right'. Moreover, for Foucault:

Of the three great systems of exclusion governing discourse—prohibited words, the division of madness and the will to truth—I have spoken at greatest length concerning the third. With good reason: for centuries, the former have continually tended towards the latter; because this last has, gradually, been attempting to assimilate the others in order both to modify them and to provide them with a firm foundation. Because, if the two former are continually growing more fragile and less certain to the extent that they are now invaded by the will to truth, the latter, in contrast, daily grows in strength, in depth and implacability.\textsuperscript{45}

This is why I elaborate on this procedure of 'will to truth' in greater detail later in the chapter.

\textbf{ii) Internal Procedures of Limitation}

The second type of procedures, which control discourse from within through limitation, can also be of three types, the first being that of \textit{commentary}. The body of secondary texts, which provide different interpretations to primary narratives or texts, collectively control and restrict the meaning of the original discourse. Foucault says,

For the time being, I would like to limit myself by pointing out that, in what we generally refer to as commentary, the difference between primary text and secondary text plays two interdependent roles. On the one hand, it permits us to create new discourses ad infinitum: the top-heaviness of the original text, its permanence, its status as discourse ever capable of being brought up to date, the multiple or hidden meanings with which it is credited, the reticence and wealth it is believed to contain, all this creates an open possibility for discussion. On the other hand, whatever the techniques employed, commentary's only role is to say finally, what has silently been articulated deep down. It must—and the paradox is ever-changing yet inescapable—say, for the first time, what has already been said, and repeat tirelessly what was, nevertheless, never said.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 342.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 343.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 345.
The second internal procedure, which controls discourse, is the notion of the *author*, which attempts to give a subjective and unifying coherence to a discourse. Foucault says,

I believe there is another principle of rarefaction, complementary to the first: the author. Not, of course, the author in the sense of the individual who delivered the speech or wrote the text in question, but the author as the unifying principle in a particular group of writings or statements, lying at the origins of their significance, as the seat of their coherence.47

Comparing this procedure with *commentary*, Foucault shows how while the latter accords discourse a repetitive sameness, the former gives it a restricted individual identity:

Commentary limited the hazards of discourse through the action of an *identity* taking the form of *repetition* and *sameness*. The author principle limits this same chance element through the action of an *identity* whose form is that of *individuality* and the *I*.48

This procedure of the author as a function is also very important and merits separate discussion, and accordingly, I discuss it in greater detail later in the chapter.

The third internal principle of limitation is that of *disciplines*. Foucault shows how this works quite in the opposite direction of the ‘author’ as well as ‘commentary’:

The organisation of disciplines is just as much opposed to the commentary principle as it is to that of the author. Opposed to that of the author, because disciplines are defined by groups of objects, methods...all these constitute a sort of anonymous system, freely available to whoever wishes, or whoever is able to make use of them, without...their validity being derived from whoever happened to invent them. But the principles involved in the formation of disciplines are equally opposed to that of commentary. In a discipline, unlike in commentary, what is supposed at the point of departure is not some meaning which must be rediscovered, nor an identity to be reiterated; it is that which is required for the construction of new statements.49

Disciplines restrict a discourse by making propositions necessarily refer to a certain body of theory alone, and fixing its limits through a permanent orientation of its rules.

**iii) Communicative Procedures of Rarefaction**

The third group of procedures that control discourse concern communicative conditions, and operate through a ‘rarefaction of the speaking subjects’. These can be of four types, the first being that of *ritual*, or the set of signs necessarily accompanying a discourse, in terms of the qualifications needed of the speaker and the behaviour he or she must adopt:

The most superficial and obvious of these restrictive systems is constituted by what we collectively refer to as ritual; ritual defines the qualifications required of the speaker (of who in dialogue, interrogation or recitation, should occupy which position and formulate which type of utterance); it lays down gestures to be made, behaviour, circumstances and the whole range of signs that must accompany discourse; finally, it lays down the supposed, or imposed significance of the words used, their effect upon those to whom they are addressed, the limitations of their constraining validity.50

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The second procedure of rarefaction is that of *fellowships of discourse* whose function is to protect a discourse by producing it in a restricted group of 'qualified' people only:

A rather different function is filled by 'fellowships of discourse', whose function is to preserve or to reproduce discourse, but in order that it should circulate within a closed community, according to strict regulations, without those in possession being dispossessed by this very distribution.\(^5\)

The third procedure, allied in a way to the second, is that of *doctrine*, which instead of restricting the number of individuals who can use a discourse, restricts the scope of that enunciation, thereby creating also a group dedicated to the restricted use of the discourse:

At first sight, 'doctrine' (religious, political philosophical) would seem to constitute the very reverse of a 'fellowship of discourse'; for among the latter, the number of speakers were, if not fixed, at least limited, and it was among this number that discourse was allowed to circulate and be transmitted. Doctrine, on the other hand, tends to diffusion: in the holding in common of a single ensemble of discourse that individuals, as many as you wish, could define their reciprocal allegiance... Doctrine links individuals to certain types of utterance while consequently barring them from all others. Doctrine effects a dual subjection, that of speaking subjects to discourse, and that of discourse to the group, at least virtually, of speakers.\(^5\)

The third procedure is that of *social appropriation* of discourse, where institutions like education become the only means to access a discourse, and thereby discursive formations become bound with the political structure that any educational system is.

Finally, on a much broader scale, we have to recognise the great cleavages in what one might call the social appropriation of discourse. Education may well be, as of right, the instrument whereby every individual, in a society like our own, can gain access to any kind of discourse. But we well know that in its distribution, in what it permits and what it prevents, it follows the well-trodden battle-lines of social conflict. Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it.\(^5\)

After the 'procedures' that control discourse, Foucault proceeds to discuss the other factors.

iv) Accompanying Factors of Philosophical Themes

As has already been stated, these procedures do not exist in isolation, but are accompanied by certain philosophical themes, which deny the specific materiality of discourse, and propose ideal truth and rationality as the principle behind a discourse and its expression. About these themes which promise 'truth' to discourse, Foucault says.

I wonder whether a certain number of philosophical themes have not come to conform to this activity of limitation and exclusion and perhaps even to reinforce it.

They conform, first of all, by proposing an ideal truth as a law of discourse, and an immanent rationality as the principle of their behaviour. They accompany, too, an ethic of knowledge, promising truth only to the desire of truth itself and the power to think it.

They then go on to reinforce this activity by denying the specific reality of discourse in general.\(^5\)

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Foucault shows how there are three such philosophical themes. The first is that of the *founding subject*, or the Cartesian *cogito*, which dilutes the materiality of discourse in a play of subjective desires and transcendental apodictic intuitions. Foucault says,

> It seems to me that the theme of the founding subject permits us to elide the reality of discourse. The task of the founding subject is to animate the empty forms of language with his objectives; through the thickness and inertia of empty things, he grasps intuitively the meanings lying within them. Beyond time, he indicated the field of meanings—leaving history to make them explicit—in which propositions, sciences, and deductive ensembles ultimately find their foundation.  

The second theme is that of *originating experience*, which, acting in the opposite direction of the subject, assumes *a priori* knowledge as the non-material basis of all discourse:

> The opposing theme, that of originating experience, plays an analogous role. This asserts, in the case of experience, that even before it could be grasped in the form of a *cogito*, prior significations, in some ways already spoken, were circulating in the world, scattering it all about us, and from the outset made possible a sort of primitive recognition.

The third theme is that of *universal mediation*, or the idea of a *logos* pervading the global domain of discourse with ‘essential secrets’ about reality to be revealed. For Foucault,

> The theme of universal mediation is, I believe, yet another manner of eliding the reality of discourse. And this despite appearances. At first sight it would seem that, to discover the movement of a logos everywhere elevating singularities into concepts, finally enabling immediate consciousness to deploy all the rationality in the world, is certainly to place discourse at the centre of speculation. But, in truth, this logos is only another discourse already in operation, or rather, it is things and events themselves which insensibly become discourse in the unfolding of the essential secrets.

Having mentioned different procedures and accompanying factors which control discursive formations, I now move on to the two procedures I said deserved a more detailed discussion.

**d. The Procedure of ‘Will to Truth’ Elaborated**

Among the two procedures of controlling discourse that I have chosen to discuss in detail, I take up the external excluding factor of ‘will to truth’ first, and show how Foucault analyses the limiting role of this structure of power, and shows in different articles and interviews how truth is nothing but a historically constituted political instrument.

**i) The Imperative of Truth and Foucault**

The first thing that one needs to look into before examining the all-pervading ‘will to truth’ is the absolute imperative that society and structures of knowledge accord truth. In a lecture delivered in 1976, Foucault shows how every individual is bound to continuously produce and seek the truth, while the structures of truth themselves decide on the structure of judgmental apparatuses of power like the law. Thus, for Foucault, an individual’s destiny is thoroughly controlled by this imperative of truth, which itself is a construct of power:

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we must speak the truth. We are constrained or condemned to confess or to discover the truth. Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalises, professionalises and rewards its pursuit. In the last analysis, we must produce truth as we must produce wealth, indeed we must produce truth in order to produce wealth in the first place. In another way, we are also subjected to truth in the sense in which it is truth that makes the laws, that produces the true discourse which, at least partially, decides, transmits and itself extends upon the effects of power. In the end, we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power.58

Connecting this to his own enterprise, Foucault shows, in a discussion in 1977, how all his works have been concerned with truth and its 'political history of production':

And, as you well know, I have been given the image of a melancholic historian of prohibitions and repressive power, a-teller of tales with only two categories: insanity and its incarceration, the anomaly and its exclusion, delinquency and its imprisonment. But my problem has always been on the side of another term: truth. How did the power exerted in insanity produce psychiatry's "true" discourse? The same applies to sexuality: to revive the will to know the source of the power exerted upon sex. My aim is not to write the social history of a prohibition but the political history of the production of "truth."59

In the same discussion, Foucault qualifies this political institution of truth further to show how, while traditional political discourse talks about ideology as false consciousness, his business has been to look into the 'politics of truth' as a factor in discursive production:

I would say that this has always been my problem: the effects of power and the production of "truth". I have always felt uncomfortable with this ideological notion which has been used in recent years. It has been used to explain errors or illusions, or to analyze presentations—in short, everything that impedes the formation of true discourse. It has also been used to show the relation between what goes on in people’s heads and their place in the conditions of production. In sum, the economics of untruth. My problem is the politics of truth. I have spent a lot of time dealing with it.60

While, thus, there is no doubt about the absolute imperative of truth, Foucault shows in an interview in 1984 how this truth is multiple and can be used as a weapon of resistance too:

I believe too much in truth not to suppose that there are different truths and different ways of speaking the truth. Of course, one can’t expect the government to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. On the other hand, we can demand of those who govern us a certain truth as to their ultimate aims, the general choices of their tactics, and a number of particular points in their programs: this is the parrhesia (free speech) of the governed, who can and must question those who govern them, in the name of the knowledge, the experience they have, by virtue of being citizens, of what those who govern do, of the meaning of their action, of the decisions they have taken.61
ii) History, Society and the Will to Truth

In the inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, which I have extensively used, Foucault shows how this political imperative of truth gets translated in history as the division between the true and the false, and this division governs the will to truth and knowledge:

It is, undoubtedly, a historically constituted division. For, even with the sixth-century Greek poets, true discourse—in the meaningful sense—inspiring respect and terror, to which all were obliged to submit, because it held sway over all and was pronounced by men who spoke as of right, according to ritual, meted out justice and attributed to each his rightful share... And yet, a century later, the highest truth no longer resided in what discourse was, nor in what it did: it lay in what was said. The day dawned when truth moved over from the ritualised act—potent and just—of enunciation to settle on what was enunciated in itself: its meaning, its form, its object and its relation to what it referred to: A division emerged between Hesiod and Plato, separating true discourse from false... This historical division has doubtless lent its general form to our will to knowledge.62

The will to truth is thus historically constructed, and accordingly, it depends for its existence on institutional support. Apparatuses of pedagogy like libraries, laboratories, the publication mechanism, and the way in which knowledge is divided, determine its nature. For Foucault,

But this will to truth, like the other systems of exclusion, relies on institutional support: it is both reinforced and accompanied by whole strata of practices such as pedagogy—naturally—the book-system, publishing, libraries, such as the learned societies in the past, and laboratories today. But it is probably even more profoundly accompanied by the manner in which knowledge is employed in a society, the way in which it is exploited, divided and, in some ways, attributed.63

On the other hand, this will to truth itself leads to systems of power and validation in other social formations and representations, like the insistence on verisimilitude in literature, rationality in morality, and the notion of 'Right' in the penal code. Foucault says,

Finally, I believe that this will to knowledge, thus reliant upon institutional support and distribution, tends to exercise a sort of pressure, a power of constraint upon other forms of discourse—I am speaking of our own society. I am thinking of the way Western literature has, for centuries, sought to base itself in nature, in the plausible, upon sincerity and science—in short, upon true discourse. I am thinking, too, of the way economic practices, codified into precepts and recipes—as morality, too—have sought since the eighteenth century, to found themselves, to rationalise and justify their currency, in a theory of wealth and production; I am thinking, again, of the manner in which such prescriptive ensembles as the Penal Code have sought their bases or justifications. For example, the Penal Code started off as a theory of Right; then, from the time of the nineteenth century, people looked for its validation in sociological, psychological, medical and psychiatric knowledge. It is as though the very words of law had no authority in our society, except insofar as they are derived from true discourse.64

This is how the politics of this overbearing imperative for truth expresses itself in a historically constituted division between the true and the false, which in turn gets translated, with assistance from institutions of social power, into the notion of 'will to truth'.

63 Ibid., 343.
64 Ibid., 343.
iii) Power Structures and the Politics of Truth

Thus, truth is inextricably connected to power structures and, as Foucault shows in an interview given in 1977, it induces power in society through its own three-point 'régime':

...truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power... it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its régime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements...the status of those who are charged with saying what is counted as true.65

In addition to its three-point agenda, Foucault shows in the same interview how truth is characterised by five important traits: it is centred on scientific discourses; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement; it undergoes immense diffusion and consumption as it circulates through apparatuses of education and information; its production and transmission are controlled by political apparatuses like the university, army, and the media; and it is the site of political debates and ideological struggles. Foucault sums up as,

‘Truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements.

‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A ‘régime’ of truth.

This régime is not merely ideological or superstructural; it was a condition of the formation and development of capitalism. And it’s the same régime which, subject to certain modifications, operates in the socialist countries.66

This circularity and all pervasive nature of truth make it impossible to ‘emancipate’ truth from the claws of power. For Foucault, the political question of power rests in truth itself:

It’s not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time.

The political question, to sum up, is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness or ideology; it is truth itself.67

For Foucault, therefore, the problem does not consist in identifying what truth is, but in questioning, in a Nietzschean way, the basis and rationality for this procedure of will to truth:

Indeed, truth is no doubt a form of power. And in saying that, I am only taking up one of the fundamental problems of Western philosophy when it poses these questions: Why, in fact, are we attached to the truth? Why the truth rather than lies? Why the truth rather than myth? Why the truth rather than illusion? And I think that, instead of trying to find out what truth, as opposed to error, is, it might be more interesting to take up the problem posed by Nietzsche: how is it that, in our societies, "the truth" has been given this value, thus placing us absolutely under its thrall?68

This is precisely what Foucault does to examine the role of politics in discursive formations.

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66 Ibid., 133.
67 Ibid., 133.
d. *The Procedure of ‘Author-Function’ Elaborated*

Coming to the second procedure of controlling discourse, which I said needed further exposition, i.e. the idea of the ‘author’, I would discuss mainly a lecture delivered before the Society at the Collège de France in 1969, that is prior to the lecture I was initially discussing, translated as ‘What is an Author?’, where Foucault discusses the idea of ‘author’ in detail.

i) **The Importance of the Author**

Foucault begins this lecture by insisting on the importance of author in a discourse, stating that while in *The Order of Things* he had ignored the specificity of authors and ‘had allowed their names to function ambiguously’, now he realizes that ‘This has proved an embarrassment to me’\(^ {69}\). He goes on to add, therefore, how ‘as a privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, and literature, or in the history of philosophy and science, the question of the author demands a more direct response.’\(^ {70}\) He provides for this in the current paper, and says how he would like to analyse the author:

> For the purposes of this paper, I will set aside a sociohistorical analysis of the author as an individual and the numerous questions that deserve attention in this context: how the author was individualized in a culture such as ours; the status we have given the author, for instance, when we began our research into authenticity and attribution; the systems of valorization in which he was included; or the moment when the stories of heroes gave way to an author’s biography; the conditions that fostered the formulation of the fundamental critical category of “the man and his work.” For the time being, I wish to restrict myself to the singular relationship that holds between the author and a text, the manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside and precedes it.\(^ {71}\)

The discussion that follows takes up Foucault’s analysis of this important factor of the author.

ii) **Writing and Death, and the Death of the Author**

Foucault begins his discussion by stating how in the contemporary criticism of Barthes and others, two themes contribute to the disappearance of the writing subject. The first is that of ‘death of the author’, or that writing need not refer to the subjective act of composition, and can sufficiently refer only to itself. About the second theme, which connects writing to death, Foucault shows how this connection turns inwardly to murder the author:

> The second theme is even more familiar: it is the kinship between writing and death. The relationship inverts the age-old conception of Greek narrative or epic, which was designed to guarantee the immortality of a hero... This conception of a spoken or written narrative as a protection against death has been transformed by our culture... Where a work had the duty of creating immortality, it now attains the right to kill, to become the murderer of its author.\(^ {72}\)


\(^{70}\) Ibid., 115.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., 115.

\(^{72}\) Ibid., 115-16.
But, for Foucault this dissolution of the author is quite naïve, and he provides two grounds for investigation into how the category of the 'author' is absolutely necessary in criticism.

The first point Foucault raises is that while contemporary criticism concentrates on the 'work', in terms of its structures and its architectonic forms, rather than in terms of the author's thoughts and experience it articulates, the very notion of a unified 'work' presupposes a person called the 'author' as the creator behind it. The second feature in contemporary criticism, which impedes its own idea of the author's disappearance, is the notion of écriteur, which in its examination of the conditions of a text's spatial dispersion and temporal deployment, instead of the actual act of writing, merely transposes the empirical characteristics of an author to a transcendental anonymity. For Foucault, doing away with the author and conceiving of writing as absence, therefore, revert to transcendental and religious beliefs in a fixed and continuous tradition of the aesthetic principle. And though he does not deny the necessity to undercut the supreme subjectivity of the author, for Foucault, one has to however, study the 'author' as a 'function' and note what its disappearance entails. He says,

'It is obviously insufficient to repeat empty slogans: the author has disappeared; God and man died a common death. Rather, we should reexamine the empty space left by the author's disappearance; we should attentively observe, along its gaps and fault lines, its new demarcations, and the reapportionment of this void; we should await the fluid functions released by this disappearance.'

iii) The Name of the Author as a Function

Talking of the function that the author performs, Foucault notes that it is the name of the author that matters in classifying discourses and awarding them a certain form of legitimacy. The name of the author does not function as any other proper noun, aimed at only indicating a person. It serves to group together certain texts and distinguish them from others, while also giving them a certain status in the social reception of discourse. For Foucault,

'...an author's name is not simply an element of speech... Its presence is functional in that it serves as a means of classification. A name can group together a number of texts and differentiate them from others... Finally, the author's name characterizes a particular manner of existence of discourse. Discourse that possesses an author's name is not to be immediately consumed and forgotten; neither is it accorded the momentary attention given to ordinary fleeting words. Rather, its status and manner of reception are regulated by the culture in which it circulates.'

This is how author-function works from the inside of a discourse to restrict the otherwise ambiguous forms it is likely to take, in controlling the way a discourse exists. Summing up his view of the author's name as a function, Foucault says, 'the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society.'

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73 Ibid., 121.
74 Ibid., 121-23.
75 Ibid., 124.
iv) Power Structures and Four Features of the Author-Function

To show how it is associated to structures of power, Foucault identifies four features of the ‘author’ as a function of discourse. The first feature is that authorship is an object of appropriation, or that the name of the author can make a discourse a personal possession, with copyright rules defending texts as private property of the author. Foucault says,

First, they are objects of appropriation; the form of property that they have become is of a particular type whose legal codification was accomplished some years ago... In our culture—undoubtedly in others as well—discourse was not originally a thing, a product, or a possession, but an action situated in a bipolar field of sacred and profane, lawful and unlawful, religious and blasphemous... But it was at the moment when a system of ownership and strict copyright were established (toward the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century) that the transgressive properties always intrinsic to the act of writing became the forceful imperative of literature.  

The second feature is that author-function is not universal or constant in all discourse. Foucault notes how, in the Middle Ages, there was no need to mention authorship for ‘literary’ discourses, but it was absolutely essential for ‘scientific’ ones to be considered true. The situation reverses in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from when ‘literary’ discourse was acceptable only if it carried an author’s name, while science could easily dispense with the author. Talking of the same thing in *L’ordre du discours*, Foucault says, 

...the principle does not always play the same role; in the order of scientific discourse, it was, during the Middle Ages, indispensable that a scientific text be attributed to an author, for the author was the index of the work’s truthfulness. A proposition was held to derive its scientific value from the author. But since the seventeenth century this function has been steadily declining; it barely survives now, save to give the name to a theorem, an effect, an example or a syndrome. In literature, however, and from about the same period, the author’s function has become steadily more important.  

The third feature is that author-function is not formed by simply attributing a discourse to an individual, but through an operation whose purpose is to construct the author as a standard, coherent, uniform, and definite locus in history. Citing Saint Jerome’s *De Viris Illustribus*, Foucault shows how attribution of authorship to texts occurs on the basis of these four needs:

According to Saint Jerome, there are four criteria: the texts that must be eliminated from the list of works attributed to a single author are those inferior to the others (thus, the author is defined as a standard level of quality); those whose ideas conflict with the doctrine expressed in the others (here the author is defined as a certain field of conceptual or theoretical coherence); those written in a different style and containing words and phrases not ordinarily found in the other works (the author is seen as a stylistic uniformity); and those referring to events or historical figures subsequent to the death of the author (the author is thus a definite historical figure in which a series of events converge).
The fourth feature of the function is that it does not talk about the actual person being necessarily reflected in the 'work', but talks about a 'plurality of egos', or the necessary 'scission' between the person and his or her function as an author. Foucault says,

It would be as false to seek the author in relation to the actual writer as to the fictional narrator; the "author-function" arises out of their scission—in the division and distance of the two. One might object that this phenomenon only applies to novels or poetry, to a context of "quasi-discourse", but, in fact, all discourse that supports this "author-function" is characterized by this plurality of egos.\(^79\)

Having highlighted the key features of the author-function and having also shown how it connects itself to systems of power and history, Foucault moves next to another function of the author, where the person and his or her name assume a status beyond the discourse itself.

v) Author-Function as 'Transdiscursive': Questions of Origin and the Subject

Foucault shows how the name of the author often does not stay restricted to the domain of a body of texts alone, but moves over to the level of a theory or discipline, thereby assuming a 'transdiscursive' function, as can be noted in the term 'Marxist' being used for systems of governance, ways of life and thought, and so many other things. Foucault says,

I have discussed the author only in the limited sense of a person to whom the production of a text, a book, or a work can be legitimately attributed. However, it is obvious that even within the realm of discourse a person can be the author of much more than a book—of a theory, for instance, of a tradition or a discipline within which new books and authors can proliferate. For convenience, we could say that such authors occupy a "transdiscursive" position.\(^80\)

This transdiscursive function of the author automatically places the author as the originating subject of a whole group of discursive formations, and the author starts to signify a transcendental origin of discourse, warranting from its practitioners, what Foucault calls, a recurrent 'return to the origin'. This stems from a belief, in such transdiscursive cases as Marxism and Freudianism, that a re-examination of the books of Freud and Marx can enhance one's understanding of psychoanalysis or politics. Foucault warns the auditor of such a return to the subject as the origin of discourse, and proposes that the author subject should instead be studied as a 'variable function of discourse'. He ends his lecture saying,

But the subject should not be entirely abandoned. It should be reconsidered, not to restore the theme of an originating subject, but to seize its functions, its intervention in discourse, and its system of dependencies. We should suspend the typical questions: how does a free subject penetrate the density of things and endow them with meaning; how does it accomplish its design by animating the rules of discourse from within? Rather, we should ask: under what conditions and through what forms can an entity like the subject appear in the order of discourse; what position does it occupy; what functions does it exhibit; and what rules does it follow in each type of discourse? In short, the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse.\(^81\)

Having discussed the factors that control discourse, I now turn to the means to resist them.

\(^79\) Ibid., 129-30.  
\(^80\) Ibid., 131.  
\(^81\) Ibid., 137-38.
e. *Means to Debunk these Systems of Control*

I was discussing *L’ordre du Discours* (1971), when I moved on to other sources to look, in greater detail, at two of the procedures that control discourse. After having finished that discussion, I return to the text mentioned above to see how, after typologizing the different procedures, Foucault looks for means to debunk these systems. For Foucault, these procedures succeed in keeping discourse under their command primarily because cultures view discourse with total veneration and suffer from, what he calls, a ‘profound logophobia’:

What civilisation, in appearance, has shown more respect towards discourse than our own? Where has it been more and better honoured? Where have men depended more radically, apparently, upon its constraints and its universal character? But, it seems to me, a certain fear hides behind this apparent supremacy accorded, this apparent logophilia... There is undoubtedly in our society, and I would not be surprised to see it in others, though taking different forms and modes, a profound logophobia, a sort of dumb fear of these events, of this mass of spoken things, of everything that could possibly be violent, discontinuous, querulous, disordered even and perilous in it, of the incessant, disorderly buzzing of discourse.82

Foucault says that to question and resist this fear, one needs to undergo a three-fold task: question our will to truth, restore to discourse its character as event, and end the sovereignty of the signifier, and to achieve this Foucault suggests four methodological principles.

The first principle is what Foucault calls *reversal*, or that categories like author, discipline, and will to truth, which have been traditionally considered as sources of discourse, have to be viewed negatively as agents of segmentation and rarefaction of discourse. He says,

A principle of *reversal*, first of all. Where, according to tradition, we think we recognise the source of discourse, the principles behind its flourishing and continuity, in those factors which seem to play a positive role, such as the author, discipline, will to truth, we must rather recognise the negative activity of the cutting-out and rarefaction of discourse.83

The second principle is that of *discontinuity*, or that discourses must be considered as a ‘series’ of discontinuous ‘events’ that intersect, juxtapose and exclude one another, rather than continuous formations based on ‘unsaid’ or ‘unthought’ *a priori*. For Foucault,

Next, then the principle of *discontinuity*. The existence of systems of rarefaction does not imply that, over and beyond them lie great vistas of limitless discourse, continuous and silent, repressed and driven back by them, making it our task to abolish them and at last to restore it to speech. Whether talking in terms of speaking or thinking, we must not imagine some unsaid thing, or an unthought, floating about the world, interlacing with all its forms and events. Discourse must be treated as a discontinuous activity, its different manifestations sometimes coming together, but just as easily unaware of, or excluding each other.84

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83 Ibid., 354.

84 Ibid., 354.
The third principle is of specificity, or that discourse is not a system of a priori significations, but the result of a regularity arrived at through human practice imposed on things:

The principle of specificity declares that a particular discourse cannot be resolved by a prior system of significations; that we should not imagine that the world presents us with a legible face, leaving us merely to decipher it; it does not work hand in glove with what we already know; there is no prediscursive fate disposing the world in our favour. We must conceive discourse as a violence that we do to things, or, at all events, as a practice we impose upon them; it is in this practice that the events of discourse find the principle of their regularity.85

The fourth principle is that of exteriority, or that one must not proceed from the body of discourse to some concealed inner meaning, but move from its regularity to its ‘external conditions of existence’, looking for the series of events that constitutes it, and its limits:

The fourth principle, that of exteriority, holds that we are not to burrow to the hidden core of discourse, to the heart of the thought or meaning manifested in it; instead, taking the discourse itself, its appearance and its regularity, that we should look for its external conditions of existence, for that which gives rise to the chance series of these events and fixes its limits.86

These four principles give rise to, as Foucault shows, four terms: event, series, regularity, and conditions of existence, which oppose, term by term, the notions of creation, unity, originality and signification, which have dominated the history of ideas so far.

As the regulatory principles of analysis, then, we have four notions: event, series, regularity and the possible conditions of existence. Term for term we find the notion of event opposed to that of creation, the possible conditions of existence opposing signification. These four notions (signification, originality, unity, creation) have, in a fairly general way, dominated the traditional history of ideas; by general agreement one sought the point of creation, the unity of a work, of a period or a theme, one looked also for the mark of individual originality and the infinite wealth of hidden meanings.87

For Foucault, discourse is generally considered as an original unified significant creation, and resistance to systems of power that control discourses, can come from reversing this trend.

f. History, Events, and two Types of Analysis

Foucault observes that this project of his is bound to have impact on the domain of historiography, and notes how his type of work involves a revision of its basic premises too:

History has long since abandoned its attempts to understand events in terms of cause and effect in the formless unity of some great evolutionary process, whether vaguely homogeneous or rigidly hierarchised... The fundamental notions now imposed upon us are no longer those of consciousness and continuity (with their correlative problems of liberty and causality), nor are they those of sign and structure. They are notions, rather, of events and of series, with the groups of notions linked to these; it is around such an ensemble that this analysis of discourse I am thinking of is articulated, certainly not upon those traditional themes which the philosophers of the past took for ‘living’ history, but on the effective work of historians.88

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85 Ibid., 354.
86 Ibid., 354.
87 Ibid., 355.
88 Ibid., 355-56.
These facts about history mean that discourse can only be treated as ‘sets of discursive events’. This ‘event’ belongs neither to the order of bodies, nor is immaterial; it belongs to the order of what Foucault calls ‘an incorporeal materialism’. Moreover, since the idea of a ‘discontinuous’ series abandons notions of mechanical causality or ideal necessity, the category of unpredictability gets introduced into the production of events. Thus, three notions of ‘materiality’, ‘discontinuity’ and ‘chance’ become most salient in understanding discourse:

Events have their place; they consist in relation to, coexistence with, dispersion of, the cross-checking accumulation and the selection of material elements; it occurs an effect of, and in, material dispersion. Let us say that the philosophy of the event should advance in the direction, at first sight paradoxical, of an incorporeal materialism... Here we are not dealing with a succession of instants in time, nor with the plurality of thinking subjects; what is concerned are those caesurae breaking the instant and dispersing the subject in a multiplicity of possible positions and functions...we must conceive...a theory of discontinuous systematisation. Finally, if it is true that these discursive, discontinuous series have their regularity within certain limits, it is clearly no longer possible to establish mechanically causal links or an ideal necessity among their constitutive elements. We must accept the introduction of chance as a category in the production of events... I fear I recognise...a tiny (odious, too, perhaps) device permitting the introduction, into the very roots of thought, of notions of chance, discontinuity and materiality.99

Keeping all this in mind, Foucault proposes two types of analysis: one ‘critical’, which questions the different types of procedures that control discourse, and the other ‘genealogical’, which questions the very basis of such power play in discursive formations:

Following these principles, and referring to this overall view, the analyses I intend to undertake fall into two groups. On the one hand, the ‘critical’ group which sets the reversal principle to work. I shall attempt to distinguish the forms of exclusion, limitation and appropriation of which I was speaking earlier... On the other hand, the ‘genealogical’ group, which brings the three other principles into play: how series of discourse are formed, through, in spite of, or with the aid of these systems of constraint: what were the specific norms of each, and what were their conditions of appearance, growth and variation.99

For Foucault, the critical and genealogical descriptions of discourse complement each other. The critical side of the analysis deals with the systems enveloping discourse, while the genealogical side deals with series of effective formation of discourse in relation to power.

Thus, we come to the end of Foucault’s discussion of how power structures repress and control discourse. Ideally, I should have moved on to the second ontological point—how Foucault talks of other discourses and perceives power to be not unilaterally repressive—but this I reserve as the conclusion to this chapter and the means to move on to the next theme in Foucault, of discussing the role of hierarchies in the socio-politico-economic material domain. So, I move next to the post-1968 Foucauldian ethics or what the intellectual should do to resist the play of politics in the mental domain of discursive formations, instead.

89 Ibid., 356.
90 Ibid., 356-57.
IV. The Intellectual’s Role in Unmasking Discursive Hierarchies

a. Rationality, Power, and the Role of the Intellectual

To analyse the ethics of the post-1968 Foucauldian understanding of the role of power in the domain of discourse, I would first turn to how Foucault views ‘reason’ as a weapon of power, and how he connects the philosopher or the intellectual to this overwhelming play of ‘rationality’. In an interview given in 1983, Foucault notices how ‘modern’ philosophy began with Kant and his question ‘Was ist Aufklärung?’ (What is Enlightenment?), articulated in his 1784 text by the same name. This basic question, which tries to seek the foundations of reason during the eighteenth century, gets further accentuated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so much so that the whole of Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School is based on this question. Thus, for Foucault, the intellectual’s questioning of power structures in discourse is rooted in this questioning of rationality. He says,

I would say that perhaps if modern philosophy (that is of the 19th and 20th centuries) derives in great part from the Kantian question, “Was ist Aufklärung?” …then, the function of 19th century consisted in asking, “What is this moment when reason accedes to autonomy? What is the meaning of a history of reason and what value can be ascribed to the ascendency of reason in the modern world through these three great forms: scientific thought, technical apparatus and political organization?”… Now in Germany this question “What is the history of reason, of rational forms in Europe?”…[appeared] in the current of thought which runs from Max Weber to Critical Theory… From Max Weber to Habermas. And the same question arises here. How do matters stand with the history of reason, with the ascendency of reason, and with the different forms in which this ascendency operates?

Foucault further shows, in a lecture delivered in 1979, how while the task of Enlightenment was to accord unsurpassable powers to reason, the primary role of philosophy and the intellectual in modern times has been to question and keep a check on this power itself:

One of the Enlightenment’s tasks was to multiply reason’s political powers. But the men of the nineteenth century soon started wondering whether reason weren’t getting too powerful in our societies. They began to worry about a relationship they confusedly suspected between a rationalization-prone society and certain threats to the individual and his liberties, to the species and its survival…since Kant, the role of philosophy has been to prevent reason going beyond the limits of what is given in experience; but from the same moment—that is, from the development of modern states and political management of society—the role of philosophy has also been to keep watch over the excessive powers of political rationality—which is rather a promising life expectancy.

Foucault goes on to demonstrate, in the same lecture, how among the several factors that determine power, the most important one is the force with which all types of exploitation and hierarchies are rationalized and established as true. The resistant political task of the intellectual thus lies in questioning the forces of this rationalization of power structures:

As for all relations among men, many factors determine power. Yet rationalization is also constantly working away at it... The government of men by men—whether they form small or large groups, whether it is power exerted by men over women, or by adults over children, or by one class over another, or by a bureaucracy over a population—involves a certain type of rationality. It doesn’t involve instrumental violence... Consequently, those who resist or rebel against a form of power cannot merely be content to denounce violence or criticize an institution. Nor is it enough to cast the blame on reason ion general. What has to be questioned is the form of rationality at stake... The question is: how are such relations of power rationalized?93

The political role of the intellectual thus consists of not a critique of ideology, but of unveiling, as Foucault states in an interview given in 1977, the politics of rationality that finally leads to the political production of ‘truth’ under a discursive régime. He says,

The essential political problem for the intellectual is not to criticise the ideological contents supposedly linked to science, or to ensure that his own scientific practice is accompanied by a correct ideology, but that of ascertaining a possibility of constituting a new politics of truth. The problem is not changing people’s consciousnesses—or what’s in their heads—but the political, economic, institutional régime of the production of truth.94

b. A History of the Role of the Intellectual in Society

Having examined this idea of the basic role of the intellectual, I will now study how Foucault traces the same down history, and how he envisages a new role for him or her. In his 1961 article, ‘Le non du père’ (which being pre-1968, does not contain any revolutionary insight into the role of the intellectual, but analyses the changing role of the artist down history), Foucault shows how as Europe got Christianized artists began to be named for the first time, to make heroes out them, who could produce a ‘double’ of this world:

The Renaissance attitude towards the artist’s individuality combined an epic perception which derived from the already archaic form of the medieval hero to the Greek themes of the initiatory cycle, and at their boundary appeared the ambiguous and overdetermined structures of enigma and discovery, of the intoxicating force of illusion, of a return to nature that is basically other, and of an access to new lands revealed as the same. The artist was able to emerge from the age-old anonymity of epic singers only by usurping the power and meaning of the same epic values. The heroic dimension passed from the hero to the one whose task it had been to represent him at a time when Western culture itself became a world of representations.95

For Foucault, this heroic and prophetic role of the artist still lingers on in European imagination, and this is the model people tend to fit the intellectual in. Foucault says, however, in a discussion in 1977, how he envisages a totally different role for the intellectual, where he or she can risk his or her life and think about the feasibility of the revolution:

93 Ibid., 84.
The Greek wise man, the Jewish prophet, the Roman legislator are still models that haunt those who, today, practice the profession of speaking and writing. I dream of the intellectual who destroys evidence and generalities, the one who, in the inertias and constraints of the present time, locates and marks the weak points, the openings, the lines of force, who is incessantly on the move, doesn’t know exactly where he is heading nor what he will think tomorrow for he is too attentive to the present; who, wherever he moves, contributes to posing the question of knowing whether the revolution is worth the trouble, and what kind (I mean, what revolution and what trouble), it being understood that the question can be answered only by those who are willing to risk their lives to bring it about.  

Foucault according, thus, a most revolutionary role to the intellectual of his choice, I propose to study now the two types of intellectuals Foucault classifies on the basis of this new role.

c. **Two Types of Intellectual: the 'Universal', the 'Specific'**

Based on the role he or she adopts, Foucault classifies intellectuals into two types—the ‘universal’ intellectual, who like a philosopher of erstwhile days tries to talk of life in general and educate people about global problems of reality; and the ‘specific’ intellectual, who works as a professional in a particular field, but instead of accepting the *a priori* of that profession, takes up a critical role of questioning the foundations of that field. In an interview given in 1977, Foucault presents these two types of ‘leftist’ intellectuals saying,

> For a long period, the ‘left’ intellectual spoke and was acknowledged the right of speaking in the capacity of master of truth and justice. He was heard, or purported to make himself heard, as the spokesman of the universal... The intellectual is thus taken as the clear, individual figure of a universality, whose obscure, collective form is embodied in the proletariat.

> Some years have now passed since the intellectual was called upon to play this role. A new mode of the ‘connection between theory and practice’ has been established. Intellectuals have got used to working... This has undoubtedly given them a much more immediate and concrete awareness of struggles... This is what I would call the ‘specific’ intellectual as opposed to the ‘universal’ intellectual.

Foucault does not undermine the progressive role of the ‘universal’ intellectual, and shows how he or she is definitely different from those intellectuals who serve the cause of dominant power, and are just ‘competent instances in the service of the State or Capital'. He notes, however, that the ‘universal’ intellectual is mostly a sort of a universal consciousness, a free subject, whereas the ‘specific’ intellectual indulges in a domain of specific activity, thereby knowing, first hand, the politics and possible means of struggle in the concerned apparatus, and having the possibility of becoming much more effective in resistant political practice.

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98 Ibid., 127.
Foucault tries next to identify these two types of intellectuals with different figures in the history of Western thought. He identifies the ‘universal’ intellectual with the lawyer and the writer, but notes that the ‘specific’ intellectual belongs to a totally different trope:

It is possible to suppose that the ‘universal’ intellectual, as he functioned in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries was in fact derived from a quite specific historical figure: the man of justice, the man of law, who counterposes to power, despotism and the abuses and arrogance of wealth the universality of justice and the equity of an ideal law...The ‘universal’ intellectual...finds his fullest manifestation in the writer... The ‘specific’ intellectual derives from quite another figure, not the jurist or notable, but the savant or expert... He is no longer the rhapsodist of the eternal, but the strategist of life and death.99

He identifies the emergence of the ‘specific’ intellectual with post-Darwinian evolutionism:

No doubt it’s with Darwin or rather with the post-Darwinian evolutionists that this figure [of the ‘specific’ intellectual] begins to appear clearly. The stormy relationship between evolutionism and socialists, as well as the highly ambiguous effects of evolutionism (on sociology, criminology, psychiatry and eugenics, for example) mark the important moment when the savant begins to intervene in contemporary political struggles in the name of a ‘local’ scientific truth... Historically, Darwin represents this point of inflection in the history of the Western intellectual.100

Foucault ends his discussion by identifying the three domains of class position, conditions and work, and the politics of truth as the domains in which this specificity gets constructed:

...the intellectual has a three-fold specificity: that of his class position (whether as petty-bourgeois in the service of capitalism or ‘organic’ intellectual of the proletariat); that of his conditions of life and work, linked to his condition as an intellectual (his field of research, his place in a laboratory, the political and economic demands to which he submits or against which he rebels, in the university, the hospital, etc.); lastly the specificity of the politics of truth in our society. And it’s with this last factor that his position can take on a general significance and that his local, specific struggle can have effects which are not simply professional or sectoral.101

Now, I finally proceed to discuss what the intellectual can do in resistant political practice.

d. The Intellectual and Resistant Political Practice

In a conversation with Deleuze in 1972, Foucault notes how the traditional role of the intellectual has been of conscience, defined by his or her class position and relation to truth:

It seems to me that the political involvement of the individual was traditionally the product of two different aspects of his activity: his position as an intellectual in bourgeois society, in the system of capitalist production and within the ideology it produces or imposes (his exploitation, poverty, rejection, persecution, the accusations of subversive activity, immorality, etc.); and his proper discourse to the extent that it revealed a particular truth, that it disclosed political relationships where they were unsuspected. These two forms of politicization did not exclude each other, but, being of a different order, neither did they coincide... The intellectual spoke the truth to those who had yet to see it, in the name of those who were forbidden to speak the truth: he was conscience, consciousness, and eloquence.102

99 Ibid., 128-29.
100 Ibid., 129.
101 Ibid., 132.
However, he notes, in the same conversation, how 1968 saw to a change in this role of the intellectual, so that now he or she can only struggle on a same footing with the masses:

In the most recent upheaval, the intellectual discovered that the masses no longer need him to gain knowledge... Intellectuals are themselves agents of this system of power—the idea of their responsibility for “consciousness” and discourse forms part of the system. The intellectual’s role is no longer to place himself “somewhat ahead and to the side” in order to express that stifled truth of the collectivity; rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of “knowledge”, “truth”, “consciousness”, and “discourse”.

Thus, as Foucault observes in an interview given in 1975, the intellectual can no longer play the role of ‘advisor’ in political practice, but can only act as an analyst and strategist:

The intellectual no longer has to play the role of an advisor... What the intellectual can do is to provide instruments of analysis, and at present this is the historian’s essential role... In other words, a topological and geological survey of the battlefield—that is the intellectual’s role.

Foucault elucidates this strategic role of the intellectual in an interview given in 1971, saying that as opposed to the humanistic project of changing the ideological system without changing institutions, and the reformatory project of changing institutions without altering the ideology, ‘revolutionary action’ proposes to alter both these foundations:

...humanism is based on the desire to change the ideological system without altering institutions; and reformers wish to change the institution without touching the ideological system. Revolutionary action, on the contrary, is defined as the simultaneous agitation of consciousness and institutions; this implies that we attack the relationships of power through the notions and institutions that function as their instruments, armature, and armor.

Thus, for the political role Foucault accords the intellectual, theory itself becomes practice and means for local and regional struggles. Foucault says in his conversation with Deleuze,

In this sense, theory does not express, translate, or serve to apply practice: it is practice. But it is local and regional, as you said, and not totalizing... It is not to “awaken consciousness” that we struggle (the masses have been aware for some time that consciousness is a form of knowledge; and consciousness as the basis of subjectivity is the prerogative of the bourgeoisie), but to sap power, to take power; it is an activity conducted alongside those who struggle for power, and not their illumination from a safe distance. A “theory” is the regional system of this struggle.

This insistence on political practice being regional takes one to the second ontological point about multiplicity of power, which I had left aside for some time, and will now take up as the conclusion to this chapter and a move onward to the remaining two chapters of this section.

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103 Ibid., 207-08.
106 Michel Foucault, ‘Intellectuals and Power’ (a conversation between Foucault and Deleuze, March 4, 1972, in L’Arc, No. 49. pp. 3-10), trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, in Ibid., 208.
V. Conclusion: Towards a Regional Understanding of Power

a. Disclaiming the Earlier Repressive Hypothesis

As I have already stated, the ontology of Foucault's understanding of the role of power in discourse has two parts to it. I have discussed in detail the first phase when Foucault thought that power structures repressively control discourse through different 'procedures'.

Now I take up the second phase, where Foucault reverts a lot of his earlier postulates to show how power is of a regional nature and not necessarily repressive. In an interview given in 1977, Foucault foregoes his earlier obsession for a systematic truth saying how he has always written 'fictions', and how fiction itself can, subversively generate truth:

I am well aware that I have never written anything but fictions. I do not mean to say, however, that truth is therefore absent. It seems to me that the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth, for a fictional discourse to induce effects of truth, and for bringing it about that a true discourse engenders or 'manufactures' something that does not as yet exist, that is, 'fictions' it. One 'fictions' history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one 'fictions' a politics not yet in existence on the basis of a historical truth.¹⁰⁷

Foucault says in the same interview how he would like to 'discard' all the categories presented in *L'ordre du discours*, because their primary assumption was a repressive and prohibitory role of power, while now he would talk about its more multiple functioning:

I think that in *The Order of Discourse* I conflated two concepts... It was a piece I wrote at a moment of transition. Till then, it seems to me, I accepted the traditional conception of power as an essentially judicial mechanism, as that which lays down the law, which prohibits, which refuses, and which has a whole range of negative effects: exclusion, rejection, denial, obstruction, occultation, etc. Now I believe that conception to be inadequate... So I would be only too glad to discard everything in *The Order of Discourse* which might seem to identify the relations of power to discourse with negative mechanisms of selection.¹⁰⁸

In an interview given in 1976, Foucault shows how this change in perspective entails a study of strategies and tactics of power, thereby comprising what he calls 'a sort of geopolitics':

The longer I continue, the more it seems to me that the formation of discourse and the genealogy of knowledge need to be analysed, not in terms of types of consciousness, modes of perception and forms of ideology, but in terms of tactics and strategies of power. Tactics and strategies deployed through implantations, distributions, demarcations, control of territories and organisations of domains which could well make up a sort of geopolitics...¹⁰⁹

This brings us to the notion of space, one of the subjugated paradigms in analysis, and I would see how Foucault insists on the importance of space vis-à-vis the monolithic dominance of time to move over to his changed notion of multiplicity of power.


b. Study of Space as Opposed to Monolithic Time

I have stated earlier how Foucault proposes a study of subjugated categories of knowledge, and I have also seen how this is connected to his later changed notion of power. The study of subjugated principles of knowledge gets articulated best in Foucault’s obsession with space as a category of knowledge. His first book-length work of the post-1968 phase, *Discipline and Punish (Surveiller et punir, 1975)*, which I discuss in the next chapter, deals extensively with the architecture of prisons, barracks, hostels, and workhouses. In a conversation recorded in 1977, which has also been published as the ‘Preface’ to the French translation of Bentham’s *Panopticon* (1791), Foucault shows how architecture as the discourse of allocation of space has always been connected to economico-political needs:

> Previously, the art of building corresponded to the need to make power, divinity and might manifest... Its development was for long centred on these requirements. Then, late in the eighteenth century, new problems emerge: it becomes a question of using the disposition of space for economico-political needs...the house remains until the eighteenth century an undifferentiated space. There are rooms: one sleeps, eats, receives visitors in them, it doesn’t matter which. Then gradually space becomes specified and functional... The working class family is to be fixed; by assigning it a living space with a room that serves as kitchen and dining-room, a room for the parents which is the place for procreation, and a room for the children, one prescribes a form of morality for the family.

Similarly, in a 1976 article, Foucault discusses the hospital in terms of the politics of space:

> The point is that in relation to these new problems the hospital appears in many respects as an obsolete structure. A fragment of space closed in on itself, a place of internment of men and diseases, its ceremonious but inept architecture multiplying the ills in its interior without preventing their outward diffusion, the hospital is more the seat of death for the cities where it is sited than a therapeutic agent for the population as a whole.

What this entails, and what Foucault articulates in his ‘Preface’ to Bentham, is that history has to be concerned with the neglected category of space to understand truly the role of ‘powers’:

> A whole history remains to be written of spaces—which could at the same time be the history of powers (both these terms in the plural)—from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat, institutional architecture from the classroom to the design of hospitals, passing via economic and political installations... Anchorage in space is an economico-political form which needs to be studied in detail.

This privileging of space brings Foucault directly in opposition with dominant critical discourse which lays emphasis on time alone. In a 1976 interview, Foucault shows how space, and not the monolith of time alone, can elucidate the nature of dissemination of power:

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People have often reproached me for these spatial obsessions, which have indeed been obsessions for me. But I think through them I did come to what I had been basically looking for: the relations that are possible between power and knowledge. Once knowledge can be analysed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transposition, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power. Anyone envisaging the analysis of discourses solely in terms of temporal continuity would inevitably be led to approach and analyse it like the internal transformation of an individual consciousness. Which would lead to his erecting a great collective consciousness as the scene of events.\(^\text{113}\)

The fact that, in spite of it being an essential category towards the understanding of power, space has been subjugated under the overwhelming regime of time, implies a political exclusion, and Foucault, in the preface to Bentham, shows how the take-over of space, at the end of the eighteenth century, by physics and state-politics, left philosophy to time alone:

> At the moment when a considered politics of spaces was starting to develop, at the end of the eighteenth century, the new achievements in theoretical and experimental physics dislodged philosophy from its ancient right to the world, the cosmos, finite or infinite space. This double investment of space by political technology and scientific practice reduced philosophy to the field of a problematic of time.\(^\text{114}\)

Foucault’s foregrounding of space is not just fighting for a particular subjugated category of knowledge, but trying to frame an alternate political strategy. It can be noted that this use of space is quite in opposition to Althusser’s critique in \textit{Reading Capital} of Marx’s use of spatial metaphors in his base-superstructure model. For Althusser, spatial metaphors are unscientific, regressive and non-rigorous, and so Foucault’s penchant for the same indicates a moving away from the contemporary Althusserian line to what would be more elementally Marxian.

Launching a veiled attack against Althusser, in an interview in 1976, Foucault shows how his obsession with temporality, ideology and consciousness, and his consideration of space as ‘anti-history’, is inadequate to understand the multiple and local nature of powers:

> For all those who confuse history with the old schemas of evolution, living continuity, organic development, the progress of consciousness or the project of existence, the use of spatial terms seem to have an air of anti-history. If one started to talk in terms of space that meant one was hostile to time... They didn’t understand that to trace the forms of implantation, delimitation and demarcation of objects, the modes of tabulation, the organisation of domains meant the throwing into relief of processes—historical ones, needless to say—of power. The spatialising description of discursive realities gives on to the analysis the related effects of power.\(^\text{115}\)

Foucault’s reliance on space as a category necessary to understand the machinations of power started as an attempt to uphold the case of a subjugated knowledge, but soon, as I showed, it leads on to a distinction between two conceptions of power, and now I will analyse these two hypotheses of power and see how Foucault comes up with his notion of ‘capillary’ power.


c. *The Reich’s and Nietzsche’s Hypotheses on Power*

Traditionally conceptions of power are considered to be of two types: the juridical or ‘liberal’ conception of the *philosophes* of the eighteenth century, and the commonsensical Marxist conception. Foucault, however, notes, in a lecture given in 1976, a common point between these two views in their reliance on ‘economism’. For the juridical theory, power is considered a right, which one can possess like a commodity, and can transfer or alienate through a legal act or contract, while the generally accepted Marxist theory bases itself wholly on an economic functionality of power. Foucault, however, raises two sets of questions:

...in the first place, is power always in a subordinate position relative to the economy? Is it always in the service of, and ultimately answerable to, the economy?...In the second place is power modelled upon the commodity? Is it something one possesses, acquires, cedes through force or contract, that one alienates or recovers, that circulates, that voids this or that region?16

Implying a negative answer to all these queries, Foucault shows how, opposed to this juridico-Marxist economistic conception of power, there is another conception of power, for which it exists only in action as a relation of force. In the same lecture, Foucault shows how the former model views power as merely repressive and labels it ‘Reich’s hypothesis’, while the latter views power as acting in a multiplicity of forces and is labelled as ‘Nietzsche’s hypothesis’. Talking of these two hypotheses on power, Foucault says,

So, no sooner do we attempt to liberate ourselves from economistic analyses of power, than two solid hypotheses offer themselves: the one argues that the mechanisms of power are those of repression. For convenience sake, I shall term this Reich’s hypothesis. The other argues that the basis of the relationship of power lies in the hostile engagement of forces. Again for convenience, I shall call this Nietzsche’s hypothesis.17

This multiplicity of power and its being locatable in a constant engagement of forces, as per the ‘Nietzsche’s hypothesis’, itself suggests that power cannot sustain itself through a mere unilateral repressive means. To perpetrate itself in all its multiplicity, power needs to produce and circulate discourse, the regional conception of power thus automatically leading to the non-repressive hypothesis, where power does not only repress discourse but generates it.

Summing it up, Foucault says in another lecture delivered in 1976,

...there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.18

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d. The Capillary Model of Power as Non-Repressive

An attempt to understand the role of power structures in the discursive domain of mentality in Foucault, thus takes a dramatic turn, where one need not formulate a global systematic theory of repressive control of discourses by power, but look into how power, in its specificity, also generates discourses as strategies. In a 1977 interview, Foucault says,

The role of theory today seems to me to be just this: not to formulate the global systematic theory which holds everything in place, but to analyse the specificity of mechanisms of power, to locate the connections and extensions, to build little by little a strategic knowledge (savoir).119

Foucault names this new conception of power, as multiple and not necessarily repressive, the ‘capillary model’, and defines it in his 1976 lecture already quoted above, as an understanding of power as decentralized, local and omnipresent, just like capillaries of the body:

In the first place, it seemed important to accept that the analysis in question should not concern itself with the regulated and legitimate forms of power in their central locations, with the general mechanisms through which they operate, and the continual effects of these. On the contrary, it should be concerned with power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, with those points where it becomes capillary, that is, in its more regional and local forms and institutions.120

The point already elaborated above, as to how the regional conception of power automatically translates to an understanding of it as not necessarily repressive, gets further strengthened within the domain of capillary power, because it is very difficult to identify the agency of exercise of power within a decentralized multiple schema, and agency is absolutely essential for a repressive model of power. In a conversation with Deleuze, Foucault shows how this unidentifiability of the agency of power makes one turn to its capillary points of ‘relays’:

Theories of government and the traditional analyses of their mechanisms certainly don’t exhaust the field where power is exercised and where it functions. The question of power remains a total enigma. Who exercises power? And in what sphere?... We should also investigate the limits imposed on the exercise of power—the relays through which it operates and the extent of its influence on the often insignificant aspects of the hierarchy and the forms of control, surveillance, prohibition, and constraint.121

With this impossibility of identifying the concrete agency of power in mind, Foucault remarks, in the same conversation, how there need not be a direct correlation between vested interests and the exercise of power, thereby, corollarily, it not being necessary that power is consciously and ideologically used by an agency to forward its interests and repress others:

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As you say, the relationship between desire, power, and interest are more complex than we ordinarily think, and it is not necessarily those who exercise power who have an interest in its execution; nor is it always for those with vested interests to exercise power.\textsuperscript{122}

This disjunction between interests and the exercise of power leads one to the Foucauldian understanding of capillary power as non-repressive. In a 1977 interview, how power can hold itself, in spite of all odds, by adopting a non-forcible, non-repressive, productive model:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.\textsuperscript{123}

It is this 'productive network' as opposed to a negative repressive function, and local nature as opposed to a global systematic, that characterize Foucault's 'capillary' model of power.

Connecting this notion of power with the type of analysis of knowledge he does in this phase, Foucault shows in a 1983 interview, how his works do not refer to a dominating and totalitarian concept of 'Power', do not construct 'a theory of Power', but analyse the numerous small 'power relations', which connect an individual subject to its local truth:

...when I speak of power relations...I am not referring to Power—with a capital P—dominating and imposing its rationality upon the totality of the social body. In fact, there are power relations. They are multiple ... in studying these power relations, I in no way construct a theory of Power. But I wish to know how the reflexivity of the subject and the discourse of truth are linked—"How can the subject tell the truth about itself?"—and I think that relations of power exerting themselves upon one another constitute one of the determining elements in this relation I am trying to analyze.\textsuperscript{124}

Thus, for Foucault, an analysis of discourses of language and knowledge, that is in the domain of mentality that this chapter proposed to study, can be studied neither from a Hegelian dialectical perspective, nor from a Platonic semiotic one, but only, as he implies in a 1977 interview, in one that involves an understanding of the capillary power working in them:

Neither the dialectic, as logic of contradictions, nor semiotics, as the structure of communication, can account for the intrinsic intelligibility of conflicts. 'Dialectic' is a way of evading the always open and hazardous reality of conflict by reducing it to a Hegelian skeleton, and 'semiology' is a way of avoiding its violent, bloody and lethal character by reducing it to the calm Platonic form of language and dialogue.\textsuperscript{125}
e. GIP and Pierre Rivière: a Shift from Discourse to Penalty

The discussion in the last forty-odd pages has examined how Foucault becomes politically more involved after 1968, and gives his conception of the tripartite nature of substrata of social formations and representations a truly political turn, thereby making his erstwhile tripartition graduate to an understanding of *tri-hierarchization*. It has also taken up, as a specific case, Foucault’s understanding of the role of hierarchies in the ‘mental’ significational domain of linguistic discourse and modes of philosophical analysis, and studied the nature and roles of power Foucault unearths through a genealogical method. However, the discussion would be deemed incomplete, if it cannot show a passing over from the domain of mentality to the socio-politico-economic domain of materiality, thereby leading to an understanding of all the three domains of hierarchization. While the notion of capillary power, and the last quote, which gives a call to the critic to come out of insulated linguistic and philosophical modes of analysis, already point to a moving over to the domain of power in social structures, I observe now, how specifically, Foucault carries over his analyses of linguistic discourses and talks about the same in a university situation to an engagement with actual material instances of power, as articulated through the institution of penalty.

In 1970, massive agitations broke out among leftist political prisoners in France, and in response to this, Foucault and some other intellectuals started the Groupe d’Information sur les Prison (GIP), which drew up a questionnaire and distributed it amongst prisoners and their relatives. Though Foucault dissolved the group by the end of 1972, his subsequent works were influenced so strongly by this involvement, that in 1971-72, Foucault introduced a new course at the Collège de France titled ‘Penal Theories and Institutions’. In a description of this course, he carries his notion of non-repressive capillary power into the domain of penalty:

> The working hypothesis will be this: power relations (with the struggles that traverse them or the institutions that maintain them) do not only play with respect to knowledge a facilitating or obstructing role; they are not content merely to encourage or to stimulate it, to distort or to limit it; power and knowledge are not linked together solely by the play of interests or ideologies; the problem is not therefore that of determining how power subjugates knowledge and makes it serve its ends, or how it imprints its mark on knowledge, imposes on it ideological contents and limits. No body of knowledge can be formed without a system of communication, records, accumulation and displacement which is in itself a form of power and which is linked, in its existence and functioning to the other forms of power. Conversely, no power can be exercised without the extraction, appropriation, distribution or intention of knowledge. On this level, there is not knowledge on the one side and society on the other, or science and the state, but only the fundamental forms of knowledge/power...\(^{126}\)

This shift can be read as Foucault’s appropriation of the ‘mental’ space of knowledge, as present in a university structure, to an understanding of power in the domain of materiality.

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While conducting research for this course, Foucault came across the case of Pierre Rivière, a twenty year old Norman peasant convicted in 1836 of murdering his pregnant mother, his eighteen year old sister and seventeen year old brother, and also found a forty-page document written by Rivière himself about his crime. Foucault organized a seminar on the case and the text and, with the collaboration of ten others, published in 1973 a volume called *Moi, Pierre Rivière, ayant égorgé ma mère, ma soeur et mon frère...* (translated as *I, Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister and my brother...*, 1975), comprising the piece by the convict, and several articles on the text, including an introduction and an essay by Foucault himself. This volume would ideally mark the second point in Foucault's changeover from the domain of mentality to materiality, where a linguistic discourse, that is the memoirs of Pierre Rivière, can lead on to speculations about power in the socio-politico-economic domain of penality. I will now briefly refer to the memoirs and the two pieces in the volume by Foucault to examine how this shift occurs.

In the memoirs, Pierre Rivière provides a reason for his crime. He shows how his father was tyrannized by his mother and siblings, and therefore he devised their murder, with his subversion of religious and social norms in the process being legitimized, within the discursive space of his memoirs, in a personalization of religion and the law. Rivière writes,

> I wholly forgot the principles which should have made me respect my mother and my sister and my brother, I regarded my father as being in the power of dogs or barbarians against whom I must take up arms, religion forbade such things, but I disregarded its rules, it even seemed to me that God had destined me for this and that I would be executing his justice. I knew the rules of man and the rules of ordered society, but I deemed myself wiser than they, I regarded them as ignoble and shameful. 127

For Foucault, Pierre Rivière's defence of his father against a tyrannical wife can be read as the result of a masculine anxiety, in the age of Enlightenment, for the steadily rising status of women in terms of power. But, what is more interesting than this connection of Rivière's discourse to contemporary power structures, is how the discourse, and the power play it terminated in, emanates from other discursive constructs, so that Rivière justifies his crime in comparing himself to a series of martyrs, including Jesus Christ. For Rivière,

> ... it is not right therefore that I should let a woman live who is disturbing my father's peace and happiness, I thought that an opportunity had come for me to raise myself, that my name would make some noise in the world that by my death I should cover myself with glory and that in time to come my ideas would be adopted and I should be vindicated. 128

This shows how the discursive mental domain, of received knowledge and cultural icons, interacts with the material domain of penality, through the play of power structures.


128 Ibid., 108.
Foucault picks this feature up for analysis, and in his essay included in the volume, makes this a case of turning over from attempts in unearthing hierarchies in representational formations to those that happen in the material actuality of society. In the essay, Foucault shows how Rivière gains a dual subjectivity—one in the material domain of crime, and the other in the mental domain of recalling and discursivizing it—thereby implicating the two plays of power involved, in his exercise of power over his murdered relatives and the consequent exercise of the social power of justice over him, in a connecting role of the discursive mental and the socio-politico-economic material domains. Foucault says,

Pierre Rivière was the subject of the memoir in a dual sense: it was he who remembered, remorselessly remembered it all, and it was he whose memoir summoned the crime, the horrible and glorious crime, to take its place beside so many other crimes. He contrived the engineering of the narrative/murder as both projectile and target, he was propelled by the working of the mechanism into the real murder. And, after all, he was the author of it all in a dual sense; author of the crime and author of the text.²²⁹

Thus, the domains of discourse and penality get inextricably linked in this text by Pierre Rivière, around structures of power, ranging from the individual to the social. It can be noted how several discourses, including Bible stories and murder anecdotes, lead to the execution of the crime, that is the act of power on the part of Rivière, while the crime and the consequent act of power by the confining judicial authorities produce the discourse of the confessional autobiography. Summing up this total connectivity between discourse and society, through the network of mutual production through capillary power, in the ‘Introduction’ to the volume, Foucault shows how all those who participated in the case took part in

...a strange contest, a confrontation, a power relation, a battle among discourses and through discourses...[These discourses] give us a key to the relations of power, domination and conflict within which discourses emerge and function, and hence provide material for a potential analysis of discourse (even of scientific discourses) which may be both tactical and political, and therefore strategic.²³⁰

This is how Foucault moves on, through his conception of capillary power, from the domain of discursive mentality to the role of power in shaping the socio-politico-economic domain of materiality. I also move on from my analysis of the Foucauldian understanding of the role of hierarchies in linguistic formations and bodies of knowledge, which I elaborated in this chapter, to a study of how Foucault envisages a role for the same in the material domain, primarily through a study of penal structures and procedures of social control, in the next. This is how I proceed in search of the principle of tri-hierarchization, so that finally after the end of the three chapters in this section, I can move ‘From Foucault’ to an understanding of politics in social formations and representations in theoretical postulates beyond him.