

Dictionary

for the Study of the Works of Michel Foucault

courtesy of Lois Shawver
last updated 11/05/06

[Click here to read about the history of postmodernism.](#)

[Click here](#) to go to the main postmodern dictionary, of which the Foucault dictionary is only a part.

Aphrodisia

The UNITY of sexual act/pleasure/desire, the very intensity of which causes sexuality to become problematic.

archaeology

"[The] archaeological level -- the level of what made [an event or a situation] possible." (The Order of Things, p.31) Strict analysis of discourse (Dreyfus & Rabinow, p.104) Archaeology and [genealogy](#) alternate and support each other (Dreyfus & Rabinow, p.105). Archaeology is structuralist. It tries to take an objective neutral position and it avoids causal theories of change.

For a richer account of this concept [click here to read a brief paraphrase of the first chapter of Foucault's The Archaeology of Knowledge](#)

binary system

A distinction that is black and white so that things are thought of as only one way or the other. "Power is essentially what dictates its law to sex. Which means first of all that sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden." (The History of Sexuality, p.83).

bio-politics

The increasing state concern with the biological well-being fo the population including disease control and prevention, adequate food and water supply, sanitary shelter, and education. (Foucault 1979, p.170 as cited in Darier, p.587)

If you're a student of Foucault, then you surely know about the postmodern movement and how Foucault critiqued our concept and treatment of mental illness [.Madness and Civilization : A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason \(Vintage\) .](#)

bio-technico-power (or bio-power)

A distinction that is black and white so that things are thought of as only one way or the other. "Power is essentially what dictates its law to sex. Which means first of all that sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden." (The History of Sexuality, p.83). Bio-power emerged as a coherent political technology in the seventeenth century. It has two poles or components. First is the pole of scientific categories of human beings (think of species, population, race, gender, sexual practices, etc.). This pole is tied to the practice of confession. The second pole is [disciplinary power](#) (which he analyzes in Discipline and Punish, chapter 7).

Postmodern empirical research sound like an oxymoron? Then, I suggest you acquaint yourself with: [Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory After the Postmodern Turn](#)

care of the self

The name of the ethical principle that leads people to cultivate themselves, that is to work to improve themselves:

"This 'cultivation of the self' can be briefly characterized by the fact that one must 'take care of oneself.' It is this principle of the care of the self that establishes its necessity, presides over its development, and organizes its practice (Foucault, Care of the Self, p.43). In ancient times this was often understood to involve a "cultivation of the soul" (Foucault, Care of the Self, p.45). In earlier times this was a matter of self-mastery, but over the course of history it became more a matter of learning to shape one's own inner character (Foucault, Care of the Self, p.67)

Chresis

The "use" of aphrodisia; the power of aphrodisia means that it must be used and regulated rightly, this regulation is however PRIMARILY meant to assure pleasure.

commentary

Discourse that paraphrases and explicates the surface meaning of a text. Foucault criticizes commentary for its exaggerated dependence on meaning available to the author. (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 123) (Commentary is to be contrasted with what [Paul Ricoeur](#) calls a "hermeneutics of suspicion" - or comments which are based on our suspicions given information other than that given to us by the author. Understand, however, that for Foucault, the hidden meaning that is uncovered by a hermeneutics of suspicion, that is a [genealogy](#), is not entirely trustworthy either.)

confession

An important component of [bio-power](#). People are taught that their liberation requires them to "tell the truth," to confess it to someone who is more powerful (a priest, a psychoanalyst), and this truth telling will somehow set them free (Dreyfus and Rabinow, p. 141, History of Sexuality, 58-65).

determinism

a condition in which all forms of liberty are gradually suppressed; madness shows us nothing more than the natural constants of a determinism, with the sequences of its causes, and the discursive movement of its forms; for madness threatens modern man only with that return to the bleak world of beasts and things, to their fettered freedom. (Madness and Civilization, p.83)

disciplinary power

A form of surveillance which is internalized. With disciplinary power, each person disciplines him or herself. Disciplinary power is also one of the poles of [bio-power](#). The basic goal of disciplinary power is to produce a person who is docile. (Dreyfus and Rabinow, p.134-135).

This is connected to the rise of capitalism. Disciplinary power is especially important in the policing of sexual confession (Dreyfus and Rabinow, p.141).

disciplinary technologies

Techniques for producing docile people. These are "techniques of discipline." "Without the insertion of disciplined, orderly individuals into the machinery of production, the new demands of capitalism would have been stymied. (Dreyfus and Rabinow, p.135). The aim of disciplinary technology is to forge a "docile [body] that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (1979a)

discontinuity

the fact that within the space of a few years a culture sometimes ceases to think as it had been thinking up till then and begins to think other things in a new way (Order of Things, p.50). Establishing discontinuities is not an easy task even for history in general. And it is certainly even less so for the history of thought. We may wish to draw a dividing-line; but any limit we set may perhaps be no more than an arbitrary division made in a constantly mobile whole. We may wish to mark off a period; but have we the right to establish symmetrical breaks at two points in time in order to give an appearance of continuity and unity to the system we place between them? (Order of things, p.50) .

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- [The Birth of the Clinic](#)
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[chapter of Foucault's The Archaeology of Knowledge](#)

discourse formation

This concept is the subject of chapter 2 of [Archaeology](#) of Knowledge.

He begins with a criticism of the concept that everything with the same label is not the same thing and that the difference between differently labeled things may be a habit of thought. Suppose a society called everything slightly red "red" and grouped purple along with red in the process. And compare this to a society that called everything slightly orange "orange," included red (but not purple) under the category, but also yellow. How would these two societies be able to talk about the color of things? They would be using different language maps to organize colors and a simple translation from one to the other appears simply impossible.

The problem is that within our own language community we fail to notice the way in which we are constituting what we talk about by such arbitrary language practices that have become second nature to us. Studying these discourse formations (or discursive formations) is "[archaeology](#)." We will try to grasp the implicit rules we use that work together to form this map of the world around us.

Without knowing it, we group distinguishable objects into unities and thus constitute our objects. An object is constituted like this by a "[unity of discourse](#)". In Wittgensteinian terms, this might mean by a language game.) The unity of discourse on a particular topic (or object) "would be the interplay of rules that define the transformation of these objects, their non-identity through time, the break produced in them, the internal discontinuity that suspends their permanence ([Archaeology](#) of Knowledge, p.33). For example, we constitute the object of "marriage" by a set of rules that allows us to say that we are "married" together with the interplay of rules that defines the marriage as dissolved (annulled, divorced, non-valid).

Foucault suggests that an [archaeology](#) should examine the way this works, how we control our mental taxonomy through language practices.

For a richer account of this concept [click here to read a brief paraphrase of the first chapter of Foucault's The Archaeology of Knowledge](#)

diseases of power

Foucault names two "diseases of power" fascism and Stalinism (Foucault Afterword, in Dreyfus and Rabinow, p.209) These are "excesses" of power.

dispositif

The concept of an [episteme](#) is insufficient and dispositif fills in the gap. An episteme is researched through the analysis of discourse (text), but there are practices (institutions, architectural arrangements, regulations, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophic propositions, morality, philanthropy) in addition to discourse which we may use to do a genealogical analysis of some particular situation (Dreyfus and Rabinow, p.121). These practices form an intensified surveillance and control mechanism (Darier, 589), creating policy which polices and disciplines and which leads to resistance among certain groups.

discourse

Practices obeying certain rules: "Archaeology tries to define not the thoughts, representations, images, themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourses; but those discourses themselves, those discourses as practices obeying certain rules (The Archaeology of Knowledge, 138)."

For a richer account of this concept [click here to read a brief paraphrase of the first chapter of Foucault's The Archaeology of Knowledge](#)

domination

domination is often indirect. People often feel they are fighting domination when they are yielding to it. Domination is not merely oppression that refuses to let these people have their pleasure. People who are resisting that kind of oppression are often unwittingly supporting their own domination. Power always requires resistance (see Dreyfus and Rabinow, p.169).

Enkrateia

"Self-control", the power one must have over oneself to use aphrodisia rightly; connected to asceticism which is "training in self-denial"

episteme

Equivalent to a paradigm.

gaze

Penetrating and sage observation. In the Birth of the Clinic, Foucault speaks of the myth of the clinical gaze, that is, the myth that the physician can see into the heart of a problem in order to diagnose and treat it, and that this ability to know by gazing is a result of the vast array of observations that the clinician has made.

genealogy

The genealogy of knowledge consists of two separate bodies of knowledge: First, the dissenting opinions and theories that did not become the established and widely recognized and, second, the local beliefs and understandings (think of what nurses know about medicine that does not achieve power and general recognition). The genealogy is concerned with bringing these two knowledges, and their struggles to pass themselves on to others, out into the light of the day.

Genealogy does not claim to be more true than institutionalized knowledge, but merely to be the missing part of the puzzle. It works by isolating the central components of some current day political mechanism (such as maintaining the power structure which diagnoses mental illness) and then traces it back to its historical roots (Dreyfus and Rabinow, p.119). These historical roots are visible to us only through the two separate bodies of genealogical knowledge described above.

Foucault says, "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 (Genealogy and social Criticism, p.42)."

The genealogical side of analysis tries to grasp the power of constituting a domain of objects. If a society were to institute the role of medicine man, for example, and give him special privileges, we would thereby "constitute the object of medicine man." Until we established and institutionalized this practice, nothing could be called a "medicine man." The genealogy explores what was not evident because of the institutionalization of knowledge by those in power.

(See Discourse on Language which is the appendix in the [Archaeology of Knowledge](#).);

Whereas [archaeology](#) studies the practices of language (in a strict sense), genealogy uncovers the creation of objects through institutional practices (Dreyfus & Rabinow, p.104). Whereas the archeological historian claims to write from a neutral, disinterested perspective, the Nietzschean or Foucaultian genealogist admits the political and polemical interests motivating the writing of the history (Hoy, 1986, p.6-7).`

For a richer account of this concept [click here to read a brief paraphrase of the first chapter of Foucault's The Archaeology of Knowledge](#)

general grammar

"general grammar is the study of verbal order in relationship to the simultaneity that it is its task to represent (The Order of Things, p.83)." "It appeared in the second half of the seventh century and faded away during the last years of the following century (The Order of Things, p.91)."

genesis

genesis - the analysis of the constitution of [orders](#) on the basis of empirical series (Order of things, p.78)."

government

[B]y government Foucault meant not so much the political or administrative structures of the modern state as 'the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick.... To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others' (Burchell et al, 1991, cited by Smart, 1992). (Also see Foucault's afterword in Dreyfus and Rabinow, p.221)

governmentality

A centralization and increased government power. This power is not negative. In fact, it produces reality through "rituals of truth" and it creates a particular style of subjectivity with which one conforms to or resists. Because the individuals are taken into this subjectivity they become part of the normalizing force. Governmentality also includes a growing body of knowledge that presents itself as "scientific," and which contributes to the power of governmentality. This is a term introduced by Foucault in the [resume](#) (199) and illustrated in other articles (1979b) 1981, 1984a. (see [Darier](#)). Also see [Foucault's article](#) on this topic. Governmentality is a novel kind of governing that emerged in Europe during the sixteenth century. It happened when feudalism was failing and when there was a loss of power in the absolute monarch. Even though we do not have absolute power of the monarch now, we do have government. To a large extent this is internalized by people, but there is also surveillance and reinforcement for conforming to the rules. This new kind of governmentality was made possible by the creation of specific (expert or professional) "knowledges" as well as the construction of experts, institutions and disciplines (e.g., medicine, psychology, psychiatry) so that individuals who we think of as experts can claim the knowledge necessary to command the power of governmentality. .

heteroptia

A space in which contradictory elements are juxtaposed.

historicity

The historical bias of each author, each society, each academic discipline. There is no narrative that describes history apart from the situatedness of the story-teller. "Thus, behind the history of the [positivities](#), there appears another, more radical history, that of man himself - a history that now concerns man's very being since he now realizes that he not only 'has history' all around him, but is himself, in his own historicity, that by means of which a history of human life, a history of economics, and a history of languages are given their form (The Order of Things, p.370)."

historicism

A means of working with the problem that all "history" is history from the perspective of the historian. "Historicism is a means of validating for itself the perpetual critical relation at play between History and the human sciences (The Order of Things, p.372)." All knowledge is rooted in a life, a society, and a language that have a history; and it is in that very history that knowledge finds the element enabling it to communicate with other forms of life (The Order of Things, p.372/3)."

mathesis

The science of calculable [order](#) (The Order of Things, p.73) a qualitative science of order (see The Order of Things, pp. 74-75).

negative power

Negative power is "power that says no." (Power/Knowledge, p.139) It is the power that says that something cannot be done and that acts to enforce this law. Positive power inspires and solves certain problems, enables, serves use to someone.

measurement

Measurement enables us to analyze like things according to the calculable form of identity and difference (The Order of Things, p.53).

normalisation

The molding of people into "normal" as opposed to "abnormal" forms., and the process by which a culture encourages its people to regulate and achieve his or her own conformity with

the established rules. This is achieved through governmentality.

order

Order can be established without reference to an exterior unit. (He seems to be thinking of "order" as a kind of sorting and establishing of priorities.)

panopticon

The method of surveillance in the modern prison - this is the method that the modern state uses to execute and regulate its control of society. Unlike the monarchical state, which uses brute force to control its subjects, the 'democratic' state requires internalized and sophisticated coercion to perform this function. The term "panopticon" was a name suggested by Jeremy Bentham (Bentham, 1995). In a prison built with modern architecture that allows guards to see continuously inside each cell, the "panopticon" is the central observing tower even though the prisoners cannot see that they are being observed. This constant gaze controls the prisoners affecting not only what they do but how they see themselves. and replaced the use of a dungeon and dark cell to control the prisoner (1979a, 170). This image serves as a metaphor for the power in of governmentality in the modern state.

pastoral power

The kind of power that is exercised by the Church. It rests on the church's power to assure individual salvation in the next world. It is linked with the notion of individualism (as in individual salvation). In modern times, the salvation in the next life has been commuted to a salvation in this life (health, wellbeing, security, etc.) ([Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, 213-215](#)) .

pathologization

There are two senses: First, the natural depletion of the organism producing tremors, perturbations, etc., and second, the "discovery" that at the root of sexuality is a source of illness in the form of a hidden passivity. Sexuality is therefore not evil but the source of ills. (Foucault, Care of the Self, p.142)

police

The job of the police is the articulation and administration of techniques of [bio-power](#) so as to increase the state's control over its inhabitants.

positivity

(The Order of Things, p.348).

power

Power is exerted implicitly by the way in which our conversation (i.e., discourse) is formed, and it is often exerted by denying its own truth, or by myths that misrepresent the source of power by pointing to less powerful sources. For example, in the History of Sexuality, Foucault explains that we moderns tend to think of our sexuality as repressed by social forces that forbid us sexual release. The myth here is that we are sexually repressed but this popularity of this myth deeply shapes the nature of our sexuality by introducing the ritual of confession. We confess (in church, in psychoanalysis) the thoughts which nature tells us should be free (or we would be free if we were not repressed) but which, due to the nature of our repression cause us to suffer in secret humiliation. But what is powerful today is less any mythical repression of our sexuality and more the myth of repression that leads us to have faith in the ritual of confession to free us of our psychic pain. This myth, and its corresponding ritual, implicitly design our sexual experience by telling us what our sexual experience should be, what we should look for, and by coloring that experience not only with shame and self-reproach but with the hidden excitement and fascination that makes our sexuality what it is.

Power is also fueled by resistance. Without resistance, all power fades.

The above is the major theme in "The History of Sexuality," however see especially pp 56-69.

Here are a few representative quotations:

"The important thing...is not that ...men shut their eyes or stopped their ears, or that they were mistaken [about sexual repression]; it is rather that they constructed around and appropos of sex an immense apparatus for producing truth, even if this truth was to be masked at the last moment." (56)

"Historically, there have been two great procedures for producing the truth of sex.(57)" One is the technique of having erotic masters who "can transmit this art in an esoteric manner.(57)" The second procedure is the "confession," and today, "western man has become a confessing

animal.(59)" "The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, "demands" only to surface;..." (60)

The two principal texts in which Foucault evaluates and substantiates his model of power relations are *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977* and *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, An Introduction*.

power/knowledge

Knowledge of how people's behavior can be affected. It is based on new techniques of social engineering, education, etc.

reflexive form of knowledge

What we know about ourselves not by introspection but by reflection (*The Order of Things*, 363).

representation

That which can be cast in a quantifiable and scientifically rigorous form. "Usually, the attempt is made to define it [positivity] in terms of mathematic: either by trying to bring it as near to mathematics as possible, by drawing up an inventory of everything in the sciences of man that is mathematicizable, and suppose that everything that is not susceptible of such a formalization has not yet attained to scientific (*The Order of Things*, p.363).

repressive hypothesis

A term that Foucault introduces in the *History of Sexuality*. It is the view that truth is repressed by a powerful force and that we can liberate ourselves by getting down to the truth. Foucault opposes the "repressive hypothesis" to "bio-technico-power (or bio-power). (Dreyfus and Rabinow, p. 127). The repressive hypothesis about sexuality is that western civilization has moved from a time of shameless sexuality to an era of repressed sexuality, restricted to the parents' bedroom. (Part 2 of the five part *The History Sexuality* is called *The Repressive Hypothesis*). The repressive hypothesis holds that sex is repressed because it is incompatible with the work ethic in the rise of capitalism during the last two centuries.

In the repressive view of power "[All power] can do is forbid, and all it can command is obedience. Power, ultimately, is repression; repression, ultimately, is the imposition of the law; the law, ultimately, demands submission." (Dreyfus & Rabinow, p. 130)

resistance

"there are no relations of power without resistance" (1980, 142)

similitude

Foucault teaches this concept by example from Bacon: The human Intellect, from its peculiar nature, easily supposes a greater order and equality in things than it actually finds; and, while there are many things in Nature unique, and quite irregular, still it feigns parallels, correspondents, and relations that have no existence. Hence that fiction, "that among the heavenly bodies all motion takes place by perfect circles" (*The Order of Things*, p.52).

Sophrosyne

"Discretion" or "wisdom", it also means "chastity"; the KNOWLEDGE, which can be of the ultimate meaning of the nature and purpose of love/sex, by which one can practice aphrodisia, chresis, and enkrateia successfully.

self-fashioning

Care of the self-- This is analogous to self-government.

subjugated knowledges -

a whole set of knowledges that are either hidden behind more dominant knowledges but can be revealed by critique or have been explicitly disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity ([1980, p. 82](#)). "When I say

'subjugated knowledges' I mean two things. On the one hand, I am referring to historical contents that have been buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systemizations. [In other words, I am referring to] blocks of historical knowledges that were present in the functional and systematic ensembles, but which were masked, and the critique was able to reveal their existence by using, obviously enough, the tools of scholarship. Second, when I say 'subjugated knowledges' I am also referring to a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as...insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naive knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity" ([Foucault, 2003, p.7](#)).

subjugated

being made subject to, being governed by institutionalized forces that control and and frame. ([1982, p. 213](#))

subjectivity -

[subjugation.\(subjection\).](#)

taxinomia

When dealing with the ordering of complex natures (representations in general, as they are given in experience), one has to constitute a taxinomia, and to do that one has to establish a system of signs. These signs are to the order of composite natures what algebra is to the order of simple natures. But in so far as empirical representations must be analyzable into simple natures, it is clear that the taxinomia relates wholly to the mathesis (The Order of Things, p.72)

technologies of self

Technologies of the self are the specific practices by which subjects constitute themselves as subjects within and through systems of power, and which often seem to be either 'natural' or imposed from above.

truth

"The important thing here...is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint." In other words, our institutions and schools of thought, our universities and charismatic leaders, our ministers our parents, our teachers, all of these collaborate to create a context in which something is established as "true." And think of truth as that which emerges only within certain sets of rules (much like Lyotard's notion of local definitions). For example, the rules of science say that we should define our concepts operationally, using specific measurement techniques. Studies of bone density, for example, must define it either as measurement of bone density of spine, the femur, the metacarpal or some other boney structure. But, since the density of these various bones is not highly correlated, different studies who use different bones will uncover "different truths." Truth emerges only within a structure of rules that control the language, the discourse." Truth presents itself as the product of discursive practices." (Pasquino)

unity of discourse

"the unity of discourses on madness would not be based upon the existence of the object 'madness', or the constitution of a single horizon of objectivity; it would be the interplay of the rules that make possible the appearance of objects during a given period of time: objects are shaped by measures of discrimination and repression, objects that are differentiated in daily practice, in law, in religious casuistry, in medical diagnosis,

objects that are manifested in pathological descriptions, objects that are circumscribed by medical codes, practices, treatment, and care. Moreover, ...the unity of the discourse on madness would be the interplay of the rules that define the transformations of these different objects, their non-identity through time, the break produced in them, the intrnal discontinuity that suspends their permanence."

Quotation is from [The archeology of Knowledge](#), p.32-33) For a richer account of this concept [click here to read a brief paraphrase of the first chapter of Foucault's The Archaeology of Knowledge](#)

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