

The Continuity of Foucauldian Archaeology and Genealogy

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In this paper, I propose that there exists, and try to understand the extent of, a continuity between the archaeological and genealogical periods of Foucault's work. By these periods, I mean his work before (and including) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and after, respectively. In particular, I will focus on *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*. Thus, while in fact my analysis cannot be said to extend beyond these works to cover the periods themselves (if one even wants to define periods), I chose these two because they seemed to be the most developed in each.

Now, rather than slowly and secretly revealing what kind of 'continuity' I am talking about, it serves to immediately give an overview of what I mean so that the majority of this paper can be development and analysis. I am arguing that there is a certain methodological and conceptual continuity between these two works. That is, I think that the ideas of discursive

formations, objects, concepts, strategies, statements, enunciative fields of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* can be linked continuously with the ideas of power, will to knowledge, technology of power, pleasure, repression, strategy of *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*. I am not arguing that these two conceptual systems are the same, nor that they are analogous, nor that they have the same purpose. I am saying that there is some continuity between them, and this paper explores what kind of continuity there is.

On the surface, this may seem like a strange project, since on the surface Foucault's two projects are very different. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* looks at the methodological foundations of modern intellectual history and proposes a very specific, refined form of that methodology. *History of Sexuality*, on the other hand, questions a history of sexuality that dwells on repression by revealing an inciting power in its place. Now, there does exist a sort of structural continuity between these two projects: both take the form 'you thought that is how things worked, but in fact it was this way'. But this sort of analogical continuity is not what I'm interested in. I am interested in that continuity which exists between the actual mechanics of each conceptual structure. My final thesis is, in fact, that the two theories exist in a common space; it is the definition and exploration of this space, and

the links between the two structures, that this paper aims to expose.

Unfortunately, one more preliminary must be noted. What would Foucault think of my thesis? To what extent am I getting this from the texts? I hope to show below that my thesis agrees with Foucault, and that at times he seems to support it. However, this analysis does consist in focusing on certain elements of Foucault's theories at the expense of others. In order to be clear about the elements which are selected, I have decided to pull them from a general discussion of each work.

The purpose of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is stated quite clearly in its Introduction: "my aim is to uncover the principles and consequences of an autochthonous transformation that is taking place in the field of historical knowledge" (p. 15). This transformation, Foucault argues, consists of replacing the chronological list of events and their connections, with which history had traditionally dealt, with a table of series of events—like a demographic history, climate history, or technological history—of which it is now the task of history to specify and relate one with another. Foucault is particularly interested in the application of this new kind of history to the history of ideas, which he argues had not yet embraced it. Thus, *The Archaeology of*

Knowledge comprises attempts at formulating a version of this methodology for the history of ideas (in two ways) and explaining how it differs from traditional methodologies. The first way looks at archaeology—what he calls his methodology—from the top down and is most convenient for this paper. The second is bottom up and equivalent.

The key concept of this first way is the discursive formation. It is, roughly, the set of rules that determine the objects, concepts, enunciations, etc., in a discourse. But this is clearly not clear enough—the important thing is exactly where this discursive formation sits and how it functions. So let us construct it. The first step is Foucault's loosening of the connections and regularities of discursive events that were tied to each other by traditional history—like the ideas of tradition, influence, evolution, or spirit—so that the discursive events loosen, splash down and spread out in a 'pure field of discursive events'. The task is to re-order this field, the question is how, and the answer is the discursive formation. Foucault does not order the field by selecting discursive events which refer to the same objects (e.g. plants), or use the same concepts (e.g. wealth), or have the same themes (e.g. evolution). He uses the discursive formation, which wraps all of these together by considering "an order in their successive appearance, correlations in their simultaneity, assignable positions in a common space, a

reciprocal function, linked and hierarchized transformations” (p. 37). More abstractly, this key point can be made as follows: he is not first defining certain structures that exist in the field of discursive events and supposing them to have certain dynamics. For example, one might suppose the elements of the field to be tied together by some spirit of the age and then look for that spirit in each element. Rather, he does define certain structures (objects, enunciative modalities, concepts, strategies) but requires that the description of their dynamics be done with reference to the discursive field, the specific discursive field in question. Thus, there is no mode of existence of objects or concepts or enunciations in general; there are specific objects, specific concepts, and specific enunciations that exist at specific times, act in specific ways, and are related to others in specific ways.

Importantly, the description of the dynamics of these structures is not restricted to the field of discursive events alone. He allows that the structures be influenced in their constitution and mode of existence by all sorts of domains: by society, authorities, other disciplines, by architecture. He thus exposes discursive events and structures to all the influences that might determine them, in and outside of the discursive field, and he demands that those influences be specific to the event or structure in question.

The discursive formation is, then, just the description of the structures that emerge out of a specific discursive field and a description of their specific mechanics, dynamics, and inter-relations. To repeat the quotation from above, it examines “an order in their successive appearance, correlations in their simultaneity, assignable positions in a common space, a reciprocal function, linked and hierarchized transformations” (p. 37). Now, one might worry at this point that the discursive formations that emerge would be too specific and ridged to do anything with. That is, if instead of imposing our own structures on the discursive field we allow structures and relations to emerge from it, we might not end up with anything more than the trivial sum of the discursive events and relations in these structures. Foucault says no. Discursive formations have a latent structure which allows one to go beyond the given. What one is doing when one constructs a discursive formation is showing “what must be related, in a particular discursive practice, for such and such an enunciation to be made, for such and such a concept to be used, for such and such a strategy to be organized” (p. 74). If one is showing how concepts, objects, and strategies can exist, what one is really constructing is a set of rules which do not determine, but rather make possible all of the concepts, objects, and strategies in the discursive field. These rules are not chronologically or logically prior to the discursive events; they are “the preterminal regularities in

relation to which the ultimate state ... is defined by its variants” (p. 76). These rules of the discursive formation open up a far larger space than is actually occupied by the discursive field itself because they specify the conditions under which any discursive event is admissible, not just the ones that occurred. A part of archaeological analysis is determining why the discursive field in question exists in only its particular part of this larger space: it seeks the economy of the discursive constellation (p. 66).

In sum, archaeological analysis consists of drawing a set of rules from a field of discursive events by investigating the specific structures and relations that emerge from that field and its interactions with outside domains, and explaining why, forsooth, the particular discursive events that emerged in fact did, instead of others, in the space defined by those rules.

The History of Sexuality Vol. 1 has a very different purpose and subject matter. It examines, preliminarily, the hypothesis that the Victorian era was a zenith of sexual repression which had been building for several centuries and which saw a small and hard-fought decline only in the twentieth century. Foucault argues that in fact there is a more complicated story to tell, of sex's being incorporated into larger (power-knowledge-pleasure) structures which heightened rather than

repressed it. “The object, in short, is to define the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality in our part of the world” (p. 11). He argues that beginning in the late eighteenth century, sex became incorporated in many new discourses and became a universal point of concern. Rather than being absolutely repressed, it had a greater role to play in many aspects of life and became the secret source of ultimate knowledge about the self. The central methodological tool that allows Foucault to describe and explain this thesis is power: it is a new conception of power, and it is my main goal at present to describe it.

Foucault's power is not sovereign power or power in laws, it is “the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect” (p. 92). Thus power is microphysical. It is localized in force relations. And these force relations are always specific. The power inheres in the architecture of a children's dormitory that is designed so that adults can keep watch over them, it flows through the confessional in which sexual secrets are relayed, it is present in the investigation of certain sexually deviant individuals. It is really just the

particular things that occur around and with respect to people. But, these local interactions become important because they pile up onto one another, they enhance or deflate each other, they form a network, a complex in which 'chains' form and begin to dominate as strategies. Foucault argues that this kind of un-authored and pervasive power is what took hold of sexuality in the nineteenth century to make it such a point of concern, so that sex was not really repressed but actually incited in specific ways.

So we now have two conceptual structures from two books: discursive formation and power. My thesis is, once again, that these two are in some specific way continuous. And indeed there are places in each of the books where Foucault seems to be saying just that. One reads at the end of *The Archeology of Knowledge*, in a section in which Foucault is questioning the domain to which archaeology is applicable, "At the moment I am not sufficiently advanced in my task to answer this question. But I can readily imagine ... archaeologies that might develop in different directions. There is, for example, the archaeological description of sexuality." (pp. 192-193). He goes on

one would show how in the nineteenth century such epistemological figures as the biology and psychology of sexuality were formed; and how a

discourses of a scientific type was established through the rupture brought about by Freud. But I can also see another possible direction for analysis: instead of studying the sexual behavior of men at a given period (by seeking its law in a social structure, in a collective unconscious, or in a certain moral attitude), instead of describing what men thought of sexuality ... one would ask oneself whether, in the behavior, as in these representations, a whole discursive practice is not at work; whether sexuality, quite apart from any orientation towards a scientific discourse, is not a group of objects that can be talked about ... a field of possible enunciations ... a group of concepts ... a set of choices ... Such an archaeology would show, if it succeeded in its task, how the prohibitions, exclusions, limitations, values, freedoms, and transgressions of sexuality, all its manifestations, verbal or otherwise, are linked to a particular discursive practice. (p. 193).

This is striking. He explicitly questions whether the archaeology of sexuality might not be possible, but 'apart from any orientation towards a scientific discourse', as a discursive practice. It makes one wonder if *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* is this archaeology, and if not, why.

In one of his statements of purpose at the beginning of *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, Foucault writes, “what is at issue, briefly, is the overall “discursive fact,” the way in which sex is “put into discourse” ” (p. 11). This catches one’s attention. Immediately following that he writes, “Hence, too, my main concern will be to locate the forms of power, the channels it takes, and the discourses it permeates ... in short, the “polymorphous techniques of power” ” (p. 11). In these statements, a kind of purpose of *The History of Sexuality* emerges: he sees power as a way of explaining the way sex is ‘put into discourse’. And so one thinks, at this point: *The History of Sexuality* is in fact an archeology of sexuality, but it is one only in part. The new part, the other part that it develops at length and which is not exactly or primarily archaeological, is this concept of power. That concept is used to explain in more detail the mechanics and dynamics of this non-scientific ‘discursive practice’ called sexuality.

This idea, this unification or consolidation or synthesis of power as a mechanism under the discursive formation, is in fact the most simple version of the continuity I am arguing for here. At a high level, everything seems to fit. If instead of focusing on the discursive field of a scientific discipline, we focus on the more abstract discursive field of sexuality, which would include enunciations, actions, choices, etc., it seems that one can draw a set of rules from this field by

investigating the specific structures and relations that emerge from it and its interactions with outside domains, to explain why, forsooth, the particular discursive events that emerged did instead of others in the space defined by those rules. Power fits in here with the genuinely new role of explaining in more detail the complex interactions that go on, and in particular explain incitement: if one looks at the language used in the long quotation from *The Archeology of Knowledge* above, one notices that Foucault expected to describe ‘prohibitions, exclusions, limitations, values, freedoms, and transgressions of sexuality’ in an archeology of sexuality; this is not the language of incitement. But with power, we come to understand in what ways the general interactions between elements of the archeology can be inciting.

This appears to be a powerful synthesis, a combined methodology that allows one to generate archaeologies on any subject (and, it must be said, animate them in time, if one so wishes), not just scientific ones. But there are several reasons for caution. The first is the most obvious: Foucault does not say this himself. I think the quotations above are the closest rhetorically to the idea of their unification. I’ll refrain from speculating on what I think he was thinking. Perhaps a more important question is: no matter if Foucault would have supported this, is it a viable and valuable idea? The answer

the this question is complicated and will form the following concluding remarks to this paper.

The first issue to be considered is the viability of the synthesis. It is not clear from the start whether the concept of discursive formation, which was designed for use in the scientific context, will carry over directly to the more general one, even with the addition of power to explain the more complex interactions it will encounter there. In other words, it is not clear, and in fact it is doubtful, whether the ideas of object, concept, enunciation, strategy, statement, etc. which are so important in the archaeology of knowledge, will be sufficient or even valuable in a more general archaeology. In the same way, it is also not clear that the idea of power as it was formulated to discuss sexuality is yet equipped for use with any given subject matter. Indeed, though incitement is surely a key part of power, it is not clear that it would retain such a prominent role outside of the context of sexuality. It seems as if in each case Foucault tuned and specified the concepts to the subject matter at hand. This paper is no place to try and generalize them. All we can note is that there would likely need to be changes made, and the viability of the final solution could not be judged until such a solution were produced.

But there is a greater concern that should be addressed here. Foucault made very clear in *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* that the idea of power he was setting forth was applicable to a specific historical situation. Indeed, the work's final part investigates the broader application of the notion of power to the modern state, where it is called biopower. Here, sexuality is just the centerpiece and sometimes mechanism for a fundamental shift in the nature of power generally and sovereign power of the state. In the proposed synthesis, power was supposed to be just a tool that fits nicely into the discursive formation so that one can construct an archaeology of any subject matter (as I posited above), but if power so understood is only applicable to the recent past, then it is not applicable to any given subject matter. This fact suggests that if one were to attempt a synthesis of power with archaeology, and one wanted an ahistorical methodology, one would have to work very hard in generalizing the concept of power so it was not specific to modern states. It is again not clear whether this is possible or its usefulness would be retained.

Given that we have now identified several pressing problems, what is the status of my initial thesis statement? It can be specified now. My real argument is that the concepts of discursive formation and power, even in their present states, are continuous enough with each other to warrant inquiry into

their being synthesized. However, for the reasons just discussed, I do not think they are, in their present states, perfectly continuous: there is work to be done. And so I'd like to end this paper by questioning whether it's worth doing that work.

If the synthesis were successful, we will have a blanket methodology to generate archaeologies on any subject, where 'archaeology' is defined by the conceptual structure that results from synthesis. There is still the question of whether this is worth having. To see why, I think it serves to sit back and try to see what Foucault himself was doing when he was building methodologies. He did not approach each subject matter with a pre-formed methodology to which he fit it. In fact, he frequently criticized that approach. Rather he constructed new methodologies for each new subject, tailor-made, as it were, to their peculiarities. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault explains that he did not deploy the full archaeological method beginning with *History of Madness* because he did not have it yet, but also because, "it turned out that the difficult point of the analysis, and the one that demanded greatest attention, was not the same in each case" (p. 65). Thus it was appropriate for him to deploy new frameworks in each case. One wonders whether the idea of a master methodology of general archaeology would not distort each subject matter and ignore its 'difficult points'. I tend to

think that this procedural wisdom should be heeded. Perhaps a grand synthesis is not worth attempting when we can be agile, deploy whatever methodology we need at the moment. But then, of course, we may be accused of not ever remaining the same.