THE DISSOCIATED SELF: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND GENEALOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract
Foucault's work examines how it is that people are shaped by various institutions as well as how people can shape institutions. In this paper I explore Foucault's concept of the self developed. To do this I first examine his archaeological method of analysis followed by his genealogical method of analysis, ultimately ending with his idea of power relations encompassing both. The shift between his archaeological and genealogical method marks the transformation of the empirico-transcendental doublet to the dissociated self. What is unearthed from his genealogical analysis is a network of power relations, a non-place, rendering the self dissociated and the task of constituting the self one of defining oneself within and against these power relations.

In this paper I will examine Michel Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical analysis of the self. Archaeology as a method, for Foucault, historically analyzes the human sciences as systems of knowledge with man being the central subject. He examines the way in which various fields and practices such as biology and psychology talk about man from the late 18th century through the early 20th century. In his analysis of historical events, Foucault introduces the conception of the empirico-transcendental doublet. However, Foucault realizes that his archaeological method of analysis isn’t enough to talk about the self. The reason for this is that studying different systems of thought doesn’t account for the shift in one system of thought to another. It is because of this that he develops his genealogical analysis of the self. Genealogy as a method does not search for origins. On the contrary, it is concerned with the lowly, the accidental, the coincidental, and the disparate. It sets up a counter lens through which to view history, which has typically been understood in terms of progress and teleology. Foucault’s genealogical method leads him to give an account of how the dissociative self emerged in the West. He later discusses the ways in which we can use technologies of the self to craft our identities in a matrix of power relations. In this paper I will seek to examine the ways in which Foucault’s idea of power relations encompasses his archaeological and genealogical analysis of the self.

In The Order of Things Foucault presents archaeology as a method for historical analysis of the human sciences as disciplinary systems of knowledge. These systems of knowledge, for Foucault, are both fields of study and systems of control. Archaeological analysis involves examining conditions of possibilities in particular epistemes. Conditions of possibility can be thought of as the discursive practices that allowed for the establishment of those systems of knowledge. Epistemes can be thought of as conceptual frameworks through which an era or society views the world. Oftentimes the meaning and implications behind these epistemes are not very straightforward or clear. We often take for granted the ways in which we understand and view the world. The work of archaeology then is the work of unearthing these understandings in particular epistemes, to examine the implications of systems of knowledge and how they interact with, impose upon, and affect the conceptual framework not just of populations, or societies, but of individuals within those populations and societies. Archaeology is a neutral examination of conceptual frameworks in their historical situatedness without claiming transcendence of that history or objectivity.

Two epistemes he gives considerable attention to are those of the Classical and Modern ages. Language plays a large role in his examination of the two epistemes. Comparing a shift in discourse from the Classical to the Modern episteme accounts for man being thought of as an empirico-transcendental doublet.
The Dissociated Self

The dissolution of discourse seems to mark the shift between the Classical and Modern episteme. Foucault writes, “When discourse ceased to exist and to function within representation as the first means of ordering it, Classical thought ceased at the same time to be directly accessible to us.”\(^1\) Classical discourse was the relationship between meaning and being. The representation of the Classical age found unity between a word and its being, or thing. The end of the Classical age is marked by the dissolution of discourse. The unity of representation shattered into the disparity of resemblances.

The consequence of the separation of a word from a thing, or object, in language was the separation of meaning and being for man. Modern language becomes historical and the meaning of signs becomes relative to a specific discourse. It led to the separation of man from himself. To suggest that something is outside man is to suggest that something is inside man, thus the birth of the Modern empirico-transcendental man. It is in the Modern episteme that man is, “a being such that knowledge will be attained in him, of what renders all knowledge possible.”\(^2\) The Modern episteme saw the emergence, or birth, of man as an epistemological concept. The inside-outside dichotomy of man suggests man as an origin. Man becomes both a subject and an object.

The empirico-transcendental doublet, then, is the subject that also becomes an object. The self as an empirico-transcendental doublet becomes an object of various systems of knowledge maintaining its subjectivity by its realization of its objectivity. The self, in this case, can become an object of both systems of knowledge and an object of itself, all the while realizing it is both a subject and an object. The self then becomes an antinomical transcendental condition of possibility for the scientific investigation of humans and the empirical objects of scientific study.

It is because man is both a subject and an object of knowledge that both the birth and imminent end of man is conceived. Man becomes “a face doomed to be erased in the course of history,” and so “Man’s finitude is heralded—and imperiously so—in the positivity of knowledge,” which “promises the very infinity it refuses.”\(^3\) Finitude thus becomes a foundation for scientific disciplines. In other words, man’s being is the foundation of scientific disciplines because it is by becoming an object of knowledge that he realizes this finitude and then establishes these disciplines as a subject that both imposes finitude upon himself and promises the infinite, in the establishment of those disciplines. Man no longer searches for the origin of the Classical episteme but finds the origin of the Modern episteme in himself, which ultimately falls under the invisible ordering of things. It is in constituting scientific disciplines from the inside that man comes to understand himself through the outside, which Foucault acknowledges leaves a haunting question, “Does man really exist?”\(^4\) The analytic of (human) finitude leaves us with a very interesting phenomenon: “Western culture has constituted, under the name of man, a being who, by one and the same interplay of reasons, must be a positive domain of knowledge and cannot be an object of science.”\(^5\) When stripped of these positivities, or disciplines, what is left? Can man survive this?

In examining both the Classical and Modern epistemes Foucault unearths the conditions of possibility in each episteme, out of which the empirico-transcendental man arose. This is the archaeological analysis of man. The Modern episteme both gave birth to and promised the end of man. However, an archaeological analysis cannot pinpoint the manner in which man will become extinct, it can only speculate. The end of The Order of Things ends with this sentiment:

If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility—without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises—were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the

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1 Michel Foucault, The Order of Things (New York: Random House, 1970), 304. Hereafter OT.
2 Ibid., 318.
3 Ibid., 313-314.
4 Ibid., 322.
5 Ibid., 366-367.
end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face
drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.\(^6\)

This is the concluding statement of *The Order of Things*. The end of man is the end of the
intelligibility of the concept of man. Foucault leaves us with a question of origin and identity, which
ultimately paves the way for his genealogical method of analysis. The archaeological analysis of man as
an empirico-transcendental is a crucial step in the process of thinking of man as a dissociated self by
means of the genealogical method.

Foucault incorporates two of Nietzsche’s variations of the word *Ursprung* (origin), *Herkunft* (descent)
and *Entstehung* (emergence) to explicate his methodology of genealogy. However, the ironical way in
which Nietzsche uses the concept of origin is illustrated in the history of reason, noting that, “Examining
the history of reason, [one] learns that it was born in an altogether ‘reasonable’ fashion—from chance;
devotion to truth and the precision of scientific methods arose from the passion of scholars.”\(^7\) This is to
say that if one were to push reason to its origins, one would ultimately find there is no origin, at least not
in the Classical sense. Reason arose by chance, out of disparity. The history of reason cannot be traced
back to an essence of reason, but to “a spirit of competition.”\(^8\) The origin thus becomes something
entirely different: disparity, dissociation, and lowly beginnings are found in place of timeless essences or
ideologies, operating in a teleological manner, of lofty beginnings.

Foucault writes that “genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the
destiny of a people.”\(^9\) It is because disparity is found at the “origin” of things that the evolution and
destiny of a people cannot be mapped because there isn’t a meta-historical implemented ideology of
human nature determining a teleological and evolutionary progress of a species toward something. It is
here that the inversion of the relationship between the purposeful and the accidental as the origin takes
place. It is at this point that Foucault incorporates the idea of descent into his genealogy. Descent can be
understood as, “captur[ing] not only likenesses, such as familial traits, but differences within general
likeness. . . used to speak of extraction or lineage.”\(^10\)

The analysis of descent, “permits the dissociation of the self, its recognition and displacement as an
empty synthesis, in liberating a profusion of lost events.” The analysis of descent discovers empty
syntheses constituted by “the exteriority of accidents.”\(^11\) The body falls under the domain of the descent;
it is “the inscribed surface of events” that renders the dissociative self.\(^12\) In contrast to the traditional
historian, the analysis of descent does not provide generic or unified characteristics, but rather it finds
unique, fragmented, dissociated “subindividual marks” that exist in relation to other subindividual marks
that the genealogist does not credit to a generic idea. It is simply this network of ideas that the genealogist
examines. It is in this network and by this methodology that the self is displaced, dissociated, and found
to be an empty synthesis.

It is in the network of ideas examined by genealogists that the analysis of emergence enters into the
genealogical method. The analysis of emergence involves the “hazardous play of dominations.”\(^13\) The
evolution of a species is no longer discussed in relation to its metaphysical essence, regarding its needs,
but as emerging out of the play of dominations. From the instinct to survive and a seemingly unfavorable
environment emerges a species. Emergence is a “non-place, a pure distance” in which force enters and the

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\(^{6}\) Ibid., 387.
\(^{8}\) Ibid.
\(^{9}\) Ibid., 81.
\(^{11}\) Foucault, FR, 81.
\(^{12}\) Ibid., 83.
\(^{13}\) Ibid.
play of dominations occurs.\textsuperscript{14} The notion of power, and of power relations, coincides with the analysis of emergence.

The play of forces in the genealogical method shifts the conversation of origin from one of essence, teleology, representations, and resemblances to one of the disparate and dissociative that manifests itself in power relations of strategy and tactics. It takes it to the “non-place” from which power relations emerge. Foucault writes, “The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning.”\textsuperscript{15} From the genealogical method emerges the idea of power relations, which encompasses Foucault’s joint archaeological and genealogical analysis of man by appropriating the entire analysis from one of language to one of war. Archaeology did well to examine the conditions of possibility that arose from the Classical and Modern epistemes that allowed man to be thought of as an empirico-transcendental. However, this method was lacking because while it could describe the epistemes, it could not account for the shift in epistemes. Ironically, its lack arose from origins. Archaeology doesn’t enable him to investigate the shifts between epistemes. Nor does it enable him to question the concept of origins. Furthermore, archaeology does not provide a means for examining how institutions and norms constitute not just systems of knowledge, but our very selves. Genealogy picked up where archaeology left off, with the realization that origins are human constructions used as a way to make sense of and justify our practices and institutions while also discovering the play of dominations and power relations.

It is important to note that this power relation is not one-sided, giving weight to institutions, because if it were the result would be obedience, not emergence. It is significant that Foucault writes of power relations instead of just power. Relation implies struggle, otherwise we would be trapped. However, struggle creates possibility. He writes, “We are always in this kind of situation. It means that we always have possibilities; there are always possibilities of changing the situation. We cannot jump outside the situation, and there is no point where you are free from all power relations. But you can always change it.”\textsuperscript{16} It is impossible to escape power relations but it is also impossible to be trapped by it because there is always a possibility for change. We craft our identities by negotiating various networks of power relations, despite living in an era where people are formed by various institutions and viewed as members of populations whose lives can be managed. The task of constituting the self then, our task, is one of constantly defining ourselves over and against these power relations, while inevitably existing within this web of power relations.

To further explicate this notion of the self in a network of power relations, I will raise the questions Foucault does concerning “the instituted models of self-knowledge.”\textsuperscript{17} The questions that arise are the following: How was the subject established as an object of knowledge? How is self-knowledge organized according to certain schemes? Furthermore, how were these schemes defined and imposed? Foucault notes that neither experience nor philosophical theories suffice in answering these questions. Rather, he performs a hermeneutic of the subject, unearthing a “technique of the self,” by examining a history of aphrodisia (roughly translated as sexuality in English) to give an account of the inevitable relation between self-knowledge and self-care that arose out of antiquity. This is an example of Foucault exploring previous ways in which Western people came to view the self as a way to challenge the hegemony of the Western conception of the self as one whose life can be managed and disciplined by bureaucratic institutions and scientific experts. It is important to note Foucault’s definition of the “techniques of the self” in order to understand this project. He defines it as “the procedures, which no doubt exist in every civilization, suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it in terms of a certain number of ends, through relations of self-mastery or self-

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 85.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 56.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 87.
knowledge.”18 This definition puts the aforementioned questions into an even broader context of questions relating to the government of the self.

The examination of the techniques of the self occurs at the nexus of subjectivity and governmentality. To further define this relation between subjectivity and governmentality, Foucault is analyzing the “domain of strategic relations focusing on the behavior of the other or others, and employing various procedures and techniques according to the case, the institutional frameworks, social groups, and historical periods in which they develop.”19 Foucault recognizes it isn’t totally possible to pinpoint an “origin” of the techniques of the self to any specific moment in time, but uses the Hellenistic and Roman periods as exemplary periods which emphasize this notion, specifically in regard to sexual acts. It is by this historical analysis, or unearthing, that Foucault concludes the relation that exists between the principle of *aphrodisia* and the living-out of *aphrodisia*. He argues, “It is a matter of acts and pleasures, not of desire. It is a matter of the formation of the self through techniques of living, not of repression through prohibition and law.”20

The history of *aphrodisia* in the Hellenistic and Roman periods briefly summarized account for the formulation of the conjugal arrangement is found. A principle of *aphrodisia* defines a conjugal arrangement, which both defines the ideal or “right” kind of marriage, which is then superimposed upon the individual, from which uneasiness or guilt can arise in individuals who do not conform to this definition by their actions. The definition of principles is superimposed and internalized within individuals so they become their own governors, so that the principle can be actualized in a conforming, normative manner. To summarize, “even after becoming a philosophical principle, the care of the self remained a form of activity.”21

The governing principle and practice of the care of oneself transforms the subject, or individual, into an object of oneself, which inevitably enters the self into a network of relations to oneself and to others. Foucault notes three functions that arise out of this subject-object conversion: the critical function, the function of struggle, and a curative, therapeutic, or medical function.22 The methods for carrying out these functions as prescribed by the Hellenistic and Roman periods are listening, writing, and self-reflection. The purpose of these techniques is to “link together truth and subject” and the object is to “arm the subject with a truth it did not know, one that did not reside in it; what is wanted to make this learned, memorized truth, progressively put into practice, a quasi subject that reigns supreme in us.”23 Here again, we are acquainted with the dissociated self.

The archaeological and genealogical methods Foucault employed discovered the network of power relations we inevitably find ourselves in. Various *epistemes* and the shifts that brought them about are evidence of the possibility of change. Power relations account for the transformation of the empirico-transcendental man to the dissociated self brought about by the rejection of origins. The task, then, of constituting the self, our task, is one of constantly defining ourselves over and against these power relations, while inevitably existing within them. The self is “found” at a place of non-origin, dissociated, created in a negative space because it is the nexus of the tension between the limitations set in place by power relations and the constitution of the self over and against those very relations, rendering the self ultimately *dissociated*, existing outside of either-or dichotomies, a non-origin, a negative space.

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., 88.
20 Ibid., 89.
21 Ibid., 95.
22 Ibid., 97.
23 Ibid., 101-102.
REFERENCES


