

Chapter 3

Sociological Hermeneutics, Power Relations, and Immanent Critique

Sociological hermeneutics is a semantic enquiry which aims at synthesizing a sociological theory of meaningful action with a hermeneutical theory. It is a process which can create a space for integrating Foucault's archaeological analysis of discourse with social scientific analysis of the elective affinity between discourse and material interests. It features a critical theory of social stratification in dealing with the linguistic, materialist significance of symbolic power and domination embedded in diverse spheres or fields (politics, economy, culture, education and religion).

This chapter begins by treating Foucault's effective history through looking at Gadamer's history of effect. A semantic reading is made by taking on the significance of the analogy, archaeology and epistemic effect; it brings Foucault to relevance with the sociological analysis of discourse in a hermeneutical frame of reference.

It goes on to critically evaluate Foucault's archaeology, cutting through his lack of conceptual clarity in articulating the role of the agent, as well as the elective affinity between religious discourse and material interests. The textual world attributes the power of meaning to the agent, who is not merely exhausted by the discourse or its epistemic mode of representation. A reflexive sociological enquiry is carried out by locating archaeological analysis within the diverse forms of capital in a symbolic, materialistic manner. Thus, it is significant to explore an implicit form of hermeneutics in Foucault's archaeology within the semantic realm, which avoids its nihilistic, anti-humanistic trend.

It then deals with Foucault's problematization of religion and sexuality, focusing on his theory of pederasty in ancient Greece. Foucault is compared with Weber's analysis of the relation between religious discourse and erotic life, followed by a consideration of the Buddhist view on the erotic life.

Finally, the chapter discusses a notion of the cultural discourse (not epistemic) in terms of a theory of intertextuality, which becomes an undercurrent in the comparative theology of culture and religion. It employs a theory of immanent critique in Horkheimer's notion of religion as a longing for *totaliter aliter*, and juxtaposes Foucault's problematization with the immanent critique to articulate its emancipatory side in the theological context. A speech activity can be characterized as discourse ethics (*parrhesia*) to enhance solidarity with the dominated in the world of religion and culture.

1. Sociological Hermeneutics and Semantic Enquiry

Sociological hermeneutics can be conceptualized by synthetizing Weber with Foucault through a phenomenological and hermeneutical lens. This can begin with Schutz, who draws attention to the interest of the historian: "The main task of the science of history is to decide which events, acts, signs, and so on of all those found in the past are to be singled out for interpretation and systematized into something called "history".¹

All of history conditions and determines the viewpoint of historians. But the very objective contexts of meaning are always and already established for us to understand history in general. For Schutz, the point of departure for historical interpretation should be the objective meaning of human acts as a history of facts. He also takes his starting point from the subjective meaning of actors in history as a history of human behaviour. Thus 'the historian will seek a valid method and a relevant choice of data depending on which of these two starting points he has made his own.'²

This perspective facilitates a construction of Weber's sociology in a phenomenological frame of reference. He acknowledges in his sociological theory that the subjective meaning-complex of human

¹. PSW, p. 211.

². Ibid., p. 214.

action is the object even for history.³ The object of sociology is defined as meaningfully oriented behaviour of the individual, which is objectified and constructed by the idea type of rationality. Meaningful action can be fixed and inscribed in written documents or cultural practices which say ‘something meaningful about something.’

Meaningful action is objectified similarly to the fixation of the language event, which occurs in writing as the discourse (spoken as well as written). This objectification is to be interpreted in accordance to its inner connections or in the semantic circle. Thus, the *noema* of meaningful action requires a hermeneutical elucidation in the understanding of the written documents of meaningful action in history, society and culture.⁴

This perspective provides a clue for conceptualizing reflexive sociology through a hermeneutical perspective; in other words, a sociological dimension of semantic enquiry into the meaning of the written documents, statements, discourses and texts. This epistemological articulation, which may be called sociological hermeneutics, seeks to correlate the domain of meaningful action of speech acts or type of rationality with the regime of written statements or documents (discourses, or the world of the text).

According to Paul Ricoeur, ‘It is this noematic structure [of action] which may be fixed and detached from the process of interaction and become an object to interpret.’⁵ This *noema* of the meaningful action becomes the regime of the semantic in history, society and culture, which implies an ensemble of texts in dealing with social, cultural practices as ‘saying something meaningful about something.’

The hermeneutical circle in the interpretation of the objectification of meaningful action as the discourse comes to terms with a phenomenology of life-world, which can be deepened in connection with the history of effect, textual interpretation, and the effect of social discourse. The notion of the hermeneutic circle is defined in a specific manner to be involved in the textual world through the whole-part correlation. However, the semantic circle is a way of articulation between the textual interpretation and its social connection with a non-discourse regime (politics, economics, institutions, cultural practice, and religion). A sociological enquiry into semantic formation may find a parallel with effective history in Foucault’s genealogy.

3. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, p. 101.

4. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 203.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

History of Effect and Effective History

A comparison of Gadamer's idea of history of effect (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) with Foucault's effective history (*wirkliche Historie*) focuses on a specific topic of history. For Gadamer, human existence is thoroughly historically effected, or always and already moving with the life-world or the common horizon. We can never escape our historical effect in which our consciousness is historically shaped and socially affected in dialogue. Our understanding is undertaken in language in which we can anticipate experiencing meaning in a fusion of horizons. In an encounter of different horizons a new meaning can be acquired. Interpretation is in this regard open-ended and dynamically moving, and remains in need of constant renewal.⁶

With Gadamer's notion of history of effect, Foucault's idea of effective history (*Wirkliche Historie*) can be incorporated into a semantic, sociological position; the latter 'rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for "origin".⁷ If Foucault rejects faith in metaphysics, or the progress and challenges of the marching continuity of history, he is supposed to find 'something altogether different behind things,' 'the dissension of other things.' 'It is disparity.'⁸

History becomes effective to the extent that it introduces discontinuity, dispersion and rupture by inverting the pretended continuity in the traditional sense of history. Effective history refers to a genealogical view of history,⁹ in which it is defined as the concrete body of becoming or emergence in confrontation; it traces the marks of power in the historical emergence of ideas, discourses and epistemological devices, which moves from domination back to domination.¹⁰ It runs against conformity to an identical meaning, to systematically dissociating decadence, overthrow and deconstruction. The genealogical theory of history is concerned with the complex course of descent, disturbing what was previously considered foundational or taken for granted as immobile. It considers the past, or tradition, not to continue in the positive sense, because it does not exist actively in the present time. For example, it reveals that the concept of liberty is invented by the ruling

⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 306–7.

⁷ Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,' in *The Essential Foucault*, p. 352.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

classes, because it is in the dangerous and endlessly repeated play of dominations that class domination engenders the idea of liberty.¹¹

The genealogy of effective history is elaborated in the knowledge-power interplay, which is conjoined in the analysis of the discourse and its emergence at the archaeological level. The truth of things is knotted to a trustful discourse, and power is not exclusively comprehended as domination; rather it is considered in relation to a field of interactions.

Foucault is aware of the radical side of literary analysis or its interpretation. “The most radical discontinuities are the breaks effected by a work of theoretical transformation “which establishes a science by detaching it from the ideology of its past and by revealing this past as ideological”.”¹²

Foucault is concerned to take as an object of research the phenomenon of rupture, or discontinuity or interruption; it implies epistemological acts and thresholds in taking the notion of discontinuity as a major role in his archaeological analysis of history; the discontinuous was both given and unthinkable in classic history. Rather it was removed from history on the part of the historian.¹³

Against the traditional notion of history, Foucault requires effective history in order to focus on the discontinuous, by ‘suspend[ing] the continuous accumulation of knowledge,’ which is taken for granted.¹⁴

Foucault observes the history of a concept as its continuously increasing rationality in its progressive refinement; it refers to the uninterrupted progress, as seen most obviously in the bourgeoisie’s recounting of its own ascension in the calendar of its victory.¹⁵

On the contrary, his interest is to specify the different concepts in the proliferation of discontinuities in the history of epistemic discourse, which enables us to discover ‘the discontinuity (threshold, rupture, break, mutation, transformation).’¹⁶

To use the term of Thomas Kuhn, a paradigm shift would occur in the epistemological rupture in the scientific community. When normal science is riddled with anomalies, then a new search for a model or a paradigm begins to solve the problem; it replaces the old one. History

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Althusser, *For Max*, p. 168. Cited in Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, p. 5.

¹³ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁵ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 368.

¹⁶ Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, p. 5.

as such is not rejected as an ideological fiction, but it is to be explored in order to rewrite the epistemological rupture and shift in the past. An interest in the past is not seen in terms of the present, but in his attempt at writing the history of the present.¹⁷

Unlike the term 'paradigm,' Foucault favours archaeology which is a discipline, or historical analysis. It is devoted to purely describing silent monuments, objects without context, purging off the anthropological theme; it seeks to acquire 'meaning only through the restitution of a historical discourse.'¹⁸

Would it be irreconcilable to read Foucault's interpretive archaeology from the standpoint of hermeneutical epistemology? Hermeneutical enquiry is not to pursue the chimera of origin, nor identity thinking. Rather it seeks a different understanding of history and culture in recognition of different language games or plays. Semantic position does not reject the role of the interpreter in dialogue with the past, because the past is appreciated, analyzed with critical distance, and rewritten for the present for solidarity and emancipation. It distinguishes its procedure from the archaeological attitude in purging off the anthropological role.

Language games, like discourse games, require that each use of language occurs within a separate system with its own rules, like playing a game. A hermeneutical notion of this playing focuses on the performance itself as regularity, which remains crucial in influencing and conditioning the consciousness of the audience. The various games are not so much commensurate with each other; they entail discontinuity and difference within the operative rules in which truth is characterized as an internal function of language; its meaning is dependent on its context, or the background of the language game, in which truth and meaning appear. An epistemological rupture or shift occurs in the different language games in history, society and culture, forming a new beginning in epistemic figures or configuration.

If archaeological method focusing on the set of statements makes up the science of 'man,' the statements supply the raw data (an ensemble of what was taken to be serious speech acts in a given period) for an independent systematization and epistemological figures; in a given period the objects of a science or discipline are constantly undergoing shifts, transformations and substitutions. The archaeology seeks to unveil the general, historical a priori of each branch of knowledge systems.¹⁹

¹⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 31.

¹⁸ Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, p. 7.

¹⁹ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 318.

Epistemic background does not avert a hermeneutical recourse to an anonymous common referent; it refers to a general conceptual framework or background as shared practices in influencing and conditioning the subject.²⁰ Foucault seeks to undertake the archaeological analysis of discourse formation and its discursive practice in Western history (the Classical age from the Renaissance through the seventeenth century, as well as the beginning of the modern age at the beginning of the nineteenth century). It contrasts with an impression of ‘an almost uninterrupted development of the European *ratio* from the Renaissance to our own day’²¹ as the homogenous history of the Same.

However, what dissociates a hermeneutical stance from archaeological genealogy is seen in Foucault’s position: ‘Genealogy, however, seeks to reestablish the various systems of subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of dominations.’²²

Archaeology and Analogy

Foucault maintains that language has a semantic web in terms of the four similitudes (convenience, emulation, analogy, sympathy together with antipathy). If sympathy is an instance of the same in the sense of assimilating and identity, it would reduce the world ‘to a homogenous mass, to the featureless form of the Same.’²³

In counterbalance, Foucault introduces a notion of antipathy in its prevention from assimilation. If the sympathy-antipathy pair produces all the forms of similitude, analogy is sustained by means of this interplay between sympathy and antipathy. Here, hermeneutics intersects with semiology, because every similitude receives a signature, a world of signs; thus the space inhabited by similitude becomes like a vast open book covered with written signs to be deciphered.²⁴

Thus, hermeneutics of resemblance and semiology of signature are superimposed or coincided in analogical language. At the archaeological level, signs and similitudes are wrapped in an episteme around one another in an endless spiral, in other words, an epistemic circle or spiral in the web of the semantics.²⁵

²⁰ Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*, p. 59.

²¹ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. xxii.

²² ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,’ in *The Essential Foucault*, p. 357.

²³ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 24.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

Despite his antipathy to total history, or all anthropocentric sciences or Renaissance humanism, an analogy remains crucial in his archaeological analysis of discourse in the field of historical knowledge in dealing with 'the categories of discontinuity and difference, the notions of threshold, rupture and transformation, the description of series and limits.'²⁶

The discourse is a range of the statements providing a language with the way of talking about something and representing knowledge about a particular subject matter (madness, prison or sexuality). All social cultural practices or performances entail meaning which shapes and influences what we think and do; they have discursive aspects within them. Such meaningful action within the discursive effect implies 'saying something meaningful about something,' which is of analogical character in sustaining the similarity in difference. Meaningful statements are located within the discursive aspect as well as an analogical language in the web of semantics.

The archaeological perspective does not necessarily contradict a hermeneutical understanding of language as analogy; a human subject is defined as historically affected and discursively conditioned. There is no such thing as the sovereignty of the consciousness outside discourse; thus history is not removed, and does not vanish, but it is located within and influential upon the archaeological analysis of discourse or episteme, which exists outside the human subject and its overwhelming consciousness.

Semantic Reading of Archaeology and Epistemic Effect

Foucault's notion of effective history, at the archaeological level, implies the eclipse of the form of history, which is grounded in the synthetic activity of the subject in its development, imbued with the sovereignty of consciousness.²⁷

Nonetheless, the interpreting subject still plays an important role in undertaking the archaeological analysis of episteme in its threshold, rupture, mutation and transformation. An archaeologist is historically influenced, socially deflected, and discursively experienced with multiple spaces of social discourse; an effect of discourse in the sense of a social scheme of interpretation is given as *noema* in the human perception in the experience of the discursive formation and performance.

²⁶. Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, p. 14.

²⁷. Ibid.

Meaningful discourse would be consonant with the consciousness of the archaeologist as well as the collective consciousness in the society committed to the inalienable rights of the Other, which has been reduced to silence. It requires an archaeologist to suspend or problematize continuous accumulation of knowledge, its increasing rationality, and its various effects, while explicating the phenomena of rupture or discontinuity.

Foucault wants to write a different history like madness, punishment or sexuality for effective history. In this act of writing history, an archaeologist is not capable of escaping the historical continuity actively existing in the present, but a critical analysis is required to describe the extent to which such continuity would exclude and subjugate successfully what is unfit and deviant.

In fact, Foucault is grounded in the exteriority of the archaeological attitude against the recourse to the interiority of conscious meaning-giving subject, but archaeology might be an implicit hermeneutic form of suspense and discontinuity; the discursively affected consciousness shapes the attitude of the archaeologist against the dominant narrative of history.

The discourse is formed, institutionalized, and epistemologized in defining and affecting a particular way of thinking and doing about a particular topic. Meaning or meaningful practices are constructed and represented through the discourse, along with power relations (institutional support, political power or judicial legitimacy).

The archaeological attitude maintains that physical objects or things have no real meaning outside discourse, which defines and conditions the way we talk about the objects, acting upon the ideas of them. They take on meaning and become the objects of knowledge within the discourse, in which the way of talking is put into practice and institutionalized as epistemological figures and patterns. Meaning comes only through the discourse, which is embedded with representation and in power-knowledge relations.

Given this, the world of discourse might be a form of life-world; in other words, a socially conceptualized scheme of interpretation as a generally shared background. An epistemological return to the discourse remains decisive in producing the meaning or meaningful action of an object in relation with other symbolic and material elements (for example, the possibility of a black woman being elected President in US). The systematic set of relations (discourse event in formation, dispersion, and practice) is a conceptual framework for understanding meaning as socially constructed through discursive articulation with political power, institutional support and legal codification.

The general arrangement of the episteme displaces the subject from the privileged position in dealing with knowledge, truth and meaning. The subject is produced along with discourse, by submitting to its rules, convention, and the implication of power-knowledge relations; it becomes the bearer and carrier of the knowledge that the discourse produces. It is also of a nihilistic trend, because it apprehends the 'man' or humanity as an invention of recent age, nearing its end.²⁸

Nonetheless, Foucault's hermeneutics of the desiring subject cannot be sidestepped in comprehending a history of the experience of sexuality. It requires a historical and critical study of desire, pleasure, and aesthetics of existence in the subject of sexuality. A hermeneutics of desire seeks to explicate how the modern individual could experience him/herself as a subject of sexuality.²⁹

A theory of problematization aims at thinking differently by way of suspense of what is already known or what is taken for granted. It puts the pre-existing forms of continuity (these syntheses accepted without question or the immediate forms of continuity) in suspense, because all manifest discourse (based on an 'already-said') still implies a 'never-said.'³⁰

In this suspension an entire, vast field made up of the totality of all effective statements (whether spoken or written) is set free. This suspension of the problematizing enquiry seeks to undertake a pure description of discursive events, which is the horizon for the search for the unities formed within it. A statement is always an event which is not merely exhausted by the language or meaning.³¹

Foucault's archaeological attitude is consonant with a phenomenological attitude of suspense. The language game or epistemological shift transpired in the history of effect in each different context, which is the site of meaning, power, change and emancipation, as well as the stumbling block and obscurities.

This perspective modifies and revises Gadamer's theory of hermeneutical dialogue (history, society, the text of the discourse, and the agent) in acknowledging the significance of the power-knowledge relations in connection with the discourse influencing and constituting human beings. Language is allotted to its social function in a hierarchal

²⁸. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 387.

²⁹. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, pp. 2, 6–7.

³⁰. Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, p. 25.

³¹. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

manner. To be hermeneutically experienced is to be discursively experienced, such that history intersects with society for vivid present, in which the dialogical rationality is driven in the anamnestic reasoning concerning the structure of privilege, inequality and hierarchy.

According to Foucault, the discourse (spoken and written) is defined in terms of an interjection between speaking and thinking, and the structures of language can be brought into play by producing a certain effect of meaning.³² In fact, the symbolic meaning is not merely exhausted by the power relations, but related to the discourse as event without the disposal of the signifying subject and its performance. The discourses are treated as an ensemble of discourse events, and they take effect and have their meaning influencing human consciousness through power-knowledge relations.

The effect of a discourse and its symbolic power intersect with sociological, hermeneutical enquiry of social stratification in dealing with each epistemological configuration or discursive practices in multiple spheres; it is explicated in terms of diverse types of capital and power relations in a symbolic, materialist frame of reference.

The *noesis-noema* correlation is always and already moved within effectiveness of life-world in history as well as society, in which a phenomenological notion of consciousness can be renewed by the corporeality of the social body. The subject of the social body is not the ground for meaning in the world, because the world itself could have different meanings and we stand in different places and epistemes. In different perspectives and different understandings of the world, there is the conflict of interpretations in which there is still a shared background: life-world underlying a tradition or a language, or culture or episteme as the commonly shared referent. This facilitates our anticipation of the meaning through semantic circle in the archaeological analysis of each episteme, the text of the discourse, or the role of the living agent. To interpret is to be different and problematic.

This hermeneutical epistemology facilitates a constructive theology of comparative religions in correlating religious text, ritual practices, and social ethics with a reality of social stratification, which is structured and represented by division of labour, rationalization, and specialization; yet it is conditioned by inequality, privilege and dominion. Such enquiry reinforces a critical dimension of comparative theology in dealing with cultural and political issues such as race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality.

³² Ibid., p. 227.