Michel Foucault

What is an Author?

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Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Background of Foucault
3. Who influence Foucault’s thought
4. Foucault comment arts to reflect his thought
5. Author Functions (4 functions)
6. Author with trans-discursive position
7. Initiators of discursive practices
8. Practice
9. Conclusion
Introduction - Timeline

18th Century
Age of Enlightenment

Winckelmann (1717-1768)
Kant (1724-1804)
Hegel (1770-1831)
Industrial Revolution (1780-1820/40)
French Revolution (1789-1799)

19th Century
Romanticism

Paul Cézanne (1839-1906)
Realism
Impressionism
post-impressionism
Modernism
Symbolism
Art Nouveau

20th Century

Michel Foucault (1926-1984)

WWI (1914-1918)
WW II (1939-1945)
Postmodernism
Background

1926 - 1984

French historian and philosopher

strong influence not only in philosophy

literature, philosophy, history, sociology, politics

Published Work


c. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, 1966

i. *What is an Author?, 22 February 1969*
Who influence Foucault’s thought

Including Friedrich Nietzsche and Hegel
Especially Friedrich Nietzsche

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)  Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)
Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

Philosophical naturalist

His main aesthetic theory

“Nothing is beautiful except human ”

➔ Most beautiful thing is ourself

➔ your background and experience

➔ how we appreciate the artist

➔ depends on how we look at the artwork
How does Friedrich Nietzsche influence Foucault?

“The order of things” (Foucault, 1966)

Challenged that audience should read the context of the work but not the historical background his political, social states of the author.

From the thoughts of Nietzsche

➢ Foucault argued that artwork is reflected:

   Artist himself, background and the experience, artwork is representing themselves.

pointed out that author have big influence to the artwork.
Foucault comments on 1656’s masterpiece, Las Meninas by Diego Velázquez in 1966.
Foucault comments on 1656’s masterpiece, Las Meninas by Diego Velázquez in 1966

Infanta Margarita Teresa (Philip IV’s daughter)
Foucault comments on 1656’s masterpiece, Las Meninas by Diego Velázquez in 1966
Foucault comments on 1656’s masterpiece, Las Meninas by Diego Velázquez in 1966
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- **ONLY** visual representation: indistinct mirror
- Situated in **Bright** position
- BUT **no** characters in painting are looking at it
Foucault comments on 1656’s masterpiece, Las Meninas by Diego Velázquez in 1966

- Superimposition of gazes function exterior to the painting are invisible
- BUT they are represented in the painting

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<th>Situations</th>
<th>Gazes</th>
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<td>1. When Model is being painted</td>
<td>Gaze of model(Middle, the mirror)</td>
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<td>2. When Spectators contemplate the painting</td>
<td>Gaze of Spectators(Right, the stair)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. When Painter is composing the picture in the hidden easel</td>
<td>Gaze of painter(Left)</td>
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Foucault comments on 1656’s masterpiece, Las Meninas by Diego Velázquez in 1966

- Gazes connect to an ideal and real point
- Gazes are under destabilized positions
- Positions can be reversed infinitely
- Allows spectators to fill in the empty place of subject

<table>
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<th>Gazes from the painting</th>
<th>Invisible</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gaze of painter</td>
<td>Models who are being painted in the hidden easel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gaze of King and Queen(models)</td>
<td>Their own portrait which they cannot see but reflected in the mirror</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gaze of Spectators</td>
<td>Centre of the scene (place himself in the painting by usurpation)</td>
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Foucault comments arts to reflect his thought

TWO western painting principles ruled by Foucault from 15 to 19th century

Words and images have often been put together, but one of them would be subordinated to the other

When painted image resembled an object in the world, it often served to direct the spectators to recognize the real object in the world
Foucault comments on Magritte’s painting in 1968

Magritte uses words to challenge the hierarchical principle

Word “This” is ambiguous

(refer to image of pipe?sentence itself?the entire painting?)

Allow multiple interpretations

René Magritte, This is not a pipe, 1929
Foucault comments on Manet’s painting in 1971 (speech)

Manet’s paintings were published in 19th century, however he became active in 20th century.

Manet introduced a painting method, “painting-object”.

Foucault appreciates Manet’s idea.

Invention of painting-object:

1. Treatment of space
2. Treatment of light
A sense of flatness
Two planes
Source of light from the place of observing
Spectators observe the painting and Olympia observes us meanwhile
BUT Spectators are invisible
The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences

Published in 1966

Defines discourse

A group of statement with center topics

E.g. natural history, analysis of wealth and political economy

Disregards similar analysis of the authors and their works

Results crude and naive employment of authors’ names

E.g. Buffon, Charles Darwin
What is an Author?
What is an Author?

A speech given at the Collège de France on 22 February 1969

Responded to *The Death of Author* - disconnection of writing and writer and criticism on *The Order of Things*

Demonstrated the idea of “Author Function”

Applying on Arts
Author

Not only refer to the individual who write the text

The individual’s name that provides a discourse

A kind of social construction

Varies with culture and time
Contemporary Writing

“What matters who’s speaking” (from Bekett)

Themes

Interplay of signs
Disregard the author
Neglect the Signified
Interpret the Signifier by the readers
Author function

“Author” should not be seen as the centre of the texts or entirely be disregarded when interpreting the texts.

Readers should see “author” as a function to interpret the texts.

4 features of Author Functions
1. Author as object of “appropriation”
Author function apply in painting
Author function apply in painting

Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*, 1503-06, oil on panel, 77 cm × 53 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris)

*L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919), *Marcel Duchamp*
1. Author as object of “appropriation”

✗ Copyright law

- people’s derivative work inspired by or based on previous art work were not illegal
- derivative work status as property is minor
- only when writing or speech said something transgressive and broke rules
- assign to real authors then the authors became subjected to punishments

✓ Copyright law

- texts became forms of property
- show author’s name
- Intellectual property right became property to authors
2. Author function varies with time and text
Author function apply in painting

Pills

Nicolas Poussin, The Rape the Sabine Women, c.1637-38, oil on canvas, 159 X 206 cm (Musée du Louvre)
2. Author function varies with time and text

Middle Ages

highly increase on technological and agricultural innovation

Scientific text

only the the scientific text with indicating author name will be regards as trustful work

People require author’s name as indicator of truthfulness (author function)

Author function

Literature

Importance of indicating the author name in literature text is less important

Author function
2. Author function varies with time and text

- 17th and 18th Centuries
  - change of ideology
  - After French revolution

**Scientific text**
- No need author
- Law of science is remain unchanged
- Theory in scientific text just like restate, it is much difference with the literature text

**Author function**
2. Author function varies with time and text

Literary

- result of French revolution
- through painting express extreme fear to the society
- realism romanticism
- emphasis individual feeling and expression
- seek for the author name in order to understand the meaning
- indicating of the author name will affect how others perception towards the artwork

E.g. background, experience and history of the author

Author function
Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) was a French Baroque artist. His works are known for their clarity, logic, and vivid use of color. In his painting, "The Rape of the Sabine Women," c.1637-38, oil on canvas, 159 x 206 cm (Musee du Louvre), Poussin utilizes the contrast of color in order to express the anxiety of the women in ancient Rome that they are being kidnapped.

If the Spectator knows more background of Nicolas Poussin, then there will be more perception towards this painting.
3. Construction of a rational entity
3. Construction of a rational entity

According to Saint Jerome, there are four criteria in maintaining the compatibility of authorship:

1. Standard level of quality
2. Contradiction or conflicts of ideas
3. Uniform style
4. Definite historical figure

People at that time saw these criteria as tradition and assumed an artist would only have one author function.
3. Construction of a rational entity

Foucault questions why it is used as tradition. He complements that author function can be more than one.
Example - Picasso (Blue Period 1901-1904)

Painting style (Author function)

- Monochrome → greyish color, mainly blue
- Use of shadow → The body is still in 3-dimensional
- Single viewpoint
- Tragic theme

Pablo Picasso, *The Old Guitarist*, 1903-04, oil on panel, 122.9 cm × 82.6 cm (Art Institute in Chicago)
Example - Picasso (Cubism)

Painting style (Author function)

Rich use of colors

Use of geometric form (bodies are reassembled)

2 - dimensional → figures are flattened

More than one viewpoint

Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907, oil on canvas, 243.9 x 233.7 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York
4. Plurality of Egos
4. Plurality of Egos

Different egos can be performed within a text
And they can contribute different author functions

Example

Mathematics treatise, fiction

In Art, an entity can be:

The individual

The one who creates the style of painting

The character in the painting
Example - Picasso (Blue Period)

The subject / character in the painting:

- Guitarist enjoy playing the guitar
- Crooked and thin body

Painting style (Author function)

- Monochrome style - Blue
  Indicating moody atmosphere
- Guitar in yellowish brown → as the focus
- The body is elongated → producing a weak look

Pablo Picasso, *The Old Guitarist*, 1903-04, oil on panel, 122.9 cm × 82.6 cm (Art Institute in Chicago)
Author with tran-discursive position
Initiators of discursive practices
Author with tran-discursive position

Author that is a pioneer, a founder of great theories

“There as old as our civilization” (Foucault)

Their author function not only influence their own work

But also other authors’ work

can support or disprove his or her ideas later

“the work sits in parallel with subsequent work in its tradition” (Foucault)

E.g. Aristotle, the Church Father
Initiators of discursive practices

Author that provides new different related discourses (ideas or concepts) that branches out within his or her own work

In the 19th Century

His or her ideas are assumed to be true

“initiators’ work overshadows the discourse” (Foucault)

“Made possible a certain number of differences.” (Foucault)

E.g. Freud, Marx
Example - Paul Cézanne

Use of **geometric forms, flat surface** to represent

Influenced Picasso and Georges Braque and emergence of Cubism

::* Initiator of discursive practices

Paul Cézanne, *The Basket of Apples*, c. 1893, oil on canvas, 65 x 80 cm. Art Institute of Chicago
The End
References


References


References