Foucault: The Birth of Power

Stuart Elden
Foucault

*The Birth of Power*
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This book developed out of the research for Foucault's Last Decade (Polity, 2016), to which it forms a prequel. As such, many of the debts incurred in the writing of that previous book are shared with this one.

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To ease reference, key texts are referred to by abbreviations. For texts where one book is translated in a single book, such as the lecture courses, the French page number is given first, followed by the English after a slash. So PP 105/103 would refer to the lecture course *Le pouvoir psychiatrique*, p. 105 in the French text, and p. 103 in the English translation *Psychiatric Power*. I have frequently modified existing translations.¹

Throughout this book, English titles are used for books available in translation; French for untranslated works or unpublished manuscripts, though an English translation of the title is provided the first time they are used.

### Abbreviations

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<td>MG2</td>
<td>Michel Foucault, Blandine Barrett Kriegel, Anne Thalamy, François Beguin and Bruno Fortier, Les machines à guérir (aux origines de l’hôpital moderne), Brussels: Pierre Mardaga, revised edn 1979.</td>
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### Archival material

**BNF** Archives et Manuscrits, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris


IMEC’s catalogue codes have changed over time as material is reorganized. References are correct at the time materials were consulted. Classical texts are referred to by the usual conventions. I have generally used the bi-lingual editions in the Loeb library.
Introduction: Out of the 1960s

On 8 August 1970 Foucault wrote in a letter to his partner Daniel Defert that he ‘had promised an afterword for the re-publication of Les mots et les choses, but now these things are of no interest to me’ (C 36/44). Four months later, on 2 December 1970, Foucault gave his inaugural lecture at the prestigious Collège de France. There he outlined his new research agenda, which would lead him from the political stakes of knowledge to the workings of power, taking in analysis of prisons, hospitals and mental health and, in time, would lead to his last great project on sexuality. By the time Surveiller et punir, which we know in English as Discipline and Punish, appeared in February 1975 a much more explicitly political Foucault was clearly evident.

Les mots et les choses was published in 1966 and translated as The Order of Things. It is a book which shares much with his earlier works History of Madness from 1961 and Birth of the Clinic from 1963. It was followed by The Archaeology of Knowledge in 1969, which is often seen as the theoretical culmination of the work Foucault conducted in the 1960s. The roots can be traced back further, of course, with the research for the History of Madness begun in the mid-1950s.1 History of Madness was initially presented as Foucault’s primary thesis, with the secondary thesis a translation of Kant’s Anthropology, along with notes and a substantial introduction.2 Foucault had lectured on anthropology from Kant to Dilthey at the École Normale Supérieure and Lille in the 1950s.3 Some of the themes in the Kant introduction were developed in The Order of Things. With

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the advent of the new decade though, it appears that Foucault wanted to move in another direction.

In 1969 Foucault had returned to France after several years in Tunisia, first to the experimental University of Vincennes, and then, following his election, to a chair at the Collège de France. Foucault claimed that Tunisia was a political awakening for him, and the events of May 1968 meant that France was much changed from the place he had left behind. On his return Foucault quickly became involved in activist work, particularly concerning prisons but also around health issues such as abortion rights. His active involvement in a number of political campaigns in this period was often around the same issues as his academic work. In addition, in his seminars and elsewhere Foucault built research teams to conduct collaborative work, often around issues related to his lectures and activism.

If *The Archaeology of Knowledge* was a methodological treatise, *Discipline and Punish* was a call to arms. What had happened to Foucault such that the research he had conducted on previous topics – work that had occupied him for so much of the 1960s – was something he wanted to move beyond? What was the nature of this transformation, and how did this transition in his thought and action take place? *Foucault: The Birth of Power* offers an answer.

**Approach and Sources**

Through a careful reconstruction of Foucault’s work and preoccupations this book therefore provides a detailed intellectual history of Foucault in this period as writer, researcher, lecturer and activist. Our ability to trace Foucault’s preoccupations is considerably enhanced by a range of newly available materials, both published texts as well as archival documents. Like the account offered in my previous book *Foucault’s Last Decade,* this book makes extensive use of all this material. Its sources include his first courses at the Collège de France, multiple shorter pieces and interviews, boxes of manuscripts available at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), as well as material relating to his activism and collaborative research archived at the Institut Mémoires de l’édition contemporaine (IMEC). Because of the dates of their collection I have not, for this book, used the archive at the Bancroft Library in Berkeley.

Foremost among the new publications are his annual research courses at the Collège de France, which comprise lectures delivered from late 1970 until 1984. The requirement of professors there is to report on their ongoing projects, rather than teach. As such, the
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lectures give a fascinating insight into the development of ideas and the germination of projects. The first three courses include a wide range of analyses of ancient Greece, the Dark Ages, the Middle Ages, early modern France and Europe through to the nineteenth century. In these courses and the next, in publications, and in collaborative work within and beyond the Collège, Foucault would turn his attention to detailed examinations of asylums, hospitals and public health, and, of course, the prison. It is now clear that Discipline and Punish, though the principal output from that work, was by no means the only one. It was grounded upon a much wider range of concerns and projects. By the time that book appeared in early 1975 Foucault had already begun to prepare materials for his last major project on sexuality and government of the self and others, which would occupy him until his untimely death in 1984. That project is the focus of Foucault’s Last Decade.

Foucault: The Birth of Power has a focus on the years immediately preceding that decade, on 1969–74, the period between the publication of The Archaeology of Knowledge and the completion of Discipline and Punish. It therefore acts as prequel to the treatment of the subsequent and final phase of his work in Foucault’s Last Decade. Noting the gap between The Archaeology of Knowledge and Discipline and Punish, David Macey suggests ‘the period 1971–3 was the most intensely political in Foucault’s life and the multiple activities in which he was involved left little time for writing’. While undoubtedly correct about the political activism, and that most of Foucault’s publications from this time take the form of transcripts of spoken material – lectures, interviews, media events or other talks – there was much going on below the surface, which is only slowly coming to light.

One of the first tasks undertaken was to build a detailed timeline, drawing extensively on Defert’s work for Dits et écrits, but also adding dates of lectures, interviews, press conferences and other activism. This was based on various sources including the Eribon and Macey biographies, Foucault’s friend Claude Mauriac’s journals, notes in texts, and newspapers. This allowed material to be worked through in a roughly chronological order. Seeing the interconnection of lectures, conversations, publications and working notes helped enormously in understanding what Foucault was trying to do, and how he was trying to do it. The account offered here tries to do justice to that. It is not a biography, but rather an exercise in the history of thought or intellectual history. It is, in a sense, a genealogy of the emergence of questions of power and, indeed, the notion of genealogy, in Foucault’s work. It attempts to situate works in
Introduction: Out of the 1960s

contexts, to draw connections, and to integrate a study of Foucault’s political activism and collaborative research work within a study of his better-known writings and his lectures. Secondary literature has been referenced when useful, though as yet there is limited material on the early courses. In going beyond Foucault’s own texts the general principle has been not to discuss people who have read Foucault, but rather to discuss what Foucault read.

Lecture Courses

The Collège de France lecture courses are an especially useful resource, with their editorial apparatus of notes, variant readings and contextual material. The early courses were among the last to appear, in part because of the difficulty in establishing the texts. While for most of the courses tape recordings were extant, and could be transcribed, with the first three courses the editors had to use other sources. For 1970–1’s Lectures on the Will to Know, Defert edited the course on the basis of the manuscript used for its delivery; a procedure followed by Bernard Harcourt for 1971–2’s Théories et institutions pénales [Penal Theories and Institutions]. While Foucault prepared his courses in extensive detail, he did not write them out in fully formed sentences to be read word-for-word. The manuscript pages give a sense of how he wrote his lectures and how he elaborated them in spoken performance – some passages are written out, others are more note-like. Contrary to a journalist’s report included in the preface to all volumes of this series (e.g. LWK viii/x), there was improvisation and extrapolation around planned themes. It can be hard to tell the difference between his point and those he is discussing or arguing against (primary authorities or other historians). The manuscripts alone can be difficult to follow, and the editors have reconstructed what is there, with scrupulous textual fidelity, rather than extrapolated from it to what might have been said. Notes specify where material was crossed out, pages inserted, or where Foucault reorganized the running order. Readers are forced to do some of the interpretative work themselves.

With 1972–3’s The Punitive Society a transcript was made shortly after the course’s delivery, from tapes which are now lost: one archival copy has the 1973–4 course recorded over the top. Foucault reviewed and corrected the transcript, which was used as the basis for the course by Harcourt, along with comparison to the manuscript. From 1973–4’s Psychiatric Power onwards, all the courses are based on tape recordings, with supplements from course manuscripts and related materials. These later volumes used the manuscript to
supplement the spoken record, but for the first two courses there is only one of the two sources to draw upon. There are a few exceptions, notably the ‘annex’ appended to the final lecture of the first course (LWK 189–92/195–9); and at times Defert is able to draw on the notes made by a member of Foucault’s audience, Hélène Politis, though he respects Foucault’s reluctance to publish the notes of an audience member. Likewise, François Ewald and Harcourt note that the manuscript of the second course accords well with what was actually delivered, but the auditors who confirmed this are not generally used to provide further detail. In both courses there are pages of manuscript missing in part or whole, and these have generally had to be left absent from the printed text.

Between 21 and 25 May 1973 Foucault delivered a series of lectures given at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, under the title of ‘Truth and Juridical Forms’. These five lectures used and developed material from the first three Collège de France courses. Foucault finished teaching in Paris around March each year, and then frequently took the lectures on the road with him. These lectures were published in Portuguese in 1974, in French in 1994; and in English in 2000 (without the 23-page round-table discussion that followed the fifth lecture). The first two lectures, on Nietzsche and Oedipus, respectively, develop arguments made in Lectures on the Will to Know. Théories et institutions pénales only provides the material for a single lecture, on feudal law and the Carolingian Empire. The fourth and fifth lectures develop The Punitive Society, especially around panopticism and institutions. As the transcript is based on a recording, it helps to fill in detail about the first and second course, for which only Foucault’s manuscripts survive from Paris. The Rio lectures demonstrate what Foucault did with this material when he took it on the road, and how he elaborated from these fragmented notes. They are a tantalizing glimpse of what might have been done with the material in Paris. However, the Rio lectures developed themes from the courses rather than just replicated them, and drew on some of the manuscript materials Foucault had prepared for, but not delivered in, Paris.

The Rio lectures are also important because they provide a strong link between the first three Paris courses, and show how their concerns are related, especially through the explicit focus on three concepts: measure, inquiry and examination. Measure was a fundamental theme of Lectures on the Will to Know; inquiry emerges in the study of the transition from Germanic law to the Middle Ages in Théories et institutions pénales, and examination is a key focus of The Punitive Society. Foucault suggests that ‘what is called the inquiry – the
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inquiry as practised by philosophers of the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, and also by scientists, whether they were geographers, botanists, zoologists, or economists – is a rather characteristic form of truth in our societies’. In time, though it would be replaced with the examination (DE#139 II, 541; EW III, 4–5). ‘This examination was the basis of the power, the form of knowledge-power, that was to give rise not, as in the case of the inquiry, to the great sciences of observation, but to what we call the “human sciences” – psychiatry, psychology, sociology’ (DE#139 II, 595; EW III, 59). Taken together, these three courses form a powerful initial triptych, developing conceptual terminology for the analysis of a wide range of phenomena.

Other Materials

Other materials utilized in this study include the interviews and other short pieces that appeared during this period. In the posthumous collection *Dits et écrits*, which collected almost all the authorized pieces published in Foucault’s lifetime, the original edition was in four volumes. Volume I covered 1954–69; Volume II 1970–5; Volume III 1976–9; and Volume IV 1980–8 – the last extended to include a few pieces authorized before Foucault’s death but which appeared later due to publishing delays. The shorter periods of later volumes are not simply because Foucault published more conventional pieces, but because many more of his lectures, especially those given outside France, were published, and because he took part in an increasing number of interviews, round-tables and press-conferences. As Foucault’s friend and sometime research collaborator Gilles Deleuze noted: ‘If Foucault’s interviews form an integral part of his work, it is because they extend the historical problematization of each of his books into the construction of the present problem, be it madness, punishment or sexuality’. This is certainly true, but even more so in terms of the record of his political activities.

We have a still incomplete sense of Foucault’s activism, which dramatically increased in the period in question in this book. As Deleuze and others have long recognized, Foucault’s political work is crucial in understanding the transition from *The Archaeology of Knowledge* to *Discipline and Punish*. While most of the documents of the Groupe d’Information sur les prisons (GIP) have been published in French, with an English selection forthcoming, little is said about his involvement with other groups, including parallel ones on health and asylums. Much of the material relating to the GIP and the health group is archived at IMEC, and I have made extensive use of their collection. The material there extends to cover other collaborative
work, including with the Centre d’Études, de Recherche et de Formation Institutionnelle (CERFI). This was a group founded in 1967 by Félix Guattari, developing from the earlier Fédération des Groupes d’Études de Recherches Institutionnelles (FGERI). Foucault’s research with this group and researchers he met through it ran in parallel to his major works until at least the mid-1970s, and he later made attempts to constitute other collaborative ventures as a visitor in Louvain, Vermont and, especially, Berkeley.\textsuperscript{12}

The archive of Foucault’s personal papers has also become partly available in the last few years. In 2012, Defert sold 37,000 pages of material to the BNF, after this resource had been declared a ‘national treasure’ by the government to prevent it leaving France. Loosely categorized into 110 boxes, at the time of writing about forty are available to researchers. Tantalizing indications of what are in the other seventy boxes can be found throughout the editorial apparatus of the recent \textit{Œuvres} – a collection of Foucault’s major works in the prestigious Bibliothèque de la Pléiade series with Gallimard. As yet, the available archive material largely comprises Foucault’s reading notes, both for his books and lecture courses. These notes help enormously in contextualizing Foucault’s work, and editors of his courses have used these extensively in their editorial apparatus. Unfortunately the notes are undated, and Foucault filed them thematically. He would add notes from a much later date to earlier folders, or move earlier notes into new folders, which can make their use difficult. At the moment, the only course whose manuscript is listed in the catalogue is \textit{Théories et institutions pénales}. There are also five boxes of material that have been available for many years, comprising an early draft of \textit{The Archaeology of Knowledge} and preparatory drafts of what became the second and third volumes of the \textit{History of Sexuality}. The latter were discussed in \textit{Foucault’s Last Decade}. As yet, pre-Collège de France courses at Vincennes, Tunis and elsewhere are not available, nor are the manuscripts of unpublished works, including, most notably, the fourth volume of the \textit{History of Sexuality}. There are plans to publish much of this.\textsuperscript{13} What is available, though, does give a very interesting insight into Foucault’s working practices and I have tried to use these in the account offered here.

\section*{From Tunisia and Vincennes to the Collège de France}

While the courses have not yet been published, we do know something of Foucault’s teaching in Tunisia and Vincennes. Foucault moved to Tunisia in September 1966, on a three-year secondment
from the University of Clermont-Ferrand. There, for the first time since the mid-1950s, he taught philosophy. Defert describes his course on ‘Philosophical Discourse’ as developing themes from *The Order of Things*, alongside a public course ‘on Western culture’ (C 29/34). There were also courses on Descartes (which seems to have owed much to Edmund Husserl), Nietzsche, painting from the Renaissance to Édouard Manet, and psychology. Some of Foucault’s individual lectures from this time have been published, but only one on Manet – intended to be the basis of a book with Minuit – in a critical edition. Foucault was therefore outside France during the events of May 1968, but the events coincided with his own political re-awakening, born out of student struggles against the Habib Bourguiba dictatorship. ‘In Tunisia I was led to help students… I was forced to enter the political arena. It was not May ’68 in France, but March ’68, in a third world country’ (DE#281 IV, 79; EW III, 279–80; see DE#160 II, 774; E 119–20).

*The Archaeology of Knowledge* was published while Foucault was in Tunisia, on 13 March 1969. Given the date of its publication it seems a curiously apolitical book. Defert recalls that ‘the dry descriptions of things he had said in previous works, and his way of differentiating himself from structuralism all frustrate expectations’ (C 34/42). This was due, in part, to the complicated gestation of the book. Foucault had finished writing *The Order of Things* on 4 April 1965 (C 27/31), and it was published the next year. He moved to Tunisia shortly afterwards, but had already begun writing the manuscript that was to become *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, confessing in a letter of 12 November 1966 to Defert that ‘the theory of discourse is still a shambles, 396 pages to re-do’ (C 29/34). Nine months later, in August 1967, he finished writing the manuscript, but left it until November 1968 before he gave Alain Badiou the task of reducing and editing it for publication (C 31/37, 33/40).

Unusually for Foucault’s books, a complete early draft dating from 1965–6 survives. It had been given by Foucault to Defert to read, and while Foucault often discarded his early draft materials when books were complete, Defert kept this copy, and it is available at the Bibliothèque Nationale. It can perhaps best be described as a different book on the same topic. There are more references to literary works than in the published book, including Honoré de Balzac, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Alain Robbe-Grillet and Shakespeare’s *Henry V*. There is some expanded discussion of Foucault’s relation to the history of ideas tradition, including a few remarks on Georges Dumézil, Ernst Cassirer, Wilhelm Dilthey and Arthur O. Lovejoy, alongside Georges Canguilhem. There are some mentions of analytic
philosophy including Ludwig Wittgenstein and Hilary Putnam as well as German thought – G. W. F. Hegel and Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Key terms in the published book like the historical a priori are absent; others are given much more extensive discussion. The way the book links to Foucault’s earlier historical studies is very clear, but there is also a clear relation to the parallel work he did on literature in the 1960s. Foucault suggests the book is a challenge to the anthropology of the past 150 years, and that the project is orientated towards ‘the diagnostic of what is “today”’, a notion which perhaps anticipates Discipline and Punish’s notion of a ‘history of the present’. Fragments of a later draft version also survive.

In the published book, especially in Part II, Chapter 3, Foucault gives some indications of future projects, including the question of knowing ‘how criminality could become an object of medical expertise, or sexual deviation a possible object of psychiatric discourse’ (AK 70/48). In the concluding chapter of Part IV in a section entitled ‘Other Archaeologies’ he outlines a much fuller research agenda of possible work, noting that he is not far along the path with any, but including the idea of a project on sexuality. This could be, of course, an archaeological analysis, ‘orientated towards the episteme’, and looking at the establishment of scientific knowledge in biology and psychology, along with Freud’s rupture.

But I can also see another direction for analysis: instead of studying the sexual behaviour of men at a given period [époque] (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 (what religious interpretation they gave it, to what extent they approved or disapproved of it, what conflicts of opinion or morality it gave rise to), one would ask oneself whether, in this behaviour, 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 (or that is forbidden to talk about), a field of possible enunciations (whether in lyrical or legal language), a group of concepts (which can no doubt be presented in the elementary form of notions or themes), a set of choices (which may appear in the coherence of behaviour [conduites] or in systems of prescription). Such an archaeology would show, if it succeeded in its task, how the prohibitions [interdits], exclusions, limitations, values, freedoms, and transgressions of sexuality, all its manifestations, verbal or otherwise, are linked to a particular discursive practice. It would reveal, not of course as the ultimate truth of sexuality, but as one of the dimensions in accordance with which one can describe it, a certain ‘way of speaking’; and one would show how this way of speaking is
invested not in scientific discourses, but in a system of prohibitions and values. (AK 261–2/192–3)

Foucault adds that this would be an analysis not of the *episteme* – that is an examination of knowledge alone – but ‘of which we might call the ethical’ (AK 262/193). An early indication of the project he would begin in earnest in 1974, this is already an outline of some important methodological developments.

On leaving Tunisia Foucault did not return to Clermont-Ferrand, but instead taught at the new and experimental University of Vincennes (now Paris-VIII) from 1969–70.22 His courses there included ones on ‘Sexuality and Individuality’ and ‘Nietzsche and Genealogy’ (C 34/41).23 Defert suggests that he first develops the promises of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and provides a ‘history of heredity and of racial hygiene’ (C 34/41). Heredity was a recurrent theme in Foucault’s work. Foucault discussed the question of heredity in relation to mental illness as far back as 1953, when he taught in Lille and at the École Normale Supérieure, in material which was related to his first book, *Maladie mentale et personnalité*.24 That book was published in 1954, and then in a substantially revised edition as *Maladie mentale et psychologie* in 1962.25 The work on these themes also informs the preparatory work for the introduction to Kant’s *Anthropology*, translated and edited as his secondary thesis. The theme of heredity continues in Foucault’s 1970s work. It comes up briefly in his television debate with Noam Chomsky (DE#132 II, 473–4), and is a key focus of his later work on race, where he discusses ‘the technology of eugenics with the problem of heredity, racial purification, and the correction of the human instinctual system by purification of the race’ (A 124/133; SMBD 53/61, 225/252).26 It also appears in his interest in the question of degeneration discussed in the 1974–5 course *The Abnormals* (A 124/133) and his wider work on sexuality. Nietzsche is a focus of the first Collège de France course and a lecture at McGill in 1971, and then again in Rio in 1973. Genealogy is of course the topic of his short essay ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, published in 1971. With this essay’s stress on emergence, provenance, lineage and birth (DE#84, II, 137; EW II, 370), it is clear that Foucault did not just envisage heredity as a topic of study, but as providing a model for the kind of work he wanted to undertake (see Chapter 1). His time at Vincennes was also important for political activism, leading to occupations, conflict with the police, arrest and interventions to protest the exclusion of students.27

Foucault had not been at Vincennes long before his next move was planned. On 30 November 1969 a chair in the ‘history of systems
of thought’ was created at the Collège de France and while this was clearly intended for Foucault, he was not formally elected to it until 12 April 1970. For his election, Foucault had outlined much of the work he intended to do over the coming years, which set out an agenda for his early lecture courses. When Jules Vuillemin proposed the chair he commented that ‘the history of systems of thought is not therefore the history of man or of men who think’, it should ‘eliminate the subject but preserve the thought, and attempt to construct a history without human nature’. When he came to propose Foucault for this chair, outlining Foucault’s work to date and his future plans, he suggested that ‘a history of thought, thus conceived, has for its principal material archives more than texts, institutions and techniques more than theories. As a consequence thought is discovered in collective forms, stripped of individual variants. In this perspective, slow transformations tend to detach themselves from original inventions and the play of economic, political and social determinations matters more than logical coherence’. In Foucault’s own presentation of his previous work and future plans, ‘Titres et travaux’, he expressed his approach in these terms:

So an object took shape for me: the knowledge [savoir] invested in complex institutional systems. And a method asserted itself: instead of only running through the library of scientific literature, as one was apt to do, I would need to examine a collection of archives comprising official orders, statutes, hospital or prison records, court proceedings, and so on. It was at the Arsenal and the Archives Nationales that I undertook the analysis of a knowledge whose visible body is not theoretical or scientific discourse, nor literature either, but a regulated, everyday practice. (DE#71 I, 842–3; EW I, 5–6)

Foucault also notes that for The Order of Things he tried a different approach, which was to ‘neutralize the whole practical and institutional side but without giving up the idea of going back to it one day’ (DE#7 I, 843; EW I, 6). This meant that that study was focused entirely on ‘domains of knowledge’, to undertake an archaeology of them. To elaborate this question he wrote the ‘clarification’ which was The Archaeology of Knowledge. But now, in late 1969, he is at pains to stress that ‘this knowledge is embodied not only in theoretical texts or empirical instruments but also in a whole set [ensemble] of practices and institutions’ (DE#71 I, 844; EW I, 7).

Following History of Madness, Foucault’s work from the mid-late 1960s is sometimes seen as comprising two main strands – archaeology and literature. The first strand, on what might be said to be on the limits of language, and which is usually understood under the