

Arena

Biopolitics, discursive order and Communication

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Abstract

The present work aims to map the discursive order in its biopolitical relationship with the field of Communication. Using the method of bibliographical research, we started with the premise that the foulcaldian discursive order is essentially a tool of power rather than an approach to truth. Therefore, we intend to dissect the problem of the institutionalization of language and Communication. When it becomes institutionalized, desire is forced to manifest under the apparently translucent form of discourse, where the discipline kingdom of biopolitics take place, limiting the satisfaction of desire to the institutional realm. Biopolitics, the modern form of controlling multitudes, works by controlling individuals, their bodies, their spirits and, of course, their discourse. In conclusion, we state that not all discourses are valid but only those shaped and coded by the institution, the instance of power that says which discourses are able to say the truth, leaving behind the instances of desire, dialogue and Communication.

Keywords: Biopolitics. Discourse. Communication. Power. Desire.

Since the games were excluded and the commerce of sophists, since their paradoxes were muzzled, with greater or lesser security, it seems that western thought has taken care that the discourse occupy the smallest possible place between thought and word.

Michel Foucault

It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society.

J. Krishnamurti

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Order, discourse and truth

On the first pages of *The order of discourse* (FOUCAULT, 1996), inaugural class pronounced at the *Collège de France* in 1970, Michel Foucault presents a curious dialogue between the desire and the institution. The desire begins by establishing his paradoxical premise: he wants to be understood immediately, without the need to use these crude and inappropriate tools, the words. The desire won't talk. "I should not have to enter this risky order or discourse, I should not like to be involved in its peremptoriness and decisiveness" (FOUCAULT, 1996, p.7). Between each object, he prefers both. It is primary, pulsating, alive. He doesn't like obstacles that hamper his access to desired objects, preferring the "calm, deep transparency, indefinitely open". There is no time to waste with discussions, with bargains, with misunderstandings.

The desire wants to be there, without having to cross the path, without mishaps, without concessions. He doesn't want to enter the order of the code. He doesn't *care about spending* any energy beyond the strictly necessary for its completion. He wants to be understood for what he is, without explanations or justifications. His alleged lack of order does not come from itself but from the way institution sees him. His is another order, a violent and titanic one. The desire wants and that is it.

On the other side of the line of this troubled process is the opposite extreme of desire: the institution. The institution cannot handle the desire in its pure form. It needs discourse, not dialogue. It is the institution that arbitrarily decides to shut the dialogue so that the law can be established. Its function is to curb the desire, to convince him to enter into a particular discursive order. "We're all here to show you that the discourse is in the order of laws; that for a long time his apparition has been taken care of; that a place has been prepared for him, a place that both honors and disarms it" (FOUCAULT, 1996, p.7).

There's nothing to be afraid of since, being inserted in order of laws, the discourse is under the institutional yoke. This is how, seductively, the institution ends up by convincing desire to manifest

itself in the apparently translucent form of discourse. This is where the biopolitical disciplinary empire begins, one that limits the way of satisfaction of desire exclusively to the institutional purview.

Biopolitics, the modern form of crowd control, takes place through the control of the individual, of his body and spirit, passing therefore necessarily by discourse control. After all, not all discourses are valid, only those molded and encoded in the manner of the institution, those provided with power and the ability to name well. That's why it is not a matter of dialogue, but of designation, labeling, naming. To the discourses which do not fall in its order, the institution also has its labels: devious, senseless, delirious, insane, ridiculous, childish.

Foucault shows us how, since the inaugural watershed of modern biopolitics, the 18th century, the institution hasn't done anything other than take ownership of discourse, making him his exclusive property, and creating the modern sense of truth. Truth is all that can be said, everything that should be fetched, all that falls into order, that makes sense within a certain system of signs. The Communicational order, including the media, is not excluded. It is a set of regulations and procedures aimed at the production of law and the distribution of sentences, being, therefore, closely linked to a given power system. "Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which induces and which extend it" (FOUCAULT, 1986, p.14).

Truth actually refers to a power of enunciation, not to the knowledge of things. It is an ethical-political issue before it is a logical or epistemological one. Who says something is equally or more important than what is said; that is, the truth or falsity are not only characteristics of the world, but depend on the one that refers to it. And it is precisely due to the clear, binary and restrictive differentiation between truth and falsehood that the institution will exert its power, founding its logic, trying to extinguish paradox and to control desire. The distinction itself is not true, since it is precisely what founds the true/false separation. The fact that this whole process has a specific birthplace, the European

18th century, just shows clearly its arbitrary character. The institution forgets strategically what philosophy is keen to point out: that before there is discourse, there lies mystery.

The truth would be a particular discursive order type, despite its claims for universality. And its main feature is the fact that it cannot be refuted, since it determines its own criteria, stating its right to autonomy that would lack in other discursive orders (such as that of desire, for example). This way is also a power system that is established in the name of apparently pure and crystalline truth. The same way we would never know what freedom is if it wasn't for the invention of captivity, we would never seek for truth if it were not for the invention of error. Both appear in the same originating movement, both are fruits of the same power relationship. "If it were not for the truth, we would not even know how to err" (AMARAL, 1996, p.20).

Truth and order are here intimately linked through the institutional power that stands with an air of naturalness, while it warns us that there is no reason to worry, that everything is under control. It is exactly because everything is under control, that there's a lot to be afraid of. Because the institutional control is not any kind of control, but one intended to be absolute, the only owner of truth, one intended to organize, select and distribute all the discourses that may be produced by individuals as well as their very own bodies. The institution claims exclusive rights under culture and all its discursive productions, pushing away everything that is related to chance, difference and desire. The law that governs this order is: you can't say everything (as well as the first law had previously forbidden desire in its immediacy: you can't do or desire everything).

What is patent with such zeal is that there is something grand and very risky in the problem of discourse. Why is it that this, apparently the most trivial and innocent production of culture, requires such care and protection? Why is it that the institution is so frightened that the discourse becomes property of the people? Foucault helps us solve the mystery: discourse is itself an object of desire. He does not only mean, that which reproduces the domina-

tion systems, but is also what we fight for, the power we want to take over. Discourse is power. He who conquers it, history teaches us, calls the shots. And who if not the institution holds the power and controls the discourse order? Not this or that institution (they come and go, win and lose hegemony) but the very fact that there is institution, institutional power as such, the one that says what can and what cannot, what should and what should not.

Institution and discipline

One of the tools used by the institution to keep desire under control is discipline, a word that has at least two meanings. Discipline is both “the scheme of order imposed or freely consented, the order that befits the regular functioning of an organization (school, military etc.)” as “the body of knowledge on each chair of an educational establishment” (FERREIRA, 1985, p.603). When we are dealing with pedagogy, discipline is the specific form of the institution to get hold of a particular type of discourse: the discourse on knowledge. Discipline, Foucault tells us, is “a set of methods, a corpus of propositions, an anonymous system of rules and true definitions” (FOUCAULT, 1996, p.30). Behind such an aseptic definition, we find a rigid code of restrictions which determines what fits in the field of knowledge and what should be deleted:

Transmitting knowledge is, from now on and from a political point of view, to take from the student any access to the truth that is not implicated in the knowledge of the teacher, and the technique of prolonged and repeated examinations allows the maintenance of this form of disciplinary power (RIBEIRO, 1996, p.206).

Many requirements must be fulfilled so that a proposition deserves to be a part of the field of a discipline, the same way as many requirements must be fulfilled for individuals that wish to circulate within the institution. Well, you may say, but without discipline, institution and order we would have chaos, the barbarism of the wild instincts. Well, we shall say, this kind of proposi-

tion is part precisely of the discourse of order, used to monopolize violence under the name of morality.

Controlling the flows through a stricter or more flexible code, as the case may be, the moral, posing as the bastion of normality and good social skills, fends off any possibility of a new desiring order or the production of a new meaning and a new communicative order, describing precisely the way individuals should behave so that everything remains in order. Such naturalization of moral order is an intrinsic part of the biopolitical control. A matter over which Foucault will lean in particular is the sexual morality. The discursive order obligates the official sex to take place only within the limits of marriage, being

confiscated to the intimacy of bourgeois homes. Since there is no way to control them all, illicit sexualities would be hypocritically tolerated, once they are practiced only in underground, circumscribed and encoded spaces: the *rendez-vous* (whorehouses) and health homes (GADELHA, 2009, p.64).

Something that does not fit in one jurisdiction and cannot be simply disbanded will have to be necessarily framed in another. What is not clear is that we are always dealing with *one* order, not *the* order itself. The order of universal truth is strategic, not natural; it relates to the “project of domination of a singular type over the other” (ANTOUN, 1993, p.238), that is, the attempt to establish a pattern of behavior for all human, individual or group, based on a certain type of conduct. The strategy implicit in the design of modern biopolitics is the production of a certain memory. Therefore several mnemonic techniques are developed, sometimes appealing to the “use of cruelty systems to inflict, by fire, some unforgettable ideas” (ANTOUN, 1993, p.204). However, although subjugated, desire remains alive, insisting in his struggle for satisfaction.

The desiring order is not less organized than the institutional one. But the second one, by the monopoly on the discourse of normality, makes the other one seem chaotic and cluttered. According to the optics of a particular discursive order, any other order is devoid of meaning. If, through the eyes of Greek men,

all others were barbarians, to the modern European institutions and rules, the conduct of Orientals have absolutely no sense, and vice-versa.

The relationship between institution and its members or potential members is subject to the official discourse. A disciplinary system of teaching ritualizes the word, giving it a fixed character, doing the same with the subjects that make use of it. "The teacher does not question himself when he asks a student a question. He gives orders" (DELEUZE, 1995, p.11). Teaching, within the disciplinary structure, has no relationship with questioning or doubting but with molding, taking a particular form. Questioning is something very dangerous, it leads to rebelliousness and disrespect for the established order. Institutions and questioning never follow the same path. On the contrary, when there is much questioning or when a period of institutional paradigm change is approaching, the current institution strengthens its power and usually the dominant order prevails, sometimes at the expense of a handful of human lives. To stifle the possibility of questioning is the way the institution has to enforce a particular truth as being the whole truth. To make discourse seem transparent is an important part of this strategy.

The transparency of discourse

Discourse must have as little reality as possible, so that it can function as a control tool, serving only to establish a mediation between the individual and an increasingly bureaucratic order. Foucault points to three historical forms by which the reality of discourse is rebutted on behalf of another. In all three, the discourse is seen only as a means, not as an entity endowed with sense in itself, much less as an instance of meaning. Three ways to articulate discourse and meaning, discourse and truth, discourse and the past.

The first way to suppress the discourse as an entity endowed with reality presents itself on the theme of the *original experience*, a complicity with the world very different from the Cartesian

distrust that will follow. Meaning is not besides the subject, but in the world. “Things mutter beforehand a sense that our language needs to manifest” (FOUCAULT, 1996, p.48). The world is a divine work that, by its similarity to the discourse, is brought again to the presence through language. Discourse, in such order, is a comment on the work of god, image of truth, updating a latency that just waits for its unveiling. Resemblance is the key figure of this stage of thought that lasted until the mid-16th century. To mention the world here implies looking at the indication of the signs, “allowing its own resemblance to come to light” (FOUCAULT, 1990, p.45).

A second form of linking word and truth is present in the theme of the *founding subject*. With the appearance of the unique figure of the Cartesian *Cogito*, meaning will no longer come from reality but will fall under the domain of the component designed to signify both the world and the discourse. Meaning is, from now on, on the side of the subject, who turns to the world, armed with a discourse structured by methodical laws, to provide meaning to all there is and to put into practice the scientific rationality principle that will rule from then on. The solidity of language dissolves, similarity does not scintillate anymore in its own light. World and language are now strangers. Discourse and things do not resemble anymore.

Language is now the art of producing signs and meanings from an autonomous center, separated from the world, responsible for naming things and no longer for discovering their hidden name. The institutionalization of discourse will, from now on, be the affair of men. Not all or any men: only those who think, that is, those who think well and know scientifically. Freed from the yoke of similarity, words adequately empower and can be more easily handled and manipulated by the institution, now under the tutelage of the subject of knowledge. In regard to similarity, it will be identified to error, to habit and to commonplace. Similarity is what must be overcome in order to achieve the true knowledge. The images presented to our senses must be corrected while the eye that sees must be trained, disciplined. The senses deceive us,

so we need methods. Rationalism will allow the orderly knowledge systematization, seeking the full list of everything and everyone and the maximum ability to calculate and predict every step which must necessarily follow. Language here should be neutral, transparent, crystalline and discourse should be aseptic, logical, rational.

Finally the third way to express discourse as an intermediate order presents itself in *universal mediation*, one where supposedly the discourse gains its independence, being present everywhere as the bridge between man and world, subject and reality. Here the center is no longer the subject of idealist rationalism nor the world of divine materialism, but the discourse itself. However, Foucault states, this discourse is not the bearer of news. The discourse of universal mediation is an already-said, reverberation of a past truth as much as the two other orders. Truth is still singular, it remains tied to the institutional power, this time delivered to the order of the functional operability.

Something that should be nothing more than a means becomes an end in itself. This is the order of instrumental reason, with perverse effects, of disorder and degradation that establish an order contrary to man. (BALANDIER, 1988, p.152).

This anti-philosophical and castrating attitude aims to encompass the universe of all discursive order, talking about everything, clarifying everything, bringing everything to the field of language. There is nothing further from the order of desire. It is crucial that something is not in the order of language so that there may be discourse. It is mandatory that something remains unnamed.

The emptiness of language, that which doesn't fit into any discourse, since it is what allows all discursive production, is away from this world in which language becomes technique. Behind this *logofilia*, which seems to prevail in our Western globalized civilization, lies an actual *logofobia*, represented by the institutional network that takes hold of a discourse as soon as it arises, labeling, classifying, explaining. If desire is erotic, trying to sexualize and populate the discourse with affections, universal mediation is pornographic since it aims to objectify the world, man and discourse.

This is what happens, for example, with the medical discourse that prevails over all subjectivity. There are no longer desiring subjects, speakers, producers, but walking symptoms, labeled beforehand and that fully incorporate this external discursive order, saying things like: “I’m bipolar, and you?”

Three attitudes are needed for a resumption of discourse on ethical terms: the questioning of the universal truth of the subject, the return of the character of event that discourse leaves aside in order to be a part of the institutional order and the suspension of the sovereignty of meaning for the production and creation of multiple meanings. There’s nothing less natural than a discourse. Things are not in the world waiting for their true names to come. Naming things and producing connections between them is an exercise that the members of a given species perform in order to understand, to give coherence to what surrounds them, and to communicate, that is, to transmit this which seems to have consistency to others. The rule does not belong to the world, but to man. We do not decipher a world that is given to us, we build one or several worlds from the data and going beyond them through our language. Therefore, this instance we conventionally call order (whether institutional or desiring) is first and foremost an exercise of power and this which we call truth is a survival strategy, the law of the strongest (or the weaker, according to Nietzsche¹) making his will prevail.

To institute is to monopolize the exercise of power. Interestingly this process does not appear to common sense as violence, but precisely as its negative, as that which prevents violence. And the argument used is pretty convincing: after all, it is all about democracy, the free form of Government. Those who are not satisfied can, with their vote, change the situation. But ... can they really? The power of individuals against the power of the State (as in the face of all institutional power) is in fact minimal and the influence of a single vote in the result of an election is meaningless.

¹ “The intellect, as a means for the conservation of the individual, unfolds his master forces in disguise; Since this is the means by which individuals weaker, less robust, if kept, those to which it is forbidden to wage an all-out struggle for existence with horns or tusks sharp. “ (NIETZSCHE, 1987, p. 31).

It is extremely difficult for an individual or group to change the rules of the game, interfering in any possible way in the territory dominated by the institution. Techno bureaucracy exerts such pressure on individuals, making it so clear that she's the one who governs, organizes and discriminates, that any action that does not pass through its paperwork is immediately devalued, receiving the label of 'act of violence'. Besides, in the democratic institution there is a subtle and disguised power: the despotism of the majority, for which Alexis de Tocqueville already drew attention in the early 19th century:

And therefore the really important one is not he who has reason and virtue, but the one who is loved by the majority, which is imposed solely by the amount of people. What constitutes the legitimate power will legitimize the greatest of tyrannies. Tocqueville argues: to whom may a man or group appeal if they suffer from injustice? (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2001, p.57).

In opposition to the act of violence we have, therefore, the state of violence. When we refer to the state, the word violence is frequently replaced by the word force (SODRÉ, 1992, p.13). Force would then be the imposition of a social order ruled by a minority, while violence would tend to be the destruction of such order. Now, who carries out the violence and who is its victim? To call violence the answer that perhaps someone will express when he is unable to act in the face of an oppressive system dressed up as democratic is like blaming the turbulent river when it is in fact the margins that make him so, as in the Brechtian metaphor.

The code and the institutionalization of language

"Communication is a process of continuous attempt to overcome the limits of established word by the linguistic code" (SODRÉ, 1984, p.50). The code is what is common, which all speakers of a given language have to accept so they can be understood by others. However, to follow the code unconditionally would not allow us to communicate. The code is only the basic structure, the minimum functioning law of the language, not being enough

to allow the communicative process itself. It does not include the excess, the desire or the difference. If we follow only the pre-established rules and conventions of code, we will not be properly communicating, in the intensive sense of the word, since there is no reciprocity, exchange of experiences, transgression of any kind. To follow the code to the letter is a way to moralize Communication, as if it were possible to talk in pure grammar. "It is the skeleton that brings us up, but it doesn't tell you anything, as the grammar is the structure of the language, but alone it doesn't say anything. Mummies talk among themselves in pure grammar" (VERÍSSIMO, 1974, p.12). No Communication is possible without some level of transgression. "To establish communication, signs must have at least some value of surprise" (CHERRY, 1966, p.14).

Every institution, in order to establish itself, must state the code under which it can function: words that say which words can and which ones cannot say what, when, where, how and why. Whenever a particular institution (educational, scientific, religious, media or other.) imposes any given code, leading Communication to take place under its premises, what we see is the manifestation of control rather than true Communication. Institutionally speaking, "communication is organizing, ordering" (CHERRY, 1966, p.5).

For the institutional control, there's simply no way to allow Communication to operate freely, as an instance of overcoming the code and producing meaning. The idea of free individuals using the language as a tool of desire is unbearable to a system with global biopolitical intensions. Given this context, it is worth reflecting on the crystallized and systematic institutional violence that arises as refraining thoughts and that currently presents itself in the form of late modernity, where we insist on playing the game of truth and representation while we are faced with less rigid and more flexible possibilities to inhabit the language and engage in Communication.

Sustaining the desire for a possible seizure of unity of meaning, of a single truth to be reached, is a real ideological ownership that transpires in the field of Communication through the transformation of language into a technique and the depotentiation of its creative character. "Whenever we discover truths, we are

just reaffirming a form of power guaranteed by the hegemony of a code” (VEIGA NETO, 1995, p.152).

Contemporary mutations

In order to maintain its strength, the institution can't be all stiff and disciplinary. From time to time it must suffer a paradigmatic review, when new discourses will articulate within the institutional space. Of course, this is not exactly a substitution of a model by another. The institutional space is paradoxical enough so that rigid institutions live side by side with more flexible ones. Police officers, judges, politicians and other bastions of the order still exist. School and family, in turn, are facing as they can their respective crises. When flexibility is at stake, however, capital is the unbeatable institution. Capital in its post-industrial phase, which Lipovetsky calls “hedonistic” or “neo-narcissistic” capitalism, introduces a new phase of bourgeois individualism (LIPOVETSKY, 1989, p.48). No revolution rises on the horizon of politics and slavery is defended as if it were freedom itself.

The emancipation of the individual by the modern state makes him free to fight for his space in the labour market. In the era of emptiness, the job market is a virtual space; it is everywhere and it is not anywhere. Virtuality is omnipresent at this stage in the development of capital: while the police, the government and the judicial apparatus occupy a well-defined place, the media and the credit have a far more subtle existence and the power of action, giving rise to a new model of social control, no longer based on duty and discipline, but on enjoyment and pleasure.

The anthropological mutation mentioned by Lipovetsky, characterized by devitalization of public space and of major policy issues related to it, is the visible face of the new production relations under hedonistic capitalism, with maximum emphasis on consumption. The order of consumption is also that of immediate consumption: there is no rest in the operation, nothing left to memory, nothing is learned that can endure, no experience is acquired. The liberalization of customs and the economy should not

be seen as less institutional than the repressive and authoritarian institutions present in other eras. What happens is only a change of masks. From time to time, 'all must change so that everything remains as it was'. Institutions have a tendency of becoming chameleonic, overlapping each other according to the situation. But let us not deceive ourselves: the distinction between what can and what cannot be said and done remains.

Conclusion

Liberalization is an effective strategy, as the ones employed in other times, to keep everything as it is, in the most perfect order possible. The permanence of the order does not allow one to see with clarity that other orders, not only the institutional one, are possible.

Here individuals are not coerced by force, that is, by a power that is exercised only from outside. The universal market has an outer part and an inner one. Its power comes largely from its ability to welcome, to convince, to make each one assume the control mechanisms as their own production, like a second skin, becoming not only a consumer but also a supporter of the machine.

Along the lines of disciplinary coercion, effort and production or of the lines of enjoyment, self-seduction and self-control, the order is always maintained as it is. When the system wishes to produce memory effects, it acts in a particular way, employing traditional tools such as school, family and the state. When it wishes to produce forgetfulness, it uses mass media, faster and more ephemeral devices. Nowadays, therefore, the system learned to take ownership of the paradox: it feeds on order as well as on disorder. Here, even the disorder is scheduled, occupying its place within the order. "Behind this leveling there are the effects of disorder (with the oblivion which (*that*) this brings) and order (with the memory and the length there implied)" (BALANDIER, 1988, p.177).

Capitalism needs to exercise "a generalized conjugation overflowing and reversing the previous apparatus" (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1995, p.33). Henceforth it will encode the state,

morality and religion, going on to occupy the central place in the production of truth and in the appropriation of words and men. When the state was central, Government states the rules. When moral was central, the father was responsible for punishments and rewards. In religion, church reigns absolutely. But under the empire of capitalism, it is the capital itself, the trading system itself that imposes a general translatability of all values and an over codification of all desires.

Capitalism, the economic system of control of current possibilities, hides behind a mask of naturalness now presented on a planetary or global scale, what Guattari calls 'integrated world capitalism'. In the IMC, the logic of unity prevails: there is one way of acquiring goods: buying. There is one way of relating to the work: employment. There is one way of inhabiting the world: the property. "You must assign to everyone a type of childhood, a sexual position, a relationship with the body and with knowledge, one representation of love, of honesty, of death" (GUATTARI, 1981, p.188). By raiding us all the time with its exclusionary logic, integrated world capitalism does not allow men to enjoy time, smothering them in the anguish of the present and the imperative of consumption and production. You must consume in order to be different; produce in order to survive, acquire to have the illusion of not being acquired. Reaching a flexibility never seen before by any institution, capitalism moves in a rhizomatic way, making use of all available tools.

Produced with universal vocation, manipulative of collective workforce, both material and semiotic, culture of IMC generates individual-terminals, consumers of a pre-produced subjectivity which they tend to identify with. "The integrated world capitalism tends to move their center of power structures from the production of goods and services to the production of signs, syntax, subjectivity" (GUATTARI, 1991, p.31). That is when Communication is exchanged by information, truth for publicity, *poiésis* for technique. It is when the man time is replaced by a mechanical time.

At the opposite end of this passive man, we find the foucaultian idea of self care, an invitation to undertake other practic-

es and to have another relationship with body and soul. Gathering data from the Stoic culture, Foucault proposes here a much broader sense of caring than the current generalized paranoia that makes health and medicalization a synonym. The care for oneself has to do with mind, with spirit, with culture: cultivating oneself is to flee the conditionings, to break free.

It is not a narcissistic care for oneself, hyper individualistic and independent from the world around. This is the man we find in contemporary consumer society. To free oneself from the yoke of coding, men must become able to think and act on their own, but not at the expense of others. To care for oneself is also to take care of the other, ensuring the conditions for him to do the same. Hence the ethical dimension of the issue. It is by considering the other man that one who cares for oneself can and must communicate more fully. Not in an absolute and complete way but at least in a way that we can take ownership of our Communicational process.

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