

Introduction to Cultural Studies
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Lecture - 29
Foucault – What Is An Author - I

So hello and welcome to this NPTEL course Introduction to Cultural Studies where we begin with a new text today and the text we will start off with today is Michel Foucault's essay, What is an Author published in 1969. Before I dive into the text which you will in a couple of minutes let us spend a little bit of time talking about Foucault, about the significance that Foucault has in cultural studies you know the massive importance, the massive impact he has had as a thinker, as a philosopher, as a theatrician etc.

And some of you are probably aware of the fact that he is one of really more significant philosophers when he comes to looking at the relationship between power and language. The creation between power and language that appears in different societies in different historical conditions etc. and how the collusion creates certain hegemonic identities, how the collusion creates certain hegemonic systems of signification etc.

And one can draw and people have drawn extensively in Foucault in terms of looking at things such as racism, biopolitics and he had written on biopolitics extensively as well. So Foucault is a very important philosopher when he comes to looking at the epistemic constructive power, the epistemic construct of hegemony you know the knowledge construct of hegemony. So you know for instance looking at the collusion between medicine and race.

Looking at the collusion between politics and medicine etc. which are things which you know historically happened on several occasions in human history. I mean one can think of the Nazi situation in Germany. One can think of racism in 19th century Africa when European powers they came and they medicalized the race to a great extent and we have already studied Frantz Fanon's Black Skin White Mask where he talks about that extensively.

So this is the general significance of Foucault, the general impact of Foucault, the general contribution of Foucault in cultural studies and as a result of which he is a philosopher we keep going back to in understanding, in a more complex, for a more complex understanding of power, culture, identity, knowledge etc. Okay, now in this essay he talks about the author, so the very title of the essay what is an author is about the author.

Is about the identity of the author, the constructed quality of the author, the power that is associated with the word with the term author and some of you are probably aware that there is another essay which is written pretty much contemporary to Foucault you know, Roland Barthes, wrote this really provocative essay called Death of an Author which is about it is a very postmodern poststructuralist stake on author, authorship, authority.

And this brings us to the key term key concept today, the relationship between author and authority in modern society. This is what Foucault studies extensively in this particular essay. So he looks at for instance the collusion between authority and writing. You know the writer as an author, the writer is someone who generates authority, the writer is someone who generates hegemony by being visible, by being readable, by being scriptable etc.

And this scriptability, visibility, readability of the author is in a way so ties him to you know greater powers, broader powers of politics, medicine, race etc. in other words etiology. So he is talking about the relationship between writing an etiology. So how does writing or becoming a writer, becoming a visible public writer with a public name, a public persona, a public significance, how is that related to the idea of etiology, to the idea of the etiological state apparatus.

So the entire apparatus of etiology is reliant to a great extent to visibility on writability, scriptability etc. So the writer over here is someone who becomes an agent in the etiological system according to Foucault and he talks about the historical construction of the writer you know how does the notion of the author or the writer come into being and what is an author and how is the idea of the author related to authority and then in association with agency.

So these are the you know the broad terms which this particular essay covers and we will read this in some details as we move on. So let us look at the beginning of the essay. So this is the opening of what is an author by Michel Foucault which should be on your screen and I am going to read out line by line in the beginning and then we will look at the more specific sections in due course.

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What Is an Author?

Michel Foucault, 1969

The coming into being of the notion of "author" constitutes the privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences. Even today, when we reconstruct the history of a concept, literary genre, or school of philosophy, such categories seem relatively weak, secondary, and super-imposed scissions in comparison with the solid and fundamental unit of the author and the work.

I shall not offer here a sociohistorical analysis of the author's persona. Certainly, it would be worth examining how the author became individualized in a culture like ours, what status he has been given, at what moment studies of authenticity and attribution began, in what kind of system of valorization the author was involved, at what point we began to recount the lives of authors rather than of heroes, and how this fundamental category of "the-man-and-his-work criticism" began. For the moment, however, I want to deal solely with the relationship between text and author and with the manner in which the text points to this figure that, at least in appearance, is outside it and antecedes it.

So he opens with saying by saying that the coming into being of the notion of author constitutes the privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy and the sciences. So you know it becomes a privileged moment of individualization. So the rise of the individual, the formation of the individual is a sign posted by the figure of the author.

So the notion of the author is that privileged moment when the individual becomes important, is condensed into a figure in history of idea, knowledge, literature, philosophy and sciences. So all these different epistemic branches that Foucault talks about those are the branches in which the author finds its formation. So it is a privileged moment of identity formation. The author becomes the privileged identity formation in the history in the context of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy and sciences.

So who is the author, who has written what, who is the author of a certain text, who is the author of a certain discourse? So these become very important questions. And you know in the case of sciences there is very interesting relation one could establish between the author and the inventor. So the inventor is a privileged person in science. The inventor is a person with a patent. The person with authorship over certain discovery, over certain invention etc.

And again the idea of authorship generates further more complex ideas of authority, agency, etc. And the obviously as you can understand by now, all these are related to the idea of ownership. So who owns the ideas, who owns the invention. So these become very complex questions in sciences as well.

Okay, so even today as Foucault goes on to say, even today when we reconstruct the history of a concept, literary genre or school of philosophy such categories seem relatively weak, secondary, and superimposed scissions in comparison with the solid and fundamental unit of the author and the work. So the unit of the author and the work, the relationship between author and the work that becomes the all important function in pedagogy today, in epistemic structures today.

So you know that kind of a relationship is something that you know is highlighted by Foucault and obviously you can see very clearly that this is completely in collusion with very patriarchal, phallogocentric and notion of system of signification where this law of the father, the law of the written word and in that law, in that landscape of law the author becomes a very important figure.

Because the author carries authority, the author carries ownership, the author carries epistemic entitlement as it were in terms of looking at, in terms of being located in privileged position in the narrative of knowledge, in the narrative of discovery, in the narrative of invention etc. Okay, so and then he goes on to say what he does not want to do in this particular essay, what are the objectives of this particular essay.

And I quote, I shall not offer here a sociohistorical analysis of the author's persona. Certainly, it would be worth examining how the author became individualized in a culture like ours, what

status he has been given, at what moment studies of authenticity and attribution began, in what kind of system of valorization the author was involved, at what point we began to recount the lives of authors rather than of heroes and how this fundamental category of the man and his work criticism began.

So you see what Foucault seems to suggest over here that in modern society the author has replaced the hero. The hero is, in classical times the hero was the doer of great deeds, the hero was an extraordinary person you know someone who is different in kind and also sometimes different in deeds but also sometimes in kind from the other people, from the common man. So here was an uncommon man, an extraordinary person, right and you can think of the Byron poem which begins with I want a hero an uncommon want.

So you know the hero was a privilege person, a person that people looked up to in terms of extraordinary abilities that can be political, military you know epistemic all kinds of extraordinary abilities were conferred on the hero. Now what Foucault suggests over here is very interesting. He says quite clearly that the authors replace the hero in modern society. So the author becomes an important person because the author is connected with the idea of authenticity, with the idea of originality, with the idea of authority in modern society.

And that is something that he is very interested in, how does it come into being. How do this you know formation of the author happen. How did it happen historically, okay. For the moment, however, I want to deal slowly with the relationship between text and author and with the manner in which the text points to this figure that at least in appearance is outside it and antecedes it.

So you know he is looking at the relationship between text and the author and the author is someone outside the text, someone who begins to form the text, someone who is the you know procreator of the text in certain sense, someone who fathers the text, size the text in a way. So again we are looking at the author as a father figure over here and that is something again the ((09:17)) had talked about as well.

So again this is part of the phallogocentric economy in which the author becomes a privileged position, in which the author becomes a privileged persona and that privilege is something which is analyzed and examined by Foucault in this essay.

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Beckett nicely formulates the theme with which I would like to begin: "What does it matter who is speaking," someone said; "what does it matter who is speaking." In this indifference appears one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing [écriture].

I say "ethical" because this indifference is really not a trait characterizing the manner in which one speaks and writes but, rather, a kind of immanent rule, taken up over and over again, never fully applied, not designating writing as something completed, but dominating it as a practice. Since it is too familiar to require a lengthy analysis, this immanent rule can be adequately illustrated here by tracing two of its major themes.

First of all, we can say that today's writing has freed itself from the theme of expression. Referring only to itself; but without being restricted to the confines of its interiority, writing is identified with its own unfolded exteriority. This means that there is an interplay of signs arranged less according to its signified content than according to the very nature of the signifier. Writing unfolds like a game [jeu] that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits. In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is, rather, a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears.

And then he mentions Beckett, he quotes Beckett and in order to still highlight the point where he says Beckett nicely formulates the theme with which I would like to begin. What does it matter who is speaking, someone said, what does it matter who is speaking and this indifference appears one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing écriture, right.

So he mentions Beckett in a sense that you know Beckett's indifference in that particular quote that we just read out and should be on your screen. What does it matter who is speaking, someone said, what does it matter who is speaking. So this indifference towards the source of the text is something that you know Foucault takes up and he sort of uses that in his analyzes of the author in postmodern times, in the times that we live in today.

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So he is beginning to map out two major themes in the idea of (()) (10:44) in modern society. What is now what are the two themes. And then he goes on to elucidate the themes. First of all, we can say that today's writing has freed itself from the theme of expression. Referring only to itself but without being restricted to the confines of its interiority, writing is identified with its own unfolded exteriority.

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So you know this particular passage which is on your screen this could be read, it is a very, it is a really important passage because this could be read as a very poststructuralist definition of writing in postmodern times where who is speaking, who is doing the writing becomes insignificant over here. Writing becomes a play of signifiers. Again, look at the way in which this resistance to its own kind of a signified closure, right.

Like any good poststructuralist, Foucault over here is someone who is sort of questioning the entire cause of relationship between signifier and signified. And he is saying quite clearly that it is writing becomes a practice which is does not restrict itself to the confines of its own interiority. Does not need to make its own semantic significance. Is not tied to its own semantic landscape. You know it is identified its own unfolded exteriority.

So it becomes a very it is a constantly playable process. It is something which you know extends forever. Goes beyond its own interiority. Goes beyond its own semantic possibilities and more importantly it is a game. So this very eluded quality about writing that Foucault highlights over here. Writing unfolds like a game but invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits. So the word transgresses over here is very important.

So writing becomes almost like a auto activity. It is an auto activity because it does not require any rules. It does not require any restricted you know rules or parameters to abide by. It actually goes beyond the parameters. It becomes a very ludic play, a very ludic activity you know and it keeps transgressing its limits. So the word transgression over here is very important because that holds the key to writing as far as Foucault says it in poststructuralist times.

And in a poststructuralist environment, a poststructuralist climate, writing becomes an act of transgression, if you remember the word transgression has appeared many times especially when we were reading Judith Butler, Gender Trouble. I mean the entire idea of gender trouble is to transgress the limits of gender, transgress the limits of normativity associated with gender. So again writing over here becomes resistance to normativity.

It becomes you know a transgressor to normativity. It transgresses normativity, it goes beyond the normative limits of its own interiority. So he you know says over here in writing the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing. So it is not really about exalting the act of writing nor is it to pin a subject within language. Nor is it to pin a human subject with, nor is to define a human subject within language you know where it sense a closure, is rather a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears.

So writing creates its own subliminal spaces as it were or subterranean spaces where the writing subject constantly disappears. So the author disappears into the writing and that is the whole point of poststructuralist writing as Foucault understands it. So this particular passage is very important for those of you who are interested in poststructuralism and a poststructuralist perspective in the act of writing.

So writing becomes an activity that creates its own disappearance. That creates its own absences, that creates its own transgressions and in that transgression in that absences the writer disappears constantly you know the writer becomes you know a disappearing figure. So there is no transcendental signified, there is no human subject who is defined through an act of closure. There is no cause of relationship between signifier and signified or rather what we have is a constant play of possibilities which transgresses the very limits of interiority of writing itself.

So this becomes a very important passage and I would like to you know we will spend some time while reading this after this lecture. That is the first theme that Foucault talks about.

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to perpetuate the immortality of the hero: if he was willing to die young, it was so that his life, consecrated and magnified by death, might pass into immortality; the narrative then redeemed this accepted death. In another way, the motivation, as well as the theme and the pretext of Arabian narratives – such as *The Thousand and One Nights* – was also the eluding of death: one spoke, telling stories into the early morning, in order to forestall death, to postpone the day of reckoning that would silence the narrator. Scheherazade's narrative is an effort, renewed each night, to keep death outside the circle of life.

Our culture has metamorphosed this idea of narrative, or writing, as something designed to ward off death. Writing has become linked to sacrifice, even to the sacrifice of life: it is now a voluntary effacement that does not need to be represented in books, since it is brought about in the writer's very existence. The work, which once had the duty of providing immortality, now possesses the right to kill, to be its author's murderer, as in the cases of Flaubert, Proust, and Kafka. That is not all, however: this relationship between writing and death is also manifested in the effacement of the writing subject's individual characteristics. Using all the contrivances that he sets up between himself and what he writes,

The second theme, writing's relationship with death. So there is always a death drive in writing as Foucault understands it. It is even more familiar. This link subverts an old tradition exemplified by the Greek epic which was intended to perpetuate the immortality of the hero. So this particular trend of writing again postmodern writing, poststructuralist writing, the trend towards death, the death of the author the death of the subject etc.

It has got a (()) (15:42) quality as you can see it. And that Foucault says goes against the classical echoes of writing which was to perpetuate the immortality of the hero. The ancient Greek classics, they sort of celebrate the immortality of the heroes, the immortality over here obviously becomes metaphorical in mortality in ancient Greek classics. If he was willing to die young it was so that his life consecrated and magnified by death might pass into immortality.

The narrative then redeemed this accepted death. In another way, the motivation as well as the theme and the pretext of Arabian narratives such as *The Thousand and One Nights* was also the eluding of death. One spoke telling stories into the early morning, in order to forestall death, to

postpone the day of reckoning that would silence the narrator. Scheherazade's narrative is an effort renewed each night to keep death outside the circle of life.

So you know this is an illusion to The Thousand and One Nights which has this classical archetypal storyteller Scheherazade's who tells a story to the emperor every single night and you know the each story ends with the beginning of the next story so the emperor would come back listen to the story the following night, in that process Scheherazade the storyteller would be alive forever because the condition was the moment she would stop telling a story she will be beheaded, she will be killed.

So the only way of not dying the only way not to die the only way to ward off death is by storytelling. Storytelling becomes a very, it becomes a life preserving activity, it becomes a preservation activity, a preservation act, a life sustaining activity, a very performative sustaining activity through which death is being warded off over here. So to keep death outside the circle of life and storytelling becomes an epistemic activity.

And also it becomes some kind of a existential you know building of a self, building of a life narrative, right. the storytelling becomes a life narrative over here and that is something that is in relation that is in connection with the ancient classical you know Greek you know tragedy and Greek literature where writing or storytelling became the way to which immortality, through which immortality was to be achieved, right.

But that particular trend, that particular idea is subverted in modern times, in poststructuralist writing according to Foucault as he goes on to elucidate, okay.

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and One Nights – was also the eluding of death: one spoke, telling stories into the early morning, in order to forestall death, to postpone the day of reckoning that would silence the narrator. Scheherazade's narrative is an effort, renewed each night, to keep death outside the circle of life.

Our culture has metamorphosed this idea of narrative, or writing, as something designed to ward off death. Writing has become linked to sacrifice, even to the sacrifice of life: it is now a voluntary effacement that does not need to be represented in books, since it is brought about in the writer's very existence. The work, which once had the duty of providing immortality, now possesses the right to kill, to be its author's murderer, as in the cases of Flaubert, Proust, and Kafka. That is not all, however: this relationship between writing and death is also manifested in the effacement of the writing subject's individual characteristics. Using all the contrivances that he sets up between himself and what he writes, the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality. As a result, the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing.

None of this is recent; criticism and philosophy took note of the disappearance – or death - of the author some time ago. But the consequences of their discovery of it have not been sufficiently examined, nor has its import been accurately measured. A certain number of notions that are intended to replace the privileged position of the author actually seem to preserve that privilege and suppress the

So what happens to writing in our culture, in the culture Foucault studies it and again this is a very important passage because this is one of the reasons why we are looking at this particular text in our cultural studies course because it looks at relationship between writing and culture. So what kind of writing are we talking about when we look at culture today? What is, is writing immortal at all? Does writing or storytelling aspire to be mortal at all?

Or is it like a self-killing activity, something which has a death drive in heaven inside it and that is something that Foucault examines over here. Our culture and I quote, this should be on your screen, our culture has metamorphosed this idea of narrative or writing as something designed to ward off death. Writing has become linked to sacrifice even to the sacrifice of life. It is now a voluntary effacement that does not need to be represented in books since it is brought about in the writer's very existence.

The work which once had the duty of providing immortality now possesses the right to kill, to be its author's murderer as in the cases of Flaubert, Proust, and Kafka. That is not all, however. This relationship between writing and death is also manifested in the effacement of the writing subject's individual characteristics. Using all the contrivances that he sets up between himself and what he writes, the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality.

As a result the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence. He must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing. So this is a complete contrast, a complete subversion or inversion by the of the classical principles of storytelling whereby storytelling was meant or designed to sort of elevate the individual, immortalize the individual, immortalize the writer or the author etc.

However, in a culture that Foucault examines here it is just the reverse. The writing becomes an activity towards deathness, an activity towards disappearance as we just saw initially a little while ago. So writing and death become entangled with each other. The death of the author becomes you know part of the process of writing itself. So the author is effaced away. The author you know cancels out his own individuality and the text takes over, right.

The text takes over as a subject over here. So as a result the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence. So the only way the author can be present in poststructuralist writing and a postmodern text is through an absence and that is a very important you know condition that Foucault examines over here. He must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing.

So deadness becomes condition of writing. So you must be a dead man. You must disappear as a writer, you must disappear as an author in the whole process of writing. The writing, the process of writing consumes the author completely. So there is a slightly cannibalistic quality of writing, in writing that Foucault examines over here, modern writing and modern poststructuralist writing.

The author is, the author disappears into the text. The author is only marked by his absence in a particular text in complete contrast to the classical presence of the author, the classical immortality of the author in ancient texts, okay. None of this is recent, criticism and philosophy took note of the disappearance of death of the author some time ago. But the consequences of their discovery of it have not been sufficiently examined nor has its import been accurately measured.

A certain number of notions that are intended to replace the privileged position of the author actually seem to preserve that privilege and suppress the real meaning of his disappearance. I shall examine two of these notions both of great importance today. So Foucault says over here that there are certain notions which are supposed to replace the privilege position of the author.

However, you know the end of preserving the privilege and he is examining the two notions which are paradoxically preserving the notion of the privilege of the author because you know these are notions which are supposed to do away with the significance of the author altogether. But the end are preserved with the author in a paradoxical way and Foucault is going to, you know he sets out to examine the paradox.

And he shall examine two these conditions both of great importance today, okay. So what are the conditions through which the author is actually preserved on the pretext of being done away with, okay.

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The first is the idea of the work [oeuvre]. It is a very familiar thesis that the task of criticism is not to bring out the work's relationships with the author, nor to reconstruct through the text a thought or experience, but rather to analyze the work through its structure, its architecture, its intrinsic form, and the play of its internal relationships. At this point, however, a problem arises: What is a work? What is this curious unity which we designate as a work? Of what elements is it composed? Is it not what an author has written? Difficulties appear immediately. If an individual were not an author, could we say that what he wrote, said, left behind in his papers, or what has been collected of his remarks, could be called a "work"? When Sade was not considered an author, what was the status of his papers? Simply rolls of paper onto which he ceaselessly uncoiled his fantasies during his imprisonment.

Even when an individual has been accepted as an author, we must still ask whether everything that he wrote, said, or left behind is part of his work. The problem is both theoretical and technical. When undertaking the publication of

So the first is the idea of the work, oeuvre. It is a very familiar thesis that the task of criticism is not to bring out the work's relationships with the author nor to reconstruct through the text a thought or experience, but rather to analyze the work through its structure, its architecture, its intrinsic form, and the play of its internal relationships. So that is the very familiar idea of criticism to do away with the biographical, the autobiographical existential, the biological

presence of the author and to read the text as a text, to analyze the text as a structure, as an architecture you know in the form of analysis etc. At this point, however, a problem arises.

What is a work? So that the obviously questions which comes over here is when you are saying that we need to study a work and not the author, we need to study a work with its intrinsic principle, with its intrinsic architecture which designs with its structures, the obvious question that comes at this point is what is an oeuvre, what is a work? How to define a work, okay. So what is a work? What is this curious unity which we designate as a work?

So there is a presupposed unity that we have when we say the word work over here. Of what elements is it composed? Is it not what an author has written? Difficulties appear immediately. If an individual were not an author could we say that what he wrote, said, left behind in his papers or what has been collected from his remarks could be called a work. When Sade was not imprisoned, this is Marquis de Sade who wrote this really interesting and series of text which is now classified as sadism, cruel literature, literature of cruelty etc.

When Sade was not considered an author what was the status of his papers? Simply rolls of paper onto which he ceaselessly uncoiled his fantasies during his imprisonment. So Foucault over here is examining the ontology of work, the ontology of authors. So how does something written become a work? How does something written become a work of literature. So he gives example of Sade.

When Sade was not considered to be an author, when you know someone was not considered to be an author is what is being written at that point of time, will that be considered to be a work right and the answer obviously here is no. So the author is a condition, is a precondition through which something becomes a work. So it is a very basic argument but at the same time it is a very complex argument as well.

But Foucault is saying over here is essentially this that in order to in order for a written text to become a work of literature, to become a work of you know any significance politics, literature, science etc. the writer must be acknowledged as an author, right. So if someone is just writing,

someone is scribbling away in a piece of paper inside a prison that person is not considered to be an author then those who just scribbles are not works. So in order for that scribbles to become work, that particular individual must be considered to be an author in the first place.

So therein lies the paradox that Foucault is examining over here that you know this is one thesis which wants to do away with the presence of the author so once it treat the work as a text, once it treat the work as a self-sufficient entity by questionist in order for that entity to become work in the first place you know the idea of the author must be retained, must be resurrected. If there is no author, there is no work.

So in order to treat something as a work, we need to presuppose it is written by an author. So that presupposition is a presupposition of the presence, the ontology of the author, okay. So the author stands always outside the text. The author is someone you know who is obviously authoring the work and again the ontology of work becomes important over here. So even when an individual has been accepted as an author we must still ask whether everything that he wrote or left behind is part of his work. So this is a very poststructuralist argument again.

So Foucault is saying he is asking 2 questions. First of all is that if we consider something to be a work I will not also simultaneously considering that is written by an author. So and every work must have an author. So the very thesis that we are treating a text as a work with its intrinsic form, with its intrinsic play, with its intrinsic energy and we are not considering the author at all, that is actually a fallacy because the very moment we are considering that as a work we are also simultaneously considering this is written by an author.

So the presence of the author is always there in that particular argument and secondly if we consider suppose we accept an individual, we acknowledge an individual to be an author so in that case the other question becomes also relevant. So that does not mean everything I wrote should be considered to be a work, right. So if Nietzsche for instance wrote you know vegetable prices on a piece of paper would you still consider that to be a work by Nietzsche, a work of philosophy by Nietzsche.

In the same way as we would consider you know his thesis on history, his thesis on civilization etc. okay. So again that becomes a very contentious a very complex question you know and obviously there is no need to answer to this okay. So even when an individual has been accepted as an author we must still ask whether everything that he wrote, everything that he wrote, or left or said behind is part of his work. The problem is both theoretical and technical.

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Nietzsche's works, for example, where should one stop? Surely everything must be published, but what is "everything"? Everything that Nietzsche himself published, certainly. And what about the rough drafts for his works? Obviously. The plans for his aphorisms? Yes. The deleted passages and the notes at the bottom of the page? Yes. What if, within a workbook filled with aphorisms, one finds a reference, the notation of a meeting or of an address, or a laundry list: is it a work, or not? Why not? And so on, ad infinitum. How can one define a work amid the millions of traces left by someone after his death? A theory of the work does not exist, and the empirical task of those who naively undertake the editing of works often suffers in the absence of such a theory.

We could go even further. Does *The Thousand and One Nights* constitute a work? What about Clement of Alexandria's *Miscellanies* or Diogenes Laertes' *Lives*? A multitude of questions arises with regard to this notion of the work. Consequently, it is not enough to declare that we should do without the writer (the author) and study the work itself. The word work and the unity that it designates are probably as problematic as the status of the author's individual.

When undertaking the publication of Nietzsche's works for example where should one stop? So you know this is the question that Foucault asks. How do you make the filtration. How do we sort of map out what is work and what is not work when it comes to a writer like Nietzsche for that matter any writer. Surely everything must be published but what is everything? So again this is a very ontological question that Foucault is asking, everything that Nietzsche himself published certainly what about the rough drafts for his works?

Obviously the plans for his aphorisms, yes. The deleted passages and the notes at the bottom of the page? Yes. What if within a workbook filled with aphorisms one finds a reference, the notation of a meeting or of an address, or a laundry list. Is it work or not? Why not? And so on, ad infinitum. So suppose and these are very almost sort of mischievous questions that Foucault is asking and obviously these are questions which are really relevant when he comes to defining something as a work.

So he is saying essentially suppose we consider Nietzsche to be a writer and by that consideration, by that logic you know what he wrote is a work, right. So with that particular principle, with that particular assumption let us go to Nietzsche's works. Now obviously whatever is published is his work. Now what are the things, what about the things he did not publish but things he wrote but are not published, the rough drafts of things which he published would be considered those to be work as well, right.

Now if you take a look at the rough draft, would we find, suppose we find a scribble on the rough draft, suppose we find an unrelated argument in the rough draft, a laundry list in the rough draft, would we consider that to be a work as well. So these are very important questions, again a very ontological questions that Foucault is asking over here okay. So ad infinitum we can just go on forever asking these questions.

How can one define a work amid the millions of traces left behind, left by someone after his death? A theory of the work does not exist. An empirical task of those who naively undertake the editing of works often suffers in the absence of such a theory. There is no work theory. There is no working theory or working definition of work if you allow me a little bit of pun. So this is what Foucault is saying that there is no theory, there is no grand theory about what is a work and what is not a work.

And this is why people who naively undertake to edit works of people, works of writers they suffer a lot in absence of such a theory because they do not quite know what to put in, what to put out. Suppose you are editing the collective works of Kafka, and everything that Kafka wrote and you want to bring it together into one volume, it is a very ambitious project.

Now if you go back, if you archive and find out some letters that Kafka wrote and those letters may be completely mundane, letters wrote to his friend about you know may be some kind of a social thing or some neighborhood gossip or some laundry list as was the example given by Foucault, a rise of vegetable prices, would we consider those instances, would we consider anecdotes to be works of Kafka as well.

So there is no you know the theory, there is no grand narrative, there is no grand you know design in terms of looking at this you know differences. There is no way, there is no theory which can map out the difference between what should be considered to be work and what should be considered to be non-work. We do not know the theory at all and as a result of which people who naively undertake to editing of these works often suffer in the absence of such a theory, okay.

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We could go even further. Does The Thousand and One Nights constitute a work? What about Clement of Alexandria's Miscellanies or Diogenes Laertes' Lives? A multitude of questions arises with regard to this notion of the work. Consequently, it is not enough to declare that we should do without the writer (the author) and study the work itself. The word work and the unity that it designates are probably as problematic as the status of the author's individuality. Another notion which has hindered us from taking full measure of the author's disappearance, blurring and concealing the moment of this effacement and subtly preserving the author's existence, is the notion of writing [écriture]. When rigorously applied, this notion should allow us not only to circumvent references to the author, but also to situate his recent absence. The notion of writing, as currently employed, is concerned with neither the act of writing nor the indication – be it symptom or sign – of a meaning that someone might have wanted to express. We try, with great effort, to imagine the general condition of each text, the condition of both the space in which it is dispersed and the time in which it unfolds.

And then he goes on to say we could go even further and this should be on your screen. Does The Thousand and One Nights constitute a work? So you know he gives an example of the classical, the archetypal storytelling, The Thousand and One Nights, would we consider that to be a work? What about Clement of Alexandria's Miscellanies or Diogenes Laertes Lives? A multiple of questions, a multitude of questions arises with regard to this notion of the work.

Consequently, it is not enough to declare that we should do without the writer the author and study the work itself. So this definition, this idea that we should do away the author entirely and look at the text as a substitution text is something that is erroneous according to Foucault because we cannot have a text without the author because the moment you consider something to be a text, consider something to be a work of literature we are automatically presupposing the presence of the author outside of it, okay.

So the word work and the unity that it designates are probably as problematic as the status of the author's individuality. So the author's individuality becomes obviously very problematic but so does this supposed unity of the work of art, the work of literature. So if you are going for unity, if you are looking at work as a unified ontology, as a unified presence, as a unified entity then obviously that becomes as problematic as the unified identity of the author behind it okay.

Another notion which has hindered us from taking full measure of the author's disappearance, blurring and concealing the moment of this effacement and subtly preserving the author's existence as a notion of writing or *écriture*. When rigorously applied this notion should allow us not only to circumvent references to the author, but also to situate his recent absence.

The notion Foucault writing as currently employed, is concerned with neither the act of writing nor the indication be it symptom or sign of a meaning that someone might have wanted to express. We try with great effort to imagine the general condition of each text, the condition of both the space in which it is dispersed and the time in which it unfolds. So he talks about the, the idea of writing in modern times.

And he says that is a very insufficient idea because ideally if you look at the act of writing as an end in itself it should allow us, it should ideally allow us to circumvent references to the author, but also to situate his recent absence. The notion of writing as currently employed is concerned with neither the act of writing nor the indication of a meaning that someone might have wanted to express.

We try with great effort to imagine the general condition of each text, the condition of both the space in which it is dispersed and the time in which it unfolds. So over here writing becomes an operative activity according to Foucault you know and that is something he talks about an ideal condition.

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Lives? A multitude of questions arises with regard to this notion of the work. Consequently, it is not enough to declare that we should do without the writer (the author) and study the work itself. The word work and the unity that it designates are probably as problematic as the status of the author's individuality. Another notion which has hindered us from taking full measure of the author's disappearance, blurring and concealing the moment of this effacement and subtly preserving the author's existence, is the notion of writing [écriture]. When rigorously applied, this notion should allow us not only to circumvent references to the author, but also to situate his recent absence. The notion of writing, as currently employed, is concerned with neither the act of writing nor the indication – be it symptom or sign – of a meaning that someone might have wanted to express. We try, with great effort, to imagine the general condition of each text, the condition of both the space in which it is dispersed and the time in which it unfolds.

In current usage, however, the notion of writing seems to transpose the empirical characteristics of the author into a transcendental anonymity. We are content to efface the more visible marks of the author's empiricity by playing off, one against the other, two ways of characterizing writing, namely, the critical and the religious approaches. Giving writing a primal status seems to be a way of retranslating, in transcendental terms, both the theological affirmation of its sacred character and the critical affirmation of its creative character. To admit that writing is, because of the very history that it made possible, subject to the test of oblivion and repression, seems to represent, in transcendental terms, the religious principle of the hidden meaning (which requires interpretation) and the critical principle of implicit signification, silent determinations, and obscured contents (which give rise to commentary). To imagine writing as absence seems to be a simple

In current usage, however, the notion of writing seems to transpose through empirical characteristics of the author into a transcendental anonymity. So you know first he gives us the ideal condition where the writing becomes a disappearance for the author and it will become an operative activity, a ludic activity in which the author should constantly disappear etc. However, what happens in real life, what happens in real conditions Foucault would argue is that writing seems to transpose the empirical characteristics of the author into a transcendental anonymity.

So by making the author into a transcendental anonymity it actually replicates the structure of the author. So it replicates the ends of becoming a transcendental signified right. So even if the signified is an absence, that too becomes signified in some sense, right and that is something that Foucault is underlining over here. So he says that what we had initially was that the author was a all important persona behind the work.

And there was a transcendental quality about that kind of signified. Now what we have today is the author has become a transcendental absence and that too has become a transcendental signified. So in a way there is a structural replication that has happened over here without any change at a functional level. We are content to efface the more visible marks of the author's empiricity by playing off, one against the other, two ways of characterizing writing namely the critical and the religious approaches.

Given writing a primal status seems to be a way of retranslating in transcendental terms both the theological affirmation of the sacred character and the critical affirmation of its creative character. To admit that writing is, because of the very history that is made possible subject to the test of oblivion and repression seems to represent in transcendental terms, the religious principle of the hidden meaning and a critical principle of implicit signification, silent determinations and obscured contents which give rise to commentary.

So again he looks at the paradoxical commonality between religious interpretation and critical interpretation in a sense that both are looking for some hidden meanings inside the text, some transcendental meaning inside the text. So he says, he is looking at how modern critical usage is actually structurally replicating the original idea of the author in albeit through an absent ontology but or the ontology absence but it is still an ontology.

It still have an ontological presence which is there very much as part of the text. To imagine writing as absence seems to be a simple repetition, so as I said this is a structural repetition or simple repetition to imagine writing as an absence so you know and that absence becomes a transcendental signified in some sense. It is like a pure, holy, sacred presence. So sacrality and absence are both ontologically similar to each other over here in terms of being transcendental in quality, okay.

So to imagine writing as absence seems to be a simple repetition in transcendental terms of both the religious principle of inalterable and yet never fulfilled tradition and the aesthetic principle of the work's survival is perpetuation beyond the author's death and its enigmatic excess in relation to him, right. So again we have a structural similarity over here between the ancient religious way of looking at text and the modern way of looking at text as an absence, okay.

And therein lays the paradox that Foucault is exploring over here. So we conclude this lecture with on this point and we will continue with this text in the times to come. But just go through the lines, go to the sections we just studied in some detail because those are important sessions for the purpose of this particular course. So I will see you and will continue with this in the next lecture. Thank you for your attention.