

# Understanding foucault, baudrillard, and postmodernity



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The use of money evolved out of deeply rooted customs as is shown through past forms of money, e. g. cattle, shells, animal teeth, weapons, and jewelry. Marx explains commodity as any good or service that is produced by human labor and distributed as a product for general sale (Wallace and Wolf 2006: 84). The notion that money is a commodity is concrete. Like money, knowledge can also be used as a commodity. Knowledge produced has become tangible, tamed, manipulated, and controlled-just as currency.

In the knowledge “ factories”, who is in control of the “ packages” of knowledge rolling off the assembly line ready for mass consumption? How can we distinguish facts from belief, opinion or flaw? These are questions we will have to put off until later, because they involve us in controversies over authority and power. For our purposes we will assume that there is consensus that accepts something as knowledge even if only imprecisely expressed at shallow levels. Through the readings of current literature, knowledge “ is”. Theorists have been quoted to state that knowledge is power or is policy, even, inherent or acquired.

Knowledge is universal, pre-eminent, and never static. In this paper, I argue that knowledge is a form of comodification in that it is produced with intent for value to be attached, distributed, and sold. The comodification of knowledge fosters the simulation present in contemporary American society. Baudrillard helps one realize that society has been socialized to a certain type of knowledge which may not be real. An example of this is plotted in Wag the Dog (In order to deconstruct the simulacrum that is foreshadowed, four main points should be critical and analyzed.

They are as follows: 1) acknowledging and understanding the simulation and/ simulacra formulated, 2) agency to contest the authorities, 3) the influence of discourse and discursiveness, 4) ability to reflect on the personal narrative intersecting history. My principal methodology is the comparison and contrast of a set of postmodern theories asserted by Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Frantz Fanon, C. W. Mills, Bell Hooks, Patricia Hill-Collins, and Tracey Reynolds. “ Simulation becomes our Knowledge” Jean Baudrillard (1929- 2007), a Frenchman, theorized the line between reality and fantasy or simulation.

The layers of simulation create simulacra. Baudrillard was a significant theorist and compelling critical thinker that is notorious for his concepts of “ hyper reality” and “ simulation”. We live in a world dominated by simulated experience and feelings, Baudrillard believed, and have lost the capacity to comprehend reality as it really exists (Lemert 2004: 475). He was strongly influenced by philosophers and sociologists. Baudrillard was a thinker who built on what was being thought by others like the classical modernists and Foucault of the postmodern bracket.

He breaks through via an ironic reversal of rationale to make fresh analysis early in the 1980s. Interesting enough, although he was a postmodernist, his text on simulations and simulacra used a master narrative that contradicts the postmodern perspective. In “ Simulacra and Simulations: Disneyland”, Baudrillard begins with a short moral story of Borges tale (471). The tale describes how an overly detailed map takes over the actual territory.

According to John Caviglia<sup>1</sup>, Borges “ proposes that the mind is reality” and all other is the creation of simulation (219).

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In academia, students learn geography primarily by way of maps. Prior to critical thinking, one may view these maps as valid and reliable. In contrary, these maps reflect that of the creator-which is the European. But is it really? Initially, this question is difficult to cope with because it refutes all that is learned, taught, and practiced. Baudrillard proposes four successive phases of simulation which latterly creates a simulacrum (474). Essentially, at this point knowledge has surpassed the first phase as a simple mirror of basic reality and graduated to phase two as it molds and exerts the face of reality.

Because knowledge is “ covering the natural (reality)” as allegorized in Borges Tales, it is in the third phase of simulation. Our reality has been replaced by the “ look-a-like” image. Knowledge has become the “ map” that has not yet fallen to ruins but has taken the identity of the original. The attainment of unquestioned ideas, thoughts, concepts, and language inevitably leads to a simulation that is beyond understanding, unrecognizable, to us, layers with a harmful overlapping that our mental agreeably accepts, yet should be violently resisted.

Frantz Fanon presents this approach to resistance in “ Decolonizing National Culture, and the Negro Intellect”. “ Deconstructing Simulation through Resistance” Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) was a well-known figure and his ideas had significant influence. Today, Fanon is not as notorious as the dead, white male theorists, though his writings are frequently referenced in text and have become the subject of advocacy of violence in third world revolutions (Lemert 2004: 358). In his short life Fanon produced an impressive body of work.

The fact that his personal narrative was being created during the time of decolonization (358); it is why his most prevalent concepts were “colonization/decolonization” and modes of revolution. We are unprepared for the infinite extensiveness of criticism and history. It is there that one must fight. We are the simulators; we are living in the simulacra; we are hollow imitators fueled by social fancy. It is in this fantasy of the simulacrum that one will need to fight. Fanon posits that in order to decolonize the mind conformity is not the answer but resistance (359).

Because one must not refuse the intense fascination that stem from this exchange of all power, text and politics included. This manifestation surpasses by far that of the commodity. “The naked truth of [deconstruction] evokes for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it (359). This vision is our essential force. He would agree that we are no longer in a relation toward victorious forces, such as the Europeans or Westernization, but in a political one.

The challenging directs at us in its disorder – liquidating without shame the law of profit, surplus value, productive finalities, structures of power, and finding at the end of its process the profound immorality (but also the seduction) of primitive rituals of destruction, this very challenge must be raised to an insanely higher level. Knowledge, like money, is inescapable and challenging to deconstruct. The need to attach to the cultural capital is expressed by the simulation as inevitable but indeed is.

By seeking the divisions of the simulation through empirical research and explicit examination, we allow ourselves to deconstruct and the opportunity

to reorganize. The 'real' knowledge is only in 'meta' transitioning and floats over our simulacrum. Contradictory to what is general belief, but the 'reality' is still within reach. Foucault would insert that as long a resistance is in play so is power. Deconstruction demands agency and appropriate attitudes. It is up to us to again become the critical thinkers of this time, parallel to those theorists of Frankfurt School, by disengaging from the illusions set in place by our carelessness.

It is at this peak that the influence of discursiveness and discourse emerge and infuse major roles. "Discursiveness and Discourse" Michel Foucault (1926- 1984) has a large body of works that show the life of a political philosopher. He was vitally concerned with the understanding and transformation of the intersectionality of power, knowledge and truth. Foucault brings to light the way in which the individual is affected by the large and small segments of society. He examines the "abnormal" human subject as an object-of-knowledge of the discourses of human and empirical science such as psychiatry, medicine, and penalization.

He demonstrates the power-knowledge relationship that the individual is also subjected to in everyday life. Aristotle once stated in *Metaphysics* that, "'All men by nature desire knowledge' (www. wisdomquotes. com). " If one accepts the claim that knowledge is power, then it will be logical to assert that all people want power. The person or persons that have knowledge also acquire the power of that knowledge. With this knowledge, is it possible to change the way in which our society affects us? There really is no way in which we can rid ourselves of the power-knowledge relationship.

If society changes one thing, it will lead to an affect on something else.

Therefore, we must remain aware of this power-knowledge relationship, so there are no hidden power relations. The individual will then be liberated in self-knowledge. Ideas exist as long as they are perceived (class notes). The back and forth movement and the filling in the gaps that modernity set as fixed helps include all peoples for the attainment of the 'reality' of knowledge; therefore, further deconstructing the knowledge as simulation. Discursiveness is fundamental to the production of knowledge.

Thus, in order to proceed in the deconstruction, reproduction of knowledge is needed via the cycle of power and knowledge. Foucault asserts that power is not owned or possessed but exercised (466). This exercise is the discursive action, but discourse is its counterpart. Broadly speaking, the discursiveness and discourse together, attempt to identify how relations of power/knowledge constitute domains of subjects and objects. To understand this historicity, it is necessary to examine broader frameworks of cultural discourse.

Throughout, I use the word discourse to refer to "clusters of ideas, images and practices" that provide context (Hall 1997: 6). Discourses establish frames of clearness. The analytical interest for discourse analysis does not regard what one says, but rather, what constitutes the domain of the expressed from within which one is able to speak. According to Fanon, "Given the significance of elite discourses in maintaining power relations, knowledge produced by, for, and/or in behalf... becomes vitally important in resisting oppression (Hill-Collins 1998: 45).

Discourse analysis helps us to understand bodies as the products of particular histories. Hill-Collins, Hooks, and Reynolds present a resistance within a resistance. They understand that the language and lack of fluidity proposed in the text of the postmodernists such as Baudrillard, Foucault, etc. are misrepresenting the postmodern perspective. These three postmodern feminists' theorists provide insight on the hegemonic powers that have been nursing us simulated knowledge. They cohesively recognized the importance of discourse.

Discourse and discursiveness create commotion in the layering of simulation. In order to realize this, Hooks, Reynolds, and Hill-Collins had to take a step back and reflect on their personal narratives in relation to the sociohistorical context provided. " Step back and Go ' Meta' " According to C. Wright Mills, there is a perspective called the " sociological imagination" that can be used to " frame," or interpret, perceptions of social life (349). In part, this imagination features a healthy skepticism, assuming that social appearances often aren't what they seem.

But even more, this perspective involves awareness toward the linkages between history and biography, between social structure and consciousness, and between knowledge and its sociohistorical and cultural contexts. It is this one of this discipline's approaches to critical thinking. Perhaps no where is this imagination so exercised than in the sociology of knowledge, which studies the social sources and social consequences of knowledge-how, for instance, social organization shapes both the content and structure of knowledge or how various social, cultural, political conditions shield people from truth.

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There are at least three broad intellectual traditions of this sub discipline. The first attempts to plot how various social and cultural orders spawn different knowledge systems- -why, for instance, the very discipline of sociology evolved, where and when it did and why the biographies of its “founding fathers” (e. g. , Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Cooley and Mead) overlap as they do. As the combination of soil and environment determine the crops a farmer plants as well as their yield, so different types of knowledge (e. g. , religious, political, scientific, everyday) are understood to differentially flourish within varying social situations.

In developing precisely how knowledge becomes socially modified, reflexivity through the combination of biography and history is the climax of the deconstruction. One of the most important factors in my decision to attend Spelman College was the concept of the strong and empowered Spelman woman. Since the graduation of the first college class in 1887, Spelman College has been famous for producing the ultimate young African American lady who portrays the characteristics of one dedicated to community service, professionalism, sisterhood, scholarship and assertiveness.

During my freshman year at Spelman, I realized that there was hypocrisy clouding the institutional mission to produce academically superior leaders. That very distinctive cloud has been allowed to endure and cultivate greatly. For just a moment in time, during the various social events of the school year perspective students, current student and even alumnae become victims of amnesia when it come to upholding the ideology of the Spelmanite.

Although some feminist's views of womanhood, such as independence, empowerment, and equity are still present within the student body of Spelman, the focus of becoming the ultimate young woman gradually fades from existence at certain social events and promptly reappears afterwards. When learning about the Civil Rights struggles of the African American community, the AUC is recognized to have constituted many of the demonstrations for equal rights during the Civil Rights Movement.

Contrary to institutional concerns, Spelmanite and young men of Morehouse were famous for asserting themselves and fighting for the equality of all; however, in the latter classes of the African American scholars seem satisfied with social events and status within their simulated environment. My thesis explores the dynamics of gender roles between Spelman and Morehouse students in comparison to the students during the Civil Rights movement. The ability to use Mills reflexivity is more than helpful in the success of producing a valid research.