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Power, Religion, and Simulacrum—Foucault on the Cult of Dionysus

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Abstract

This article examines a passage concerning the cult of Dionysus in Michel Foucault's 1970–71 lecture series *Lectures on the Will to Know* (2013; *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir* 2011). The article shows how the intensification of ritual prescriptions is associated with socio-political changes. The cult of Dionysus is located in the political field, and the passage is contextualized by literature from classical scholarship. The discussion is embedded in the analysis of truth: the cult and the societal aspects are connected to power in Foucault's 1970–71 lectures by the key theoretical concept of *simulacrum*.

The article deals particularly with legislation as one of the societal changes Foucault associates with increased ritualism: the introduction of publicly recognized laws—visible to all and applied by everyone—implies power that is exercised through and by all citizens. The cult of Dionysus is analyzed as an anti-system in opposition to prevailing social practices and official religious forms. Foucault points out that the cult manages to slip away

from certain traditional systems of power. The article claims, however, that as the official status of the cult is strengthened in the classical era, performing the rites also serves the individualization process of the new political culture and its legislation, which is not necessarily liberating. In this way, the inaugural lecture series is connected to Foucault's later work on governmentality—techniques of governing the self and the others.

Keywords
Dionysus, Foucault, governance, individual, popular religion, power, simulacrum

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Introduction

Dionysus was not a god of one thing but a multiplicity, just like the other Greek gods and goddesses. He was the god of wine and ecstasy, dance, theatre, tragedy and of the mystery cult; vegetation and rambling ivies, animals and beastliness, arriving and departing, unity and dispersion, grape harvest and distribution. He was a traveler and a stranger (*xenos*). Marcel Detienne characterizes Dionysus as diverse and unpredictable, the god bearing a mask which simultaneously conceals and reveals (Detienne 1986). It is not possible to identify all aspects of the god or associated phenomena which took place in the Mediterranean from the Bronze age and was still a serious rival to Christianity as it started to spread. Hence, this article examines a short passage concerning the cult of Dionysus and societal changes in Michel Foucault's inaugural 1970–71 lecture series *Lectures on the Will to Know* (2013; *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir* 2011). These lectures are still only marginally commented on, and have not provoked scholarly debate from the perspective of the cult of Dionysus. Moreover, from the viewpoint of Foucault scholarship, the religious practices form a link between this early lecture series and Foucault's later work dealing with techniques of governing the self.

The predominant theme of the lecture series is the formation of truth and its relation to conflict, power, and, for example, to introduction of money and written law. Foucault thematizes the question of power relations, which is subsequently defined in the first volume of the *History of Sexuality*. Foucault's most famous definition of power relations in the *History of Sexuality* serves as the overall context of this article: not a power that is possessed by someone and exercized on someone else, but as a name of a strategic situation in which power is exercised through

multiple points that constitute a whole network of differentiations and divisions. In Foucault's thought, power is not about domination or repression, but about producing these relations and their effects. Power is not then something external to societal relations—like the juridical, religious and economic relations this article deals with—but immanent to them (Foucault 1976: 123–24). Most importantly, the concept of power by definition includes *resistance*, as one cannot step outside these relations and their dynamic character presupposes the possibility of opposition (Foucault 1976: 124–27). This article locates the cult of Dionysus in a field consisting of multiple points of societal changes associated with certain conceptions of truth. The cult is seen as a set of phenomena that rises from below and induces adjustments in the overall network of power relations.

I will contextualize Foucault's short passage with literature from classical scholarship dealing with Dionysus and the cult. In general, the research dealing with Dionysus draws information from various sources—poetry and plays, paintings, philosophical works, ceramics—and interpretation depends on the sources used. The cult seems to provide something for everyone in its inclusiveness. The literature might, for example, refer to very short notions in Homer's *Iliad* in which Dionysus is described as "manic" or "frenzied," but also as "the joy of men" (*Iliad*: 6.130; 14.325). Plato is often referred to, and one can search for the ritual aspects of the mystery cult performed by women in Euripides' *Bacchae*. This is not a problem of any kind to Foucault, who treats all statements from various sources equally, and regardless whose main objective is not in seeking the most adequate historical description of how things really were.

Foucault's perspective indeed differs from historians, anthropologists or sociologists in defining his methodology as such: "[W]hen I used the word archeological research I want to differentiate what I am doing from both social history, since I don't want to analyze society but facts of discourses" (Foucault 1983). Foucault defines the task as to study statements that have occurred and form *discursive events* which cannot be separated or isolated in representable units. Instead of presupposing historical continuities, Foucault seeks to make events visible as singularities. These singularities are, however, connected to other singularities, and the aim of his reseach is to discover their connections (Foucault 2000: 226–27). By *event*, Foucault means a multiplicity which occurs dispersed through different institutions, with *discursive event* a term for these events dispersed between behaviour, institutions, reactions, laws and so on (Foucault 2011: 187). At the same time, he locates himself in the contemporary philosophical debate that reflects on our present moment. Foucault's analysis, defined as "ontology of the present," enables us to distance ourselves from existing differentiations and patterns of thought so that we can find other ways of thinking and acting. In Berkeley in 1983, Foucault stated:

> With the term archaeological research what I want to say is that what I am dealing with is a set of discourses, which has to be analyzed as an event or as a set of events. […] Genealogy is both the reason and the target of the analysis of discourses as events, and what I try to show is how those discursive events have determined in a certain way what constitutes our present and what constitutes ourselves: our knowledge, our practices, our type of rationality, our relationship to ourselves and to the others (Foucault 1983).

Foucault's work in the *Lectures on the Will to Know* is strongly influenced by classical scholarship of the "Parisian circle," namely Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant's descriptions of archaic Greek societies. They follow Louis Gernet's earlier research on the relationship between the formation of truth and legislation (Gernet 1964). Legal practices and associated empirical factors also play a prominent role in Foucault's analysis. Historians in the Parisian circle adopt viewpoints from the structuralist theory framework to varying degrees, including the study of binary oppositions. Detienne further theorizes the dualities and oppositions associated with Dionysus, but not only in terms of the internal oppositions of Dionysus or the cult: the Dionysian itself is seen as an opposition to something external to it—an anti-system in opposition to prevailing social practices, and a protest movement against the official religion (Seaford 2006: 9). Foucault disregards structuralist concepts and methodology, but adopts the view which emphasizes political aspects in the analyses of the ancient sources.[1]

The only description Foucault approves of to describe himself is "a Nietzschean" (Foucault 2001b: 1523). Richard Seaford briefly discerns the contemporary literature on Dionysus and writes that a stance has still to be taken as to Nietzsche's conceptualization of the Dionysian.[2] Seaford states that the "over-abstractness" of the literature concerning Dionysus is a failure caused by the Nietzschean tradition based on metaphysical conceptions (Seaford 2006: 11). He considers that the high level of abstraction in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* unjustifiably privileges Athenian tragedy and emphasizes contradiction. Also, more recent studies

[1] "Structuralism" of the Parisian circle does not mean seeking universal patterns (for instance in myth) but emphasizing particular contexts of Greek society. On various occasions, Foucault distances himself from structuralism (e.g., see Foucault 1994a [1969]; 1994b [1968]; 1994c [1967]; 1970; 2001c [1983]: 195–211).

[2] Seaford makes a distinction between modern *Dionysiac* and ancient Dionysus (2006: 6). He refers to Nietzsche's contemporary Erwin Rohde, who does not focus on Dionysian metaphysics, instead focusing on the practicalities in the development of the cult, associated historical events, and the experience of the ecstatic (Seaford 2006: 9). The appeal of a Dionysus cult to Seaford is, nonetheless, the possibility to transform individual identity (Seaford 2006: 11).

have emphasized the unresolved character of the contradictions, overall ambiguity, and co-existence of order and disorder in Dionysus (Seaford 2006: 9). However, I find it highly important that through this Nietzschean legacy we can address on one hand the philosophical questions of truth and appearance, and questions concerning the relationship between individual and community on the other. Nietzsche describes how the Dionysian artist is "altogether one with the Primordial Unity" and this unity is embedded in contradiction (Nietzsche 1923 [1886]: §5; Seaford 2006: 6). The notion of primal unity refers to the dissolution of boundaries between men and nature, men and men—and men and women (Seaford 2006: 6). The rites of the cult provide the possibility to extricate from individual identity in a trance which is collectively performed but individually experienced.

Reading Nietszche and the French classicists, the cult of Dionysus can be seen as a counter-force to traditional norms and power structures. Foucault points out that the cult of Dionysus manages to escape the traditional social structures and pre-established games of power and proprietorship. The thesis of this article is, however, that the individualistic ritual prescriptions of the popular cults will eventually be assimilated with the regulatory use of power. Even if the cult of Dionysus has specific features in this regard, performing the rites serves the new political culture and its legislation instead of emancipatory aims as *the official status* of the cult is strengthened in the classical era. Plato's *Laws* takes a normative stance in proposing how the rites should be implemented in the observances of a city-state (*Laws*: 665a–674c; 815c–d). In the last section of this article a complementary concept of power is needed: the intensification of ritualism in the city-state system is discussed by the framework of *governmentality* which entails both the individual's self-governance and the strategic government of others.[3]

In the following steps this article shows how the cult is located in certain struggles of truth and simultaneously to the political field. First, a distinction between archaic and rational conceptions of truth is made. This is done in order to discuss how the role of the cult's ritual prescriptions is conceived differently in the context of oral tradition compared to Plato's rational, philosophical discourse. The analysis of truth leads to the study of appearances, and the key theoretical concept of *simulacrum*, by

[3] "Governing," in the lecture series *Security, Territory, Population*, is first defined in the sixteenth century context. However, the concept is also used in a more abstract, theoretical way to address certain techniques of governing. I'm using the term in this latter sense. In Foucault's late lectures the theory of governing the self and the others is developed further in the context of antiquity (See Foucault 2004; 2008; 2009). In his late work Foucault defines power relations and concrete techniques in terms of open strategies, and they replace the perspective of *simulacrum*, which is more abstract form of domination (Foucault 1985: 5).

which the cult and the societal aspects are connected to power. Second, the article shows how Foucault associates concrete changes in legislation with the strengthened position of the cult in the society. Finally, the cult itself is studied from two different perspectives, both connected to certain relations to truth. On one hand the cult is investigated as a popular religion that enables the dissolution of social hierarchies and identities, but on the other hand the cult is seen as a site of increased ritualism which plays a part in fostering regulation and self-governance of individuals in a city-state.

Theoretical Framework of Truth and Appearance

The title *Lectures on the Will to Know* reveals that it deals with the question of knowledge and its relation to power.[4] The lecture series is notably influenced by Marcel Detienne's *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece* (1996 [1967]). Both Detienne and Foucault describe their research as "history of the systems of thought." This means that the point is not to interpret the texts by composing a commentary of them, but to investigate the roles different discourses are given within the society (Foucault 2011: 191). The conceptions of truth are always related to the real, material operations and social life (Detienne 1996: 35), and truth itself takes place in the multiplicity of events that together constitute it (Foucault 2011: 191). *The Masters of Truth* investigates how *Alētheia* (unconcealment, and in that sense "truth") in the oral tradition of archaic Greece is inextricably associated with oblivion or concealment, *Lēthe*. Even if they form a pair of opposites, concealment and unconcealment indeed form a pair instead of being mutually exclusive (Detienne 1996).

Surely the idea of the non-contradictory character of unconcealment and concealment can be recognized from Heidegger, coming forth involves the covering over of something else. In the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger addresses the question of power in a Nietzschean manner by stating that it is difficult to recognize the intersection of apparent and unconcealement as "a formation of forces" (Heidegger 1961: 92). Detienne well acknowledges his Heideggerian influence, but makes a significant differentiation: he sees that as Heidegger stresses Being as the focal point of his research, he leaves politics out of the analysis.[5] Detienne

[4] Foucault (2011: 200) finds it important to be clear with the distincion between "truth" and "knowledge." We must be able to analyse knowledge without presuming that it consists of truth. Truth on the other hand is something that comes after knowledge instead of preceding or being a component of it.

[5] According to Detienne, Heidegger might see *polis* as the site that unveils Being, but he reduces *polis* into the ancient verb *polein*, which means "to be" (Detienne 1996: 27).

argues that politics (*to politikon*) in the traditional sense of the word and mundane social forms of life are not needed for the realization of unveiled existence in Heidegger's thought (Detienne 1996: 27–28). In the Foucauldian context, however, the point of theorizing is to bring forward concrete practices and political operations.

Detienne, along with Jean-Pierre Vernant, accepts premises which set religious or mythological thought in contrast with philosophical or rational thinking (Detienne 1996; Vernant 1988a: 242; 1988b: 89). According to these views it is characteristic to classical, philosophical thought to clearly distinguish *Alētheia* from its opposites—ignorance, forgetfulness of the eternal truths, deceit of words, and persuasion and on the other hand shadows, reflections and other visual illusions (Detienne 1996). When Detienne deals with the cult of Dionysus as a popular religion its relation to truth is indeed quite different compared to Plato's discussion of the Dionysian rituals in the *Laws*. Platonic philosophy installs itself against the Sophists who glorify the spoken which has an immense power to change the state of affairs by appealing and convincing (Detienne 1996: 118–19). The Sophists recognize that the sphere of the spoken is not purified from ambiguity and obscurity, but the confusion of meanings of words is related to power. Plato's dialogue, *Sophist*, introduces a technique of making a distinction between "things in themselves" and appearances that have a tendency of tricking and charming people (Defert 2011: 268). To Plato, it is an ethical task to be able to recognize these *simulacra* and exclude them as a twisted sophistry.[6]

If Detienne and Vernant make a clear distinction between religious (or archaic) and philosophical ways of forming the truth, the post-Nietzschean philosophical tradition breaks down the distinction. In this tradition, the philosophical significance of these illusions and appearances is explored. The cult of Dionysus plays with illusions, unconcealment and concealment. Concretely, a ritual in which a myth of Dionysos is repeated simulates the plot of the legend, and the rituals imitated on stage of a theatre are simulations of the ritual practices. Further, the person on stage bears different masks and simulates other legendary characters, and finally, a mirror used in the rite reflects and multiplies everything that takes place.

Foucault writes that illusion is a product of a certain type of philosophizing, which has made distinctions between the original, the copy and an appearance, *simulacrum* (Foucault 2001d: 947–48). Philosophy itself is embedded in power, and it is not a place of clarity and transparency (Foucault 2011: 199), or as Nietzsche put it, "every philosophy also conceals a philosophy; every opinion is also a lurking-place, every word is also a mask" (2013 [1886]: §289). Philosophy is associated with theatre: it is a canon of faces we do not really know, but the thoughts of philosophers are

[6] See Deleuze (1983 [1969]); Smith (2006: 89–123).

repeated and altered in written form, and so they return in different masks and several disguises (Foucault 2001d: 967).

Following the political emphasis in theorizing knowledge and truth, Foucault refuses the skeptic notion that there would be no truth (Foucault 2011: 208).[7] Instead, we find the truth of power in appearance, and that is where we need to look at. This formulates *the principle of fiction*: the truth is an effect that is created, which does not mean that the effects would escape into the immaterial world, quite the contrary (Foucault 2011: 190).[8] Even Plato declares that in order to define the Sophists' art of illusions, one must admit that the apparent and the ostensible take part in being—they exist (*Soph*: 260c–d). Foucault writes further that the fictitious is never in things or in people, but in the verisimilitude of what lies between them (Foucault 1998: 153). The task is not just to show the invisible, but to make the relations of power visible as they are tied to the very concrete practices, even if they might be very difficult to pinpoint. Instead of trying to unmask what lies beneath the "real," one must go beyond what is given as appearance and ask how did it become conceived as appearance in the first place (Foucault 2011: 198).

To be more precise with the definition, appearance or *simulacrum* is a concept which does not assume that a subject at hand, an entity or a phenomenon, would possess in itself any substance to which it refers to. In the *Lectures on the Will to Know*, Foucault makes it distinct from symbol or sign by the following example: in archaic Greece where the scepter is a *symbol* of power, the symbol refers to the very concrete aspects such as land, corps, and other goods on which power rests. In a market society, money is, by contrast, understood as a *sign* of something absent, and visible circulation of money hides political relations (Foucault 2011: 133–34). However, if money is understood as a *simulacrum*, it is considered to be consisting of an inner force that enables regulation by concrete operations and substitutions (Foucault 2011: 134). *Simulacrum*-money is a complex system of relations, a construction which refers to something else than any of its physical qualities. In this context *simulacrum* is a whole set of "superimposed substitutions," creating a fixation between simultaneous, overlapping events.

[7] Foucault replaces the sceptic slogan by stating that "the truth is not true (*vrai*)" (2011: 208). The statement becomes understandable when the word *vrai* is opened up: it signifies not only "true," but also "real," "actual," "right," "truthful," "genuine," and "sincere." The truth is not "real" in the sense of being opposite to the appearance, and it does not hold moral qualities such as sincerity or authenticity.

[8] There is a passage in one of the Foucault's earlier essays where the problematics of *simulacrum* revolves around deceit: Descartes suspects that Devil is whispering in his ear in the disguise of God, and Foucault's aim is to rethink *simulacrum* without evil genie, non-sense or system of representing signs. See Foucault (2001a [1964]: 355).

Hence, *simulacrum* is distinguished from representation and likeness. Detienne speaks of a statue of a god which is considered to be divine and carrying a divine force in itself (Detienne 1996), but if it would be understood to be *representing* something divine, no internal force needs to be presumed. Nietzsche in turn compares the Dionysian to music in its abstractness. It is accompanied and contrasted with the Apollonian that unifies and identifies one as singular and makes it possible to describe and represent a thing (Nietzsche 1923 [1886]: §1; §4). If likeness is defined by a presupposed internal similarity or a shared identity with an external difference (e.g, a painting and its model), *simulacrum* is defined by internal difference in which similarities are external (*Soph*: 235e–236a; Deleuze 1983: 47–49). Despite the illusion, the simulating object is completely different in multi-dimensional ways we cannot really observe.

Both Foucault and Heidegger propose that appearances have a tendency to conceal their character as apparent. Foucault does use the word *simulacre* also in its French meaning, denoting pretense and sham. It is a "sham" when used to designate power which is not easily observable as "real." Foucault states that the use of the inner force can be disguised, and *simulacrum* presents itself as a neutral sign: money in the market economy refers to the absent and suggests that the state of affairs is an outcome of a natural process (Foucault 2011: 135).[9] It is not only power that is found in appearance, but "truth," and the task is to unconceal how this power operates. If the *simulacra* are nothing, or if they are to be excluded or totally erased from the field of knowledge, then also struggle and the use of power are erased from the sphere of knowable things. The word *simulacrum* is used as a sham when it is associated with procedures that hide class-struggles, distribution, or other political and factual processes. *Simulacrum* turns the possibilities to recognize these processes and to discuss about them into something else, and the vocabulary of this "something else" becomes conceived as the only form of truth (Foucault 2011: 187). In the context of religious ritualism, the religious cult might well provide an access to the sense of freedom and dissolution of fixed identities, but with certain political changes similar-looking rituals can just as well consist of intensification of individualizing power. The next section will deal with Foucault's observation that the transformation of religious practices in the classical era is an overlapping process with the formation of new type of political power.

[9] In this case Foucault compares Marx's "commodity fetishism" to *simulacrum*. Marx writes that commodities have gained mystical qualities: "[They] have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising from there. There it is a definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world" (Marx 1999 [1867]).

Individualization and Legislation: *Simulacrum* of Good Governance

If anything, the trancelike rites of the cult of Dionysus are known for providing a possibility to detach oneself from individuality, all the individual characteristics that are projected to people. Rather than aiming at a historical description of empirical facts, Nietzsche abstracts the Dionysian from history and makes it into a principle of dispersion of identity (Nietzsche 1923 [1886]; Seaford 2006: 6).

Vernant describes the experience of cutting oneself loose in the rite as follows:

> [A]lterity is a sudden intrusion of that which alienates us from daily existence, from the normal course of things, from ourselves: disguise, masquerade, drunkness, play, theater, and finally, trance and ecstatic delirium. Dionysus teaches or compels us to become other than what we ordinarily are (Vernant 1991: 196).

According to Foucault, the status of the cult gets strengthened in a culture in which a certain type of individualism raises its head—more specifically, in the juridical definition of an individual. The argument of individualization can also be validated by examples that concretely demonstrate intensified ritualization of popular religions: gods are no longer communicated only through the leaders but by each person who performs the rites (Foucault 2011: 165). The immortality of every soul was introduced by Orphism, where salvation does not concern only the rich and noble. Solon's sixth century BCE reform of laws protects private property but also introduces strict restrictions of funeral rites—such as controlling the height of stone piles on graves and mourning time—to be compatible with the idea that afterlife is not a matter of wealth but accessible by everyone (Foucault 2011: 169).

Moreover, Foucault traces back the process of individualization of the criminal subject.[10] A murderer becomes someone who pollutes the city by impurity, and in the religious purification process that person needs to be identified and sanctioned (Foucault 2011: 169–70). Committed crime is conceived as an impurity which threatens the whole *polis*, and compensation of crime involves purification besides monetary compensation. According to Foucault, purity and impurity become defining

[10] In contrast, the "pre-juridical" sphere of Homeric, oral tradition is more like a codified battle (*agon*), within which groups come across each other (Vernant 2009: 56). See also Gernet (1964: 63). Foucault adopts the view according to which crimes are solved in negotiation processes between groups in these scenes, and that the individual is not a legal subject—an individual does not carry a criminal identity (Foucault 2011: 171).

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factors of the development of a criminal subject: it is not enough to operate on the level of tribes and familial ties, but to find out *who* has done the crime and to confine the person (Foucault 2011: 174).

Foucault investigates the individualism of religious rites together with two parallel processes: the introduction of written law and the introduction of money, both of which can be seen as *simulacra*. Written law plays an important role in the individualization process of public institutions, differing from the secret, unwritten rules (*thesmos*) a leader needs to remember, utter out, and apply at the right time (Foucault 2011: 154–55). Written laws carved on the walls of the polis can be seen by everyone whenever needed (Foucault 2011: 146), not functioning as an expression of a divine secret, but as public property accessible to all and applied by everyone (Vernant 2009: 63). Written law shifts the power of decision-making from the tribes to the sphere of publicly recognized rules.

Written law (*nomos*)[11] and money (*nomisma*) as institutions are part of the same, wider project of codifying (Vernant 2009: 102–103). They are closely related because they are linked to a conception of truth which emphasizes measurement. Legislation in the written form embodies not only an individualization process but also the conception of truth, in which money is seen as the just measure (*EN*: 1133b). In the classical era, Plato's philosophical thought called into question the role of the oblivion as the component of truth. As we have seen, *Alētheia* needs to be distinguished from *Lēthe* and ambiguity dispelled from the way of clarity. Plato writes in the *Republic* that appearances and illusions cause perplexity in our souls, but measuring, calculating and weighing are the best recourses against them (*Rep*: 602d). The part of the soul which trusts measuring is the best part of the soul whereas the part that has to do with appearances is inferior (*Rep*: 603a).

Foucault's claim is, however, that regardless of the requirement of measurement, the concept of *simulacrum* captures how the functions of these new religious rites, laws and money are perceived. Measurement does not mean that money or written law would in a neutral manner refer to an "objective" reality of objects: *nomoi* can be set under public discussion and altered through discourse. The logic is that as *nomos* is negotiable, we also have an effect on money (*EN*: 1133a; Foucault 2011: 146). Money is not treated as a sign that would simply represent the value of objects or wealth of its possessor, but is openly a *simulacrum* that holds an

[11] *Nomos* does not refer only to written laws, but a whole set of practices and understanding of knowledge. The word *nomos* (pl. *nomoi*) was not used in early Greece to designate written law, but to any traditional custom, even a 'tune' or a 'song.' (See Gagarin 2008: 33, 35). In Plato's *Laws*, *nomos* refers both to spoken, commonly known norms or rules, and written laws (Gagarin 2008: 34). Distinction between them is kept clear, but they should both be taken into account (*Laws*, 793a-c).

inner force enabling the use of power. These three processes—ritualization, written law, money-compensation—associated with individualization might be organized around new conceptions of truth, yet they are conceived to consist of the internal forces to be used.[12] Rather than representing things, *simulacra* form a fixation of these relations.

Hence, Foucault uses the concept of *simulacrum* here to designate forms of regulatory power which can for example mitigate poverty and further peace while holding back other social changes. Solon's reform of laws, described by Aristotle as "good governance" (*eunomia*),[13] implies the idea that good order should come from within, not above, people. Good governance should not be dictated by a god (Kalimtzis 2000: 138), but it should be desired to be implemented. However, these regulations mean changes in governing rather than absolute freedom: power might no longer be possessed by few, but the totality of the social body becomes the place for power that this body applies to itself—power is exercised permanently through and by each citizen (Foucault 2011: 154). In terms of the relationship between freedom and governance, a similar logic applies to the following: if on one hand the popular cult serves the purpose of detaching oneself from restricted individual identity, on the other hand the rites can provide a space of exercising power by and through an individual.

The Cult of Dionysus as a Popular Religion

The "democratization" of legal procedures and the development of monetary systems are part of the simultaneous cultural and political changes that include increased and intensified ritualization of popular religions (Foucault 2011: 163, 166). This is the context in which Foucault's notion of the cult of Dionysus and its self-guided practices take place. I pointed out that in the 1970–71 lecture series Foucault analyzes written law, the introduction of money and mystery cults as *simulacra* that form a fixation, a set of overlapping, dispersed events. Furthermore they form

[12] Aristotle writes in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that written law together with money secures peace in the *polis* and regulates interaction (*EN*: 1132b–1133b; Peacock 2006: 645). He sees that money keeps communities together—it forms ties (*EN*: 1133a–b).

[13] Solon's reform suggests that ideally the regulation of shares takes place in *eunomia*, which is opposite to *dusnomia*, disruption of shares, that makes some people too rich and most people too poor (Foucault 2011: 150). Solon's *eunomia* itself was not, however, a solution to inequality. The reform included wealth-based distinction of four classes that all had political rights of participation in the direct democracy that took place at the *agora*. For some, the only form of power they had was to participate without any real possibility to have an impact. Being rich or poor was beyond the law (Foucault 2011: 154). Hence, the new system solidified the class structure and caused geographically based divisions (Castrén 2011: 136, 138).

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a conception of a juridical individual. Certainly one cannot talk about the *emergence* of mystery cults in this context, but one can address the issue of the *strengthened* status of the cult in the society.

Foucault discusses the general features characteristic to the rituals of the popular cults, especially Orphism, and points out their socio-political function. He writes that the rituals set up a system of regulation that is accessible to everyone and open to autonomous control regardless of wealth or status (Foucault 2011: 165). In the popular cults, rites are not hidden secrets of prosperous families but transmitted from generation to generation, well known and possible to follow by everyone (Foucault 2011: 165, 172). Hence, everyone can be their own judge in deciding whether the rite is well followed through. By performing rites one is responsible for one's own faith and has a direct, personal access to the gods. Foucault accepts the Nietzschean notion that *askēsis* to some extent replaces sacrifice: only the rich can sacrifice valuables and animals such as goats or oxen (Foucault 2011: 164), but everyone can use herbs and dance. In this regard the cult of Dionysus involves peculiar rituals indulging in pleasures of tearing raw meat into pieces by teeth—designating dispersion—and drinking honey. Euripides portrays the orgy in the following manner:

> At once all the earth will dance […] to the mountain, to the mountain, where the crowd of women waits, goaded away from their weaving by Dionysus […] after the running dance, wrapped in holy deerskin, hunting the goat's blood, blood of the slain beast, devouring its raw flesh with joy […] The land flows with milk, the land flows with wine, the land flows with honey from the bees (*Bac*: 120–45).

The orgy in archaic Greece is not associated with delusion, but with truth. Detienne points out that in the anonymous *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* one speaks truth (*Alētheia*) when eating this honey—performing a particular, pleasurable rite—while being possessed by Dionysus. The idea is that if they do not perform this pleasurable rite in the orgy, they speak falsely (Detienne 1996: 24; *Hom*: 560–65). Speaking is connected to the divine truth in a ritual, but at the same time it is closely connected to the possibility of falsehood. Moreover, everyone can have access to the truth through the rite in the experience of letting go of one's pre-established identity. The cult sets itself in opposition to the idea that only the leader could express the truth.

According to Foucault, the aristocracy pleaded to the traditional gods Zeus, Athena, or Apollo to justify their power. In popular power, *the* popular god is Dionysus, who is associated with the rural activity of the wine harvest. The official legislation does not refer to Dionysus when justifying its power or distribution of wealth (Foucault 2011: 166–67). Hence, religion is not an "opium to the people" imposed by the dominant class

(Foucault 2011: 169). The cult of Dionysus on the contrary does not appeal to some aristocrats, because it is too inclusive; the whole community participates, slaves and foreigners included, without city-state-based boundaries (Seaford 2006: 27; Foucault 2011: 172). Dionysus comes forcefully and unexpectedly from outside the city, compared to a flood that dashes against the city gates and is impossible to stop (Foucault 2011: 165). He is described with words that will later be recognized from medical vocabulary (Detienne 1986: 12–13): he is *epidemic*. He travels, suddenly appears, spreads mania like ivy and disseminates without boundries (Detienne 1986: 12–13) or without asking the target's social standing.

Euripides writes in the old seer Teiresias' voice that all Athenians should worship Dionysus together, "[T]he god makes no distinctions—whether the dancing is for young or old. He wants to gather honours from us all, to be praised communally, without division" (*Bac*: 260). Nietzsche describes in the *Birth of Tragedy* how especially early tragedy—in which all heroes beneath their masks refer to Dionysus—opens up a space where the gaps between state and society, and between people, "give way to an overwhelming feeling of oneness" (Nietzsche 1923 [1886]: §7). Tragedy makes it possible to experience powerful and pleasurable life in the appearance of the corporeal choir and to experience life existing regardless of changing phenomena and historical events (1923 [1886]: §7). Nietzsche stresses that because early tragedy is highly religious, the socio-political sphere with confrontation between king and people is non-existent (1923 [1886]: §8).

Foucault also highlights the cult of Dionysus as a special form of popular ritualism exterior to the traditional and official use of power. The religious practices of the cult somehow succeed in slipping away from the "games of appropriation" between rich families (Foucault 2011: 165). Furthermore, he describes the organization of the Dionysiac cultic groups as spontaneously emerged brotherhoods, contrasted to the hierarchical management of religious leaders who possess divine secrets. To sum up, the cult provides an individual membership accessible to all. Sacrifice is performed together, but trance is experienced singularly by each participant, enabling a detachment of oneself from pre-established categories of identity. The rites are performed by each and everyone in the community, but united: the connection to the god is individual even though the individual is dissolved in the rite (Foucault 2011: 165).

Hitherto, Foucault's short description of the cult of Dionysus seems indeed like a reflection of counter-conduct or power that rises from below, which by definition is included in Foucault's concept of power. However, as the new ritualized forms of religious practices intermingle with the worship of traditional deities of city-states, the picture gets more complicated. Foucault sees that the cult of Dionysus enforced a reorganization of religious structures also at state level, describing the status of the cult in the city-state as follows:

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> The intensification of both popular and individualistic ritual prescriptions and their takeover by general religious movements (like Orphism), led to a religious quality of the individual which depends of the rigor and precision of an observance: the pure and the impure. The vigorous development of the Dionysian cult forced, not without violent struggles, a readjustment of religious structures, and a cohabitation of traditional divinities with these new forms. Finally, readjusted this way, the role of religion as justification of the new political power makes possible the integration of these religious qualities of the individual in the legal system of the State. Pure and impure will be now be distributed by the State, or at any rate, be based on State regulation (Foucault 2013: 175).

This quotation stresses that the cult of Dionysus spread from the grassroots as it was not imposed on people from above, affecting the religious constitution of the *polis*. Nevertheless, ritual prescriptions of popular cults redefine the quality of the individual in terms of purity and impurity in general (also in legislation), which in turn fosters the state regulation of purity and impurity of each individual (Foucault 2011: 168). Foucault points out that even if certain gods are no longer associated with certain families in power, religious power and legislation are still kept in their hands in the new form of state power (Foucault 2011: 167), although this new organization of political power is not simply dictated and repressive (Foucault 2011: 171).

Aristocratic Critique of the Cult and the Power of Self-Control

The relationship between religion and power in the context of the city-state is not describable in terms of domination, but as ritual exercises to which people willingly subject themselves. These certain techniques of governing become definable by the concept of *governmentality* (Foucault 2007: 118). In "Technologies of the Self," Foucault defines governmentality as the intersection of techniques that are used in governing others and techniques through which one governs oneself (Foucault 1997: 225). In the lecture series *Security, Territory, Population* from 1977–78, Foucault systematically studies the history of governing and associates the concept with "guidence of behaviour and individual will" instead of commanding and forcing (Foucault 2007: 116). Governing in this sense includes nurturing, care and diet, benevolent instructions of bodily conduct and prescriptions, but also daily interaction and processes of exchange between individuals (Foucault 2007: 122). Foucault points out that in religious and pedagogical communities, people carry out certain arts of governing which are not explicitly defined as rules and regulations (Foucault 2007).

In the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, Greece, and particularly within Orphism—which combined the purgatory aspect of worshiping Apollo with Dionysian mysteries—intensified inscriptions revolving around purification, for instance through alimentation (Lawrence 2006). Orphism emerged from the Dionysian orgy, but turned its ritualism into renunciation (Lawrence 2006; Detienne 1987: 111).[14] Compliance concerning purity and impurity does not concern as much purity of the body as the purity of the soul and the purity of the whole community (Foucault 2011: 168–69). Hence, the intensification of ritual prescriptions also sets a certain social pressure on the individual: the religious qualification of the individual is dependent on how rigorously and accurately the prescriptions are performed (Foucault 2011: 168).

At this point I will depart from Foucault and take a look at the normative role of the Dionysian rites in Plato's *Laws*. Behavior associated with Dionysiac cults is not promoted in *Laws*, because the orgy would be an access to truth. Instead, certain methods are recommended because they support the educational aims and organization of the city state. Dionysus is perhaps not god of the city-state, but is a foreigner. We must reconsider, however, what is actually meant by "an official status." The cult had no located headquarters. It included a secretive initiation rite performed by women withdrawn to the mountains (Seaford 2006), but also had a highly strong cultural status with communal festivities and daily behavior. This also complicates the distinction and sharp opposition between popular and official religions.

It is interesting that Plato, whose political vision is based on strict self-moderation (*sōfrosynē*) in the *Republic*, takes a positive stance on the mystery cult: *The Symposium* turns into a bacchanal of aristocratic men, and there is a discussion in Plato's *Laws* about the benefits of participating in drinking parties, associated with Dionysus. Moreover, it is even a duty of each citizen to participate in certain rituals. Plato's main character named "the Athenian" argues in favor of wine-drinking and charming oneself into mysteries:

> That it is the duty of every man and child—bond and free, male and female,—and the duty of the whole State, to charm themselves unceasingly with the chants we have described, constantly changing them and securing variety in every way possible, so as to inspire the singers with an insatiable appetite for the hymns and with pleasure therein (*Laws*: 665c).

[14] Detienne's *Les dieux d'Orphee* and *Dionysos mis à mort* operate on the opposition between state and society—official religion, with its programmed citizens, and cultic groups (Detienne 1997). However, these divisions are stirred by the framework of governmentality.

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Plato encourages everyone to sing to Dionysus, but he does not promote going overboard or losing oneself—he promotes exercising self-moderation which is exactly opposite to Foucault's Nietzschean objectives regarding Dionysus. Plato writes that the young souls inflame easily, but for old men it is not only tolerated but recommended to join the choir. For old men, the choir is a medicine against becoming too stubborn and mentally inflexible to new political regulations (*Laws*: 665b; 666b–c).[15]

Plato is not, however, equally welcoming to all the rites involved in worshiping Dionysus, and he makes a clear distinction between approved and non-approved behavior. The latter especially concerns women. In the *Bacchae* it is a matter of constant anxiety that women are outside of *oikos*, the household. The worry is that they would let Dionysus, a passing foreigner (*xenos*) to take over their bodies. Keeping women busy with petty weaving duties also keeps them under control and out of power (*Bac*: 785). Plato clearly disapproves of the honey-drinking orgy Euripides describes. In frenzy, women are a reversal of the desired order, beasts that would kill their children and tear living things limb by limb with their own hands and teeth (Seaford 2006). Plato considers also that orgiastic dancing to Dionysius is not appropriate. Dancing itself is recommended if it is in line with military training or harmonious, circular movements of the rational, celestial order (*Laws*: 665a), but if dancing is associated with intolerable purification rites performed by women, it is highly questionable (Seaford 2006: 57).

> So, in the first place, we must draw a line between questionable dancing and dancing that is above question. All the dancing that is of a Bacchic kind and cultivated by those who indulge in drunken imitations of Pans, Sileni and Satyrs (as they call them), when performing certain rites of expiation and initiation—all this class of dancing cannot easily be defined either as pacific or as warlike, or as of any one distinct kind. The most correct way of defining it seems to me to be this—to separate it off both from pacific and from warlike dancing, and to pronounce that this kind of dancing is unfitted for our citizens (*Laws*: 815c-d).

It is therefore advisable to educate oneself by rhythm, and enjoy it as it is education through which the *nomoi*, desired order and division of labour are preserved. However, it would not be acceptable to the order of the polis to have an ecstatic ritual, to dance oneself into a trance and so break

[15] Plato writes, "[W]hen a man has reached the age of forty, he may join in the convivial gatherings and invoke Dionysus, above all other gods, inviting his presence at the rite (which is also the recreation) of the elders, which he bestowed on mankind as a medicine potent against the crabbedness of old age, that thereby we men may renew our youth, and that, through forgetfulness of care, the temper of our souls may lose its hardness and become softer and more ductile" (Laws: 666b-c).

out from the sphere to which one belongs. These examples show a double standard in recommending or prohibiting certain rites: they indicate an attempt to deploy certain forms of worship in regulating behavior and interaction.

Conclusions

Foucault attaches the improved status of the cult of Dionysus to other changes in the society, such as publicly recognized laws and organization of "good governance." These changes are associated with new a conception of truth. Plato's philosophy aims at recognizing appearances, *simulacra*, to be able to exclude them. Foucault's point is, however, that ancient popular religions, law, and money should still be seen as *simulacra* that contain an applicable inner force. In this sense the cult of Dionysus takes the force in its own hands, enabling equal access to gods, to the truth, pleasure and associated pain regardless of the pre-established hierarchies. The rites release from the ordinary and provide the possibility to detach from predetermined social distinctions and systems of exclusion. Participating in the rites is communal and personal at the same time: trance is individually experienced, but is performed as a unity. However, the strengthened status of the cult does not simply indicate emancipation, but overall institutionalized process of individualization. In the city-state system people are governed and govern themselves through new forms of power in which individual and communal purifying techniques intersect. This is seen in the aristocratic critique of the cult: I pointed out through Plato's *Laws* that singing to Dionysus advances regulatory power and self-control. It makes people's minds adaptable and obedient to laws. Erratic dancing of women is not, however, recommended by Plato—instead, it is seen as a threat to the order of the city state. In Foucault's thought, the intensification of individualistic ritual prescriptions and the conception of purity and impurity are roughly located in the same era with the definition of the individual in the legal system and new forms of power.

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