

# An Interpretation of Brave New World from Foucault's Theory of Power and Discourse

Liang Chen

King's College London, London, EC1V7AF, England

**Abstract:** *The British novelist Aldous Huxley's Brave New World is regarded as one of the three major dystopian science fiction novels of the 20th century. The novel describes a future World State where the world is superficially rich, but, the rulers have gutted the spiritual world. Brave New World is not only Huxley's satire and critique of reality but also a reflection and a warning about the future world. Taking Foucault's power discourse theory as the theoretical framework, this thesis explores how power operates in Brave New World; by analyzing the construction process of the "beauty": through technological manipulation and ideological manipulation, people are deprived of discourse. It aims to reveal that the nature of the ruler is numbness, bondage and manipulation, disregarding individuality and freedom. At the same time, under the oppression of mighty power discourse in the World State, the awakening of a few individuals occur. Thus, based on the inseparable relationship between power and discourse, the analysis provided here will end with some conclusions on the meaning and ways in which individuals from the "marginalized group" of society, represented by John, resist the totalitarian domination of the power and discourse. This thesis employs close reading to provide readers with a new angle on this novel and to further understand power control in the World State and the identity crisis of some main characters. This analysis aims to stimulate discussion and thinking over modern people's self-existence, self-awareness and the understanding of future human development.*

**Keywords:** *foucault; power and discourse; resistance*

## 1. Introduction

This paper uses Foucault's theory of power and discourse to explore the issue of power in Brave New World and the possibility of minority resistance to totalitarian repression from the perspective of marginalised groups.

## 2. Totalitarian Manipulation of Power Discourse in Brave New World

As Foucault claimed, the most obvious but most difficult to recognize in the various ways of power operation is discourse. In the World State, to gain much power to manipulate the people, the rulers of Brave New World use the means of high techs, such as controlling population with "Bokanovsky's Process" and holding instinct with "Conditioning." By doing these, the rulers will regulate people's bodies and behaviors and make people believe in the "beauty" of the new world.

### 2.1 Population Control: "Bokanovsky's Process"

Bokanovsky's Process is a process that Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre create to produce children by machines. This Process aims to achieve the World State's motto: community, identity, and stability. Bokanovskification consists of a series of arrests of development. There are some steps such as X-rays, chilling, and alcohol to obstacle the development of the buds. Besides, experiencing such a Process, all men and women are standard, being the products of the small factory. As Mr. Foster said, "fertility is merely a nuisance" [1]. What's more, during this Process, the Social Predestination Room is also used to name and identify every embryo. Heat conditioning, which is decanted to the embryos, in order to make some of them have a horror of cold. As a result, after the lower class people grow up, they will love the job of silk spinners or steel worker as they thrive on heat.

Actually, the nature of this Process is the controllers' mighty power discourse. Such a practice would have been of great benefit to the rulers. Firstly, the fact that the majority of women are incapacitated would have reduced the inconsistency in the size and number of embryos. The ruler could

control the size of the population by placing it according to the needs of the state. Secondly, as the Bokanovsky Process used intervention to prevent the natural development of embryos, thus producing large numbers of twins, it means that there would be many people produced from the production line who would have the same appearance, feeling, and ability. And labeled after the “heat conditioning,” they could be good “puppets” for the rulers. As Foucault said: “a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit” [2]. Thirdly, the fact that human beings are no longer conceived in the mother’s womb but produced by mass machines means that tens of thousands of children will be born without parents, a term that is stigmatized and despised in the new world. Without parents, the education and upbringing of children would be entirely dependent on the birth-centered approach to education. This provides the prerequisites for the intellectual indoctrination of the rulers. This will also eliminate the possibility of rebellion. The world will be harmonious and unified. For the individual, there is no such optimism. They are destined for life from the time they are fertilized, with no sense of resistance, only obedience. Sadly, after the heat of nurture, they even think they are happy in what they do. People revel in this predetermined destiny, no longer suffering and at the same time having no voice, always being manipulated. It is difficult for them to realize that they are suffering from the cruel oppression brought to them by the power discourse of the rulers so that they always believe in the “beautiful” veil woven by the rulers and cannot see the true face of the World State.

## 2.2 Instinct Control: “Conditioning”

To control the population is not enough. To hold people’s instincts is the ruler’s primary purpose. As a result, people will be aware of social class from an early age and even feel satisfied with their social status. The instinct control contains heat conditioning, neo-pavlovian conditioning, hypnopædia, and death conditioning. The first two relate to work and knowledge; hypnopædia is about social class education, while the last one is about the attitude toward death.

“Heat conditioning” has two sides of meaning. The first one is that it makes some groups of people love the high temperature. The embryos who had a horror of cold were predestined to emigrate to the tropics, to be miners and acetate silk spinners and steel workers. The other meaning of “heat” is love or like. The lower class people don’t complain and don’t want to change. Over time, generation after generation, they no longer have the power to resist and lose their discourse. In comparison, neo-pavlovian is a method to make people hate something from instinct. It can also be called “mild electric shock”. The process is to make the young children see books and flowers, and then there is an explosion, the bell sounds. So children will scream in extreme horror. As a result, children will have no interest in knowledge and beauty. If a man does not acquire knowledge or even abhors knowledge and all good things, he will have no mind. Listen to all the demands of the ruler. The lower classes will always be cheap labor, without the slightest thought for the status quo, the pursuit and expectation of excellence. As Foucault said, people empower themselves through discourses, “without the production, accumulation, circulation, and function of discourses, the power relations themselves cannot be established and consolidated” [3].

It is unstable to get people to react to stress by just some means above, and there will always be people who respond in other ways. Hypnopædia would then undoubtedly add a layer of security to the management of the ruling class, as it would change the class consciousness of people. This can also be called Elementary Class Consciousness. There is a sound of light, regular breathing, and a continuous murmur, as of very faint voices remotely whispering. The whispers are something like, “Delta Children wear khaki. Oh no, I don’t want to play with Delta children. And Epsilons are still worse. They’re too stupid to be able to read or write. Besides, they wear black, which is such a beastly color. I’m so glad I’m a Beta.” [1] All these words have no reason. They are just like ethics education. If these sentences are repeated thousands of times, children can remember them when they grow up. They can then clearly remember that different races of people wear different colors, that Delta and Epsilon are inferior, and that Alpha and Beta shouldn’t play with them. This class memory, formed from early childhood, will remain.

Another conditioning is death conditioning. In the World State, all the people can live sixty years without growing old. This means people’s mindsets and emotions do not change. Keeping happy will be a significant factor in maintaining social stability. Besides, boys and girls go to the hospital to see the dying twice a week. And when someone dies, the children will get rewarded. The recyclable rate of the dead body exceeded 98%, which can continue to be used by society and promote plant growth. In this way, children are accustomed to the hospital as a happy-related game place, thinking that death is a “matter of course” [4]. Meanwhile, the dialogue between Henry Foster and Lenina Crowne on the

physico-chemical equality of all men and on the contribution to society after death is actually Huxley's transmission from Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" into Fordian society. The irony is that people are deprived of their own freedom even after death and are uniformly arranged for the rulers to make phosphorus pentoxide gas to promote plant growth and contribute to society [5]. From this education, it can be seen that humankind has lost the right to speak of grief and weeping.

Whether it is Bokanovsky's Process or various conditionings, these are all means of manipulating the World State. Every step from birth to death is carefully orchestrated to deprive people of the ability to control their bodies and then brainwash them so that they are completely defenceless.

### 3. The Manipulation of Ideology in the New World

To make the people believe in the happiness of the World State, the rulers use a variety of discourse practices to shape the ideology of citizens, including education emotion and ethic. For education, citizens must obey the motto of "Community, Identity, Stability" of the World State. To manipulate residents' emotion, people are provided to eat "soma" frequently to avoid real life.

#### 3.1 Educational Control: "Community, Identity, Stability"

As Foucault said, "Ideology plays a positive and even decisive role in the political and social roles" [6]. Only by firmly controlling people's minds can the ruler grasp the ultimate power of human discourse. The motto "Community, Identity, Stability" is an example of the ruler controlling people's values.

The "community" means "every one belongs to everyone else." As there is no mother and father in the new world, every man and woman relies on other people even though they do not belong to the same class. For example, Lenina told Fanny that sometimes she hadn't been feeling very keen on promiscuity lately. Fanny said, "But one's got to make an effort, one's got to play the game. After all, every one belongs to everyone else" [1]. This means that all the female's bodies do not belong to themselves. Instead, it belongs to everyone else. In today's world, if a woman has some sexual relationship with many people, people will regard her as misbehaving and consider that she does not cherish herself. However, there is no "self" in the new world" but "everyone." It is one's duty to give your body for the entertainment of others. Releasing sexual desires is a way of maintaining social stability. Because this will make people feel happy enough and kill their time. As a result, they will have no time to think about the regulations, work, and other unfair things, being satisfied.

Such an assertion is based on Foucault's work on the relationship between power and sexuality. As Foucault said, "The multiplication of sexual acts brings the power effect to the extreme, and every - specific sexual act shows this interference of power" [6]. The country encourages people to talk about sex, to do sex. And if even the country gets the secret about everyone's sex, what else does the government not know? All people are transparent in the eyes of the ruler. When people have no secrets, they are at the mercy of others, no power discourse.

In the new world, people are not only limited to their established social identity, they also have a common identity as "consumers". In order to achieve sustained economic prosperity, the rulers use various means to promote consumption. One of the most effective ways of practicing this is to educate people to love consumption consciously. Firstly, by constantly promoting the evils of the family, the inhabitants begin to resent the attachment to objects that intimate relationships consisted of. Secondly, the rulers kept instilling a new view of consumption as "Ending is better than mending" [1]. Gradually, people will live in a "throw-away" society, where they do not have the sense to mend and repair broken objects, but rather to buy and replace them. Thus, people's lives will be entirely dependent on the production of the state. The end result is not only a more prosperous and stable state, but also a greater control by the rulers over the perceptions of the people.

As Foucault said, "Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse" [3]. So in a certain of degree, education is a tool to unify people for the purpose of stability, which makes the citizens obey the maxims of the World State.

#### 3.2 Emotional Control: "Soma"

In this new world, "soma" is used as a medicine to cure all the sadness and bad emotion. After drinking soma, universal benevolence broke out on every face in happy, friendly smiles. As a result,

people will never solve any problems by themselves because when they feel annoyed, they can drink soma and then enjoy the happy time for hours. When they wake up, they may forget all the unsatisfying things. So the society will become stable, and the controllers can decide things in whatever way they want as the people are immersed in their world, having no passion for any issues. In the long run, people will lose the discourse and the power.

#### **4. Consequences of Totalitarian Power Discourse on People**

The power discourse has been enhanced through physical and ideological manipulation in this new world. This kind of control has two sides of influence: the first one is totalitarian obedience, and the other is resistance.

##### **4.1 Obedience to Totalitarian Power Discourse**

According to Foucault, the concept of “body” is repeatedly mentioned as the object and goal of power, which “is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skillful and increases its forces” [7]. The purpose of the ruler’s control is to create docile bodies. In fact, due to the different identities of different types of people in society, they behave differently. Besides, people are not allowed to read forbidden books such as Shakespeare’s works. The goal of discipline is to make the body “more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies” [7].

The first mean of obedience are docile bodies. This group of people consist both the top classed of the society: Alpha and Beta and the lower class: Epsilon. Or instance, Thomas, the Director of Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre, is an Alpha. And he always made a point of conducting his new students around the various departments in order to show how the world is controlled, which is the process of showing students the generation mechanism of authoritative discourse [4]. Beta is a caste that always appears as a woman, such as Lenina, Fanny, and Linda. They are used as a shared sexual body. Having a sexual relationship with different men is their responsibility. As the lower groups in the World State, Gamma, Delta, and Epsilon are considered abnormal human beings because they are mass-produced according to the rulers’ standard through the Bokanovsky’s Process and appear identical twins.

According to Foucault, knowledge is something related to power. “There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any power-knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute the power relation at the same time” [4]. As a result, the controller often uses the so-called knowledge to manipulate human thought. In Brave New World, the ruler erases the function of knowledge. So people will never get spiritual satisfaction.

This was manifested in the rulers’ ban on old books. Just as Controller Mustapha Mond said, “our world is not the same as Othello’s world.” There is no resistance and war in today’s world. And people don’t need to think of danger in times of safety. People should not love beautiful things as these will arise their deep feeling and aspiration for something unstable. According to the controller:

Actual happiness always looks pretty squalid in comparison with the overcompensations for misery. And, of course, stability isn’t nearly so spectacular as instability. And being contented has none of the glamour of a good fight against misfortune, none of the picturesqueness of a struggle with temptation, or a fatal overthrow by passion or doubt. Happiness is never grand [1].

Once people read books about the wonders of freedom in the spiritual world, they will abandon their present stable lives searching for unstable excitement, posing a significant threat to the rulers, like John. He had a strong desire for freedom because he was obsessed with Shakespeare’s works. Besides, if people indulge in reading, they will spend more time on these low efficient things, and productivity will decrease. So through the mild electric shock, people will hate flowers and books. In the long run, they instinctively lose their desire for beautiful things.

##### **4.2 Resistance of Subject to Power Discourse**

Foucault argues that “where there is power, there is resistance” [1]. Although some people become docile bodies under manipulation, a small group still aspire for freedom in the spirit. Compared with those who think happiness is the only feeling human should have, this group of people believe that

loneliness is also a wonderful experience. They have part of self-cautiousness, and if they are encouraged by someone, they will be aroused. This kind of quality is apparent in Bernard, Helmholtz, and John in this novel.

Bernard belongs to the top Alpha, but he is different from others. Unlike the tall and robust Alpha, Bernard is small in stature. For this reason, it is often suspected that his blood is laced with alcohol and he is not pure Alpha. His self-consciousness is acute and distressing. Each time he looks on the level, instead of downward into a Delta's face, he feels humiliated. But this physical handicap has given him a sensitivity and sentimentality beyond the ordinary. Because he is often not looked up to, he has a lot of time to himself, which provides him with the opportunity to enjoy thinking. He refuses to drink soma which will erase his confusing things. Instead, he tries to talk with Helmholtz. Apart from that, he loves Lenina deeply. This shows his resistance to the principle of "community". He could not bear to hear Lenina regarding herself as meat. His different understanding of this world sometimes disturbs him. At last, under John's influence, he chooses to fight against the people who paralyze them.

Compared with Bernard, Mr. Helmholtz Watson is a standard Alpha. "He was a powerfully built man, deep-chested, broad-shouldered, massive, yet quick in his movements, springy and agile"<sup>[1]</sup>. He is not satisfied with his noble identity. He seeks beautiful and sorrowful things. For example, his job is as a lecturer at the College of Emotional Engineering. Once, he wants to do a bit of propaganda and try to engineer them into feeling as he had felt when writing the rhymes. So he writes a verse that is about loneliness. After that, he is fired because he breaks the rule of sleep-teaching. At last, his pursuit for true emotion is encouraged by John, throwing the poison out by handfuls through the open window to set people free.

According to Foucault, discourse is power. If someone has self-awareness, they will try to regain this power because they will be aware that power discourse is more important than physical power. The awakening of Bernard and Helmholtz's self-consciousness expresses their resistance to the power discourse of the rulers but also makes them see the true face of the World State.

#### ***4.3 "Marginalized Group": John's Rejection of Temptation and Soma***

The resistance of the subject to the power discourse of the World State comes not only from the internal residents, but also from the outsider, the Savage. John is the only Savage that has such self-awareness. And this kind of quality is not only from the atmosphere he is born in, his mother's education, but also Shakespeare's influence.

He is born in Malpais. His father is the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning, and his mother is Linda, a Beta, working in the Fertilizing Room. His father has flown away, back to the Other Place, away without her. John is a fetus in the Savage. It comes to be that he is intelligent but with dependent thoughts. After he meets Bernard and Lenina, he and his mother are taken back to the new world for some research. From the time he reads the old book from Shakespeare, he awakens with self-awareness.

Bernard organizes a meeting in the new world, where John will meet many people. However, after all the people are gathered, the savage refuses to see them, showing extreme resistance. "Ai yaa tákwa!" In Zuni, the Savage could adequately express what he felt about the Arch-Community-Songster. "Háni!" he added as an afterthought<sup>[1]</sup>.

This reflection shows that he is not willing to follow other people's orders. He is pursuing the right to be alone. So he never opens the door and gives no reason.

Besides, under the influence of the works of Shakespeare, he regards sex as a very holy thing. So when Lenina watches Feelies and is excited about it, he feels it is base and ignoble. And when Lenina wants to have a sexual relationship with him and even takes off her clothes, he feels surprised and even crazy about that behavior even though he loves Lenina. This behavior violates his principle and understanding of love. He follows the words of Shakespeare: "If thou dost break her virgin knot before all sanctimonious ceremonies may with full and holy rite ..."<sup>[1]</sup>.

He believes that if he loves someone, they will get married, and it is a serious thing to always. So, when Lenina repeatedly seduces him, he feels fear and anger instead of indulging because such behavior completely stain his love. "Whore!" he shouted. "Whore! Impudent strumpet!"<sup>[1]</sup>

His resistance to the control of discourse is most evident in the opposition to "soma". However, unlike Bernard and Helmholtz, he does not let other Alphas take. His mother, Linda, died of an overdose of Soma. He is fighting not only for her fate but for all those who have lost their discourse

power through the use of Soma. “Yes, men! men!” and there was no more poison left. He picked up the cash-box and showed them its black emptiness. “You’re free!” [1] He awakes that the ruler uses Soma to keep people in control. So throwing them out is vital to set free from the manipulation.

John’s rebellion is in line with Foucault’s conception of the role of the “marginalized group”: a small group of people on the margins of society who want to have a voice. But John’s rebellion fails for several reasons: firstly, the mainstream values do not intend to accept John’s values, which means that the conflict between them is irreconcilable. Secondly, John’s rebellion is feeble, or to be precise, it is a rebellion of its own. It does not form a certain number of groups that have a particular influence on society. So he ends up being the laughing stock of the mainstream. Thirdly, John only uses Shakespeare’s works to rebel. He does not have a deep sense of the meaning of rebellion or a sense of solidarity with some people to join him in his rebellion. He only defends his right to spiritual freedom and he does not have his own set of theoretical ideas adapted to the new era to refute the rulers but merely borrows literary quotations from Shakespeare, which the rulers have read and considered obsolete. Therefore, John’s rebellion is doomed to failure, unable to influence the dominant ideology and he has to hide it carefully. In the end, he chooses his hermitage, the old lighthouse which stands on the crest of the hill between Puttenham and Elstead.

## 5. Conclusion

The formulation of power and discourse formally stems from Foucault’s concern for the realities of social life, explicating the freedom of capitalism, truth, and concern for the power of the underclass or marginalised people. In his ideas, Foucault is firmly opposed to political hegemony and discursive hegemony, insisting that the ability to choose freedom is determined by the people. In this novel, Huxley also shows that such problems exist in a seemingly good society. It is imperative that the state and the individual pay close attention to these issues from their respective perspectives to address them as soon as they arise through power relations. At the same time, society must pay attention to the lives and voices of the underclass and marginalised groups to help them satisfy their needs to the best possible extent while facing them on an equal footing, not on the basis of class or hierarchy.

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