

# The University of the Philippines Center for West Visayan Studies (UP CWVS): A Foucauldian Exhibitionary Complex

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**Abstract.** This paper looks at the University of the Philippines Center for West Visayan Studies (CWVS) as an exhibitionary complex that employs techniques of display and exercises the power to represent. Following the Foucauldian framework, the paper aims to present the CWVS not only as a structure of knowledge but also as an articulator of the power/knowledge relations in the production of discourse related to West Visayan culture and history. Using discourse analysis of secondary data such as the CWVS publications and annual reports, this paper uncovers the CWVS' power to define what constitutes local culture and knowledge. The resulting discourse renegotiates the limits of the CWVS' power and knowledge as an institution.

**Keywords:** West Visayan studies, Exhibitionary complex, Techniques of display, Power/Knowledge relations, Foucault.

## 1. Introduction

In the early 1970's, the Dean of the UP College Iloilo Dionisia Rola worked for the establishment of the Center for Visayan studies. With the approval from the UP Board of Regents on 26 June 1975, the Visayan Studies Program (VSP) was created as a "response to the need for a concerted effort to preserve and disseminate information about the rich cultural and historical legacy of the region" (Pamphlet of the CWVS, nd, 2 as cited in Jover 1998, 26). Prof. Lourdes V. De Castro was officially designated as Coordinator of the Program on 16 October 1975, while Dr. Moises Ponteras took charge in 1981 until 1983. (Ang Pagkitan, Vol. V. No.2, June 1988, 3). However, it was Dr. Henry Funtecha who was able to work for the elevation of the VSP into a Center in 1988, becoming its first Director after three consecutive term as Coordinator. His direction led to a great increase in the collection of research materials which worked well with the growing importance of the VSP as a pioneer in West Visayas research. VSP officially turned into the West Visayan Studies Center (WVSC) via the 1016<sup>th</sup> BOR approval in 1988 but it remained under the College of Arts and Sciences. (Ang Pagkitan Volume V Number 4, 1988, 1) On 29 June 1989, WVSC replaced its name to what is now known as the Center for Visayan Studies (CWVS) so as not to confuse it with the West Visayas State College.

Many studies including this one have been inspired by contemporary views on culture as a "multiple discourse, a structure of relations, and a system of symbols" (Dirks, et.al. 1994, 3-4). This paper presents the Foucauldian perspective with the Center for West Visayan Studies (CWVS) as an example of exhibitionary complex that articulates power/knowledge structure in the production of discourses related to West Visayan culture and history. This is substantiated by the CWVS' exercise of institutional power and its underlying and explicit advocacy. The main source of data for the Foucauldian analysis in this paper is derived from the CWVS published newsletter, *Ang Pagkitan*, as well as the *Palayag* Proceedings of the Conference on West Visayan History and Culture. Another source of data is the Annual Report of the CWVS Director to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, which reveal the history, perspective and activities of the CWVS, including seminars and researches organized.

The paper proceeds by briefly introducing the philosophy of Michel Foucault and its relevance to the study at hand. Then it highlights the elements of a Foucauldian exhibitionary complex by looking at the

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CWVS as an articulation of power/knowledge relations. Finally, the paper looks at the CWVS' techniques of display and ways of moving within the discursive field (related to Western Visayas culture and history) in order to "open up spaces" from which further maneuvering is possible.

## **2. The Relevance of Foucault in the Study of Discursive Practices**

Rabinow (1984) presents Foucault's work according to four areas: the problem of the subject, the problem of power/knowledge, the problem of government and the locating of the author. In this paper, we see these Foucauldian interests lingering in processes involving the CWVS, particularly on the articulation of power and its relation to the reproduction of knowledge in a power/knowledge dynamics, its manner of ordering as a kind of government, and its significance to the society and to itself as an institution. What we excavate in this endeavor is a subjugated knowledge that investigates the more active character of the CWVS as a non-neutral institution that promotes a particular knowledge, as well as some matters of ethics and normalization.

Foucault redefines the concept of power from its old notion of being "an organ of repression" which must be recovered and used for a more justified oppression. He referred to this old system as the "juridical schema" where power is seen as "an original right" provided by a social contract. To go beyond the limits of the contract is regarded as oppression, thus renders that power illegitimate. Foucault introduces a view of power that is productive in engendering knowledge that allows the further circulation of power. He clarifies further:

"The 'how' of power, its dynamics within and among forces, can be seen in the mechanism of the power/knowledge relation. In a society such as ours... there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize, and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated, or implemented without the production, accumulation and circulation and functioning of a discourse" (Foucault 1980, 92-93).

Foucault gives us the three domains of his genealogical interpretation – how we constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge, how we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others, and how we constitute ourselves as moral agents. "So, three axes are possible... truth axis, power axis and the ethical axis" (Foucault 1984, 352).

Foucault himself described his works as "fragmentary researches, inconclusive, did not have a predetermined starting point and destination what emerges out of this is something one might call a genealogy... a painstaking discovery of struggles together with the rude memory of their conflicts" (Foucault 1980, 79-83). In *Power/Knowledge* (1980), this archeological enterprise was aimed at "confronting the present actuality...questioning and understanding the fluctuating possibilities, the necessary or contingent historical limits of intellectual discourse" (Foucault 1980, viii). Institutional studies like this paper on the CWVS employs this so-called "deconstruction" asking the relevant questions "What sort of exercise does it involve? In what does it consist? What is its mechanism?" (Foucault 1980, 89) We discover a different way of seeing and knowing the truth. "The center of initiative, organization, and control for this politics should not be located only in the apparatuses of the state." (Foucault 1984, 274)

## **3. UPV CWVS As A Foucauldian Exhibitionary Complex**

An exhibitionary complex refers to an "institution involved in the transfer of objects and bodies from the enclosed and private domains in which they had previously been displayed (but to a restricted public) into progressively more open and public areas where, through the representations to which they were subjected, they formed vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting the messages of power throughout the society" (Bennett in Dirks, et.al. 1994). Using Foucauldian discourse analysis, this paper investigates "a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" (Foucault 1980, 133). It allocates the mark of truth as "a specific linguistic materiality which is institutionalized as a manner of expression in society" (Schottler 1997, 87). In short, what is perceived to be relevant to the study of Western Visayas culture and history is a product of a well-ordered labeling. Foremost in this interest in the circulation and operation of statements is the dynamics of power/knowledge relations. Power/knowledge

relations pertain to how the “exercise of power itself creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge and accumulates new bodies of information” (Foucault 1980, 51). This new accumulation redefines the limits of power, legitimizing its new exercise and brings the newly negotiated forms of power to further limits. Knowledge reproduces power as power generates knowledge.

The CWVS thrust “to promote a deeper knowledge of Philippine society and culture” through interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach (Andrada 1998, 1) combines a dual mission of research and education by collecting materials from the multiple places of the scattered private and presenting them as authenticated material (representations of the West Visayan traditions) made open and accessible to the public visitors. As seen in its various activities including the annual conference, CWVS attempts to render West Visayan history and culture visible, and therefore knowable as a totality. This imagery of a visible totality is maintained by the ability to command, control, order objects and bodies into a display of exhibits. The control of individual bodies is an important consequence of the exercise of power. The term “control” does not refer to outright physical coercion but taken in the sense of “molding individual perspectives into either supportive or alternative visions of the particular institution” (Jover 1998, 15; March and Olsen 1989, 145).

From its scanty beginnings, the CWVS as an institution of exhibitionary complex was able to increase its collections in the manner of transferring objects and bodies from the enclosed and private domains to a more open public arena:

“Encouraged by a significant increase in its budget for 1987, the VSP engaged in a rigorous campaign to collect materials pertaining to Visayan history and culture visiting different municipalities of Western Visayas, contacting individuals and institutions that could take part in such undertaking.” (“VSP Intensifies Drive to Collect Materials” *Ang Pagkitan* Volume IV No. 3, 1)

The technologies of objectification target the human body that they “may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault 1979, 198). A new regime of power takes hold – the bio-power “in a factory, the procedure facilitates productivity; in school, it assures orderly behavior; in a town, it reduces the risk of dangerous crowds, wandering vagabonds or epidemic diseases” (Foucault 1984, 17). Foucault’s notion of the disciplinary technology applies in the case of the CWVS. The rhetoric of power embodied in the CWVS as an exhibitionary complex is manifested not in its ability to coerce or to inflict pain but by its ability to organize an order of objects that produces an imagery for the people to look at themselves in relation to that order. There is a dynamics of bio-power. In doing so, we observe that the CWVS is not only built to see or to be seen but much like the centralizing power of the Panopticon (a form of architecture denoting a central tower in a ring-shaped complex such as prisons), it actually operates to transform individuals and to provide a hold on their conduct: to be proud of West Visayan achievements, to contribute in this collective image, to be active vehicles in propagating the messages of power.

A contextual logic dictates the arrangement of objects in the CWVS display collection. There is proper placement of the collections defining what is appropriate in the hallway and what should be in the library. It has rationally subdivided the area to accommodate an office space, display corridor, and a library of its own despite being a few meters away from the campus library also housed within the same building. The CWVS itself is located at the very center of the UPV Iloilo City Campus, which is at the convenient location in Iloilo City. Its location is convenient enough to be reached by local and outside-based researchers and enthusiasts.

Like other cultural institutions such as the museum, the CWVS does not impose its presence but is actually “generally accepted by society to promote and preserve cultural traditions” (March and Olsen 1989, 118). In its public display of objects, a certain level of progress or technological innovation of the community is being represented (*Ang Pagkitan* Volume I Number 2, December 1984). Bennett argues that through these innovations, material form and function are introduced into the minds and senses of the visiting public (Bennett 1994, 136) which they, in turn, internalize as a demonstration of a certain idea of growth and development. For instance, the arrangement of objects into a chronological succession of events suggests a notion of linear progress in technological development. Some objects on display tend to embody the past traditions and previous way of life. “The objects become material signifiers of progress.” (Bennett 1994, 130) With this organizing principle, the CWVS is able to create a sense of being for the people, with

them transforming the rhetorical representation of progress as a collective achievement – a formation of active and reflective learners that would reconstruct new objects of inquiry about Western Visayas and new targets for the disposal of disciplinary power.

#### **4. The UPV Center for West Visayan Studies (CWVS): *Manoeuvres* and Techniques**

Foucault argues that “in order for a certain relation of forces to maintain, accentuate, stabilize and broaden itself, a certain kind of *manoeuvre* is necessary” (Foucault 1980, 206). This maneuver can be seen in techniques “to evolve, organize and put into circulation a knowledge” (Foucault 1980, 102) that is culturally and economically useful. To illustrate, the CWVS broadened its function to cater to the larger aspect of Western Visayas. Seminars, annual lectures and workshops were conducted, and cultural activities were launched through its performing arm Teatro Amakan. Collections of folklore materials from students of the Division of Humanities were made and were documented, authenticated, and utilized as baseline data for researches on other fields related to regional culture including topics about gender, environment, and ethnicity (Ang Pagkitan Volume IV Number 4, December 1987). A large emphasis, however, was focused on history and culture because of the “relative availability of materials compared with multidisciplinary researches” (Andrada 1998, 2).

The CWVS regularly opens up spaces and broadens the intellectual field of exploration, thus reinforcing its legitimacy as an institution of power/knowledge. This maneuver is necessary because “there is a lack of comprehensive cultural and historical information about the country due to the fact that certain regions of the Philippine archipelago are still untapped” (Proceeding of the 1<sup>st</sup> Conference on West Visayan History and Culture, 1990, 1). Thus, the annual conference conducted by the CWVS aims to “contribute to a broader and rich knowledge and insight on Ilonggo’s history and culture; encourage local scholars to do more researches on Ilonggo history and culture; serve as a forum for scholarly interaction regarding issues on Ilonggo history and culture; and foster academic cooperation between individuals and institutions in the city and province of Iloilo” (Ang Pagkitan, Volume VI No. 4, 1989, 1). Evident in the CWVS Five-year plan since 1988 is the wide intellectual field by which it maneuvers:

“The specific objectives of the Center are to: (1) document and preserve various forms of cultural expressions in the West Visayan area; (2) undertake research and publication activities, engage in the translation of documents, scholarly works, etc.; (3) disseminate information on West Visayan culture and history; (4) make accessible to interested parties cultural and historical materials; (5) foster the development of the creative and interpretative talents of West Visayan population; (6) assist in catalyzing similar efforts by individuals and institutions; and (7) establish linkages with the same.” (1992 Annual Report of the CWVS Director to the CAS Dean, part I, 3).

Maneuvering involves a skillful management and manipulation of people and situations. CWVS staff, for instance, visit different municipalities of Western Visayas “to contact individuals and institutions that could take part in the preservation, enhancement and dissemination of Visayan history, culture and arts.” (Ang Pagkitan Vol. VI No.2, 1989, 3) CWVS staff themselves, are sent to local, national and international enrichment programs in order to provide them with the recent approaches in the study of history, culture and the arts (Ang Pagkitan Vol V No. 1, 1988, 1; Volume V Number 2, June 1988). Proper acknowledgment and compensation was extended to those who participated.

The CWVS also uses the performing arts to maneuver and open up spaces in the discursive field (Ang Pagkitan Volume I Number 1, June 1984, 1). With the national recognition as a University Performing Group by the Cultural Center of the Philippines, their “Teatro Amakan has proven to be an effective vehicle for disseminating the rich cultural heritage of Western Visayas.” (Ang Pagkitan Volume II Number 2 December 1985; Volume VI Number 3, September 1989, 4) Emphasis is placed on the richness and uniqueness, as well as, relative progress achieved by the region. This regional progress is seen in the group’s sequence representation of historical development where *change* rather than *essential permanence* is highlighted.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Foucault investigates three axes of interpretation in his genealogical study of discursive practices -- the truth, power, and its ethical implications (Foucault 1984, 352). Using the Foucauldian lens in investigating the CWVS as an exhibitionary complex shed light on the significance of the institution (and all other types of exhibitionary complex for that matter) into a deeper plane of exchange. However, more questions do arise. This paper does not claim to give finality to the discussion, but instead, opens up exciting areas of inquiry. Scholars interested in further studies might include the following questions as something to think about: how does CWVS constitute the subjects of knowledge, how does it act on others, and how does it relate to order and normalization as guide to moral agents.

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