

ARTICLE

Confession, Voice and the Sensualization of Power: The Significance of Michel Foucault's 1962 Encounter with Jean-Jacques Rousseau

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ABSTRACT: Michel Foucault is known for his critiques of the intertwinement of empirical knowledge, perception and experience, and power. Within this general framework, this article focuses on a fairly unnoticed text of Foucault's: his 1962 *Introduction* to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Dialogues*. The article shows that Foucault's *Introduction* is central for more than one reason: Firstly, it is apparently the first piece, in which Foucault focuses in detail on confession as an individualizing mode of power and truth-utterance. Secondly, in this text, Foucault treats confession as an empirical, sensual and affective form of power. Thirdly, in this early text, Foucault presents what can be called his critique of phonocentrism, i.e., of the interrelated centrality of voice, hearing, authenticity and "presence." We find out that Foucault elaborated this critique (from the starting point of his archaeology of knowledge), already before Jacques Derrida introduced the actual term "phonocentrism," and made it generally known. Finally, we will see that Foucault's seminal 1970s genealogies of confession, sexuality and pastoral power revisit as well as revise the earlier insights discovered in the *Introduction*.

Keywords: Michel Foucault, confession, sensualization of power, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, phonocentrism.

Throughout his intellectual history, Michel Foucault came back to the criticism of empirical or sensual regimes of knowledge and power. This criticism is also the general framework of this article. However, I wish to focus on one particular text of Foucault's that has been passed over in general, and in particular has not been treated from the perspective of the senses and sensual-empirical power. The piece in question is Foucault's *Introduction*, published in 1962, for the *Bibliothèque de Cluny* edition of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Dialogues* (*Rousseau Judge of Jean-Jacques*). In what follows, I argue that the *Introduction* is a significant text in more than one respect, and thus one that deserves much more notice than it has received so far.¹

¹ There are certain commentaries that have noted the *Introduction*, albeit not from the perspective of this essay. See Timothy M. Scanlan, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Silence," *Modern Language Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2 (Autumn 1977), 59-76; Huck Gutman, "Rousseau's Confessions: A Technology of the Self," in Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton and Luther H. Martin (eds.), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 99-120; Annie Tardits, "Partage, séparation, aliénation,"

Firstly, I intend to show that the *Introduction* is important in its status as the first text in which Foucault provides a detailed treatment of confession as a regime of interrelated truth, knowledge, and power over the singular or unique self. As we know, it is later, in his work of the 1970s that Foucault devoted some of his most seminal genealogical analyses to this issue.

Secondly, I will emphasize that the *Introduction* is also central when we approach it from the perspective of the senses and perception. As we will see, Foucault already offers us in this early text an account of confession as a regime in which *voice and hearing* constitute the central vehicles of truth, knowledge, and power. It is an early instance of Foucault applying the “tools” of his critical thinking to sensual power, which is *auditory-sonorous-vocal* in character.²

Thirdly, I suggest that there is a still more general pertinence to the *Introduction* that ranges beyond Foucault scholarship in the limited sense. As we know, in the late 1960s Jacques Derrida set out to deconstruct, on the basis of his reading of Rousseau, the primacy of voice and hearing—what he calls *phonocentrism*—as an overarching structure in the “metaphysics of presence,” which has (supposedly) dominated the history of Western philosophy and also Occidental culture more generally speaking. The common account is that Derrida inaugurated the line of critique targeting the privileging of voice as the medium of “truth” understood as “presence” in the metaphysical tradition of philosophy. Yet, my intention is to show that by examining Foucault’s relatively neglected piece, we find that he was also developing in the same period, from his own archaeological perspective, a critique of a regime of “authenticity” and “truth” determined as “presence,” and organized around the center provided by voice and hearing. This is what shall be called Foucault’s critique of phonocentrism, notwithstanding the fact that he does not use the actual term in the *Introduction*. Still, as I will try to demonstrate, we find this critical insight at the very core of Foucault’s discussion of the confessional regime in his early text.

in Luce Giard (ed.), *Michel Foucault: lire l'œuvre* (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1992), 37-43; James D. Marshall, *Michel Foucault: Personal Autonomy and Education* (Dordrecht, Boston and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996); Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, “The Dynamics of Autobiography: From Anthropological Anchorage to the Intercultural Horizons,” *Mots Pluriels*, no. 23 (March 2003) <http://motspluriels.arts.uwa.edu.au/MP2303hjl.html> (accessed August 17, 2011); Simon During, *Foucault and Literature: Towards a Genealogy of Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Antoine Lilti, “The Writing of Paranoia: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Paradoxes of Celebrity,” *Representations*, vol. 103 (Summer 2008), 53-83.

² Certainly, besides the ones that are discussed in this essay, we find plenty of other instances in Foucault’s *œuvre*, where he discusses the role of voice, sound and hearing in use of power. These can be found already in his work of the 1960s. See, e.g., Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975* (Paris: Quarto/Gallimard, 2001), 585-588; cf. Foucault, *Naissance de la Clinique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005), xiv-xv, 30-31, 35-38, 168-169. Also much later, in the early 1980s, Foucault tackles the issue of auditory-sonorous-vocal power. See Foucault, *L’Herméneutique du sujet: Cours au Collège de France, 1981-1982* (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 2001), especially 229-230. On voice, sound and hearing in Foucault’s thinking, see Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), especially 14-19, 127-128; Leigh Eric Schmidt, “Hearing Loss,” in Michael Bull and Les Back (eds.), *The Auditory Culture Reader* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2003), 41-61; R. Murray Schafer, “Open Ears,” in *The Auditory Culture Reader*, 25-41; Peter Szendy, *Sur écoute: Esthétique de l’espionnage* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2007), 32-39: however, these do not discuss Foucault’s *Introduction*.

Interestingly, just like Derrida, Foucault too came to this critique of phonocentrism through his reading of Rousseau. Furthermore, we should bear in mind that Foucault's piece was already published a few years before Derrida introduced the term "phonocentrism" and made it generally known. This is an issue which, I propose, gives further relevance to Foucault's *Introduction*, not only for our understanding of his thinking, but, even more extensively, for our understanding of how the criticism of phonocentrism developed in post-World War II francophone philosophy.

The second part of the article aims to locate the key insights of the *Introduction* in the larger context of Foucault's thinking. Above all, this means comparing it with his 1970s genealogies of *pastoral power*, *scientia sexualis* and the *dispositive of sexuality*. I will suggest that in spite of certain noteworthy differences, there is essential coherence between these accounts precisely in their manner of treating confession as a regime or dispositive which is empirical, "sensualizing" and affective.

Rousseau and the Senses of Transparency

It is crucial for us to be able to evaluate Foucault's manner of approaching Rousseau's thought in the *Introduction*. Most importantly, it is necessary to be able to assess what actually constitutes the relation between Rousseau's corpus of texts and the key ideas that Foucault presents. For this purpose, we first need a brief discussion of Rousseau, with an emphasis on "confession and the senses."

It is well-known that in various parts of Rousseau's *œuvre* we can find the argument on the preeminence of voice, of music and above all of melody, as the expression of emotions.³ Yet, we should not consider it self-evident that there is a univocal *phonocentric nucleus*—an unambiguous privilege or preeminence given to voice and hearing—in Rousseau's thought, particularly when he discusses the notions of confession, truth, authenticity, and transparency. It is these that are also at issue in Foucault's *Introduction*, as we will see below.

To begin with, it already strikes one that in the *Confessions*, when Rousseau characterizes his own enterprise of confessional writing and his ideal of the confessional language of transparency, we come across a variety of strong optical-visual sensations and experiences. Rousseau states:

In the enterprise I have made to show myself entirely to the public, nothing of me must remain obscure or hidden for it; I must incessantly maintain myself under their eyes [...] that they do not lose the sight of me for a single moment⁴ [...] I would like to be able, in some fashion, to make my soul transparent in the eyes of the reader; and for that reason I strive to show it to him from every point of view, to cast light upon it [l'éclairer] through the everyday, so that no movement takes place within it that he does not perceive, in order for him to be able to judge for himself the principle producing them.⁵

³ See, e.g., Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. by Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), especially 253-267, 279-293, 296; cf. John T. Scott, "Rousseau and the Melodious Language of Freedom," *Journal of Politics*, vol. 59, no. 3 (1997), 803-829.

⁴ Rousseau, *Les Confessions de J.-J. Rousseau: Nouvelle édition* (Paris: Charpentier, 1858), 55. (My translation and emphasis).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 170. (My translation and emphasis).

Furthermore, Rousseau characterizes the ideal reader of the confessional text as a *seer*, *beholder*, and *spectator*, as someone whose reading actually is a *looking and seeing through* the soul of the writer. We come across similar passages not only in the *Dialogues*, but also in other works of Rousseau, when he is discussing in a more general sense the ideas of “truth” and “authenticity,” both in relation to nature as well as in inter-human relations, i.e., in the formation of the ideal, harmonious community. Referring to these, Rousseau speaks of a “spectacle” that has something “magical” in it,⁶ or an “ineffable mixture for the eyes,”⁷ one in which colors become “more striking.”⁸ Or, he suggests that it is through a *mutual seeing and being seen* that a community-building process of sharing and participation between souls takes place, whether this is the fictive village-community of *Julie*, or the nostalgic memory of the Geneva of Rousseau’s youth.⁹

In all of these cases, the notions of truth and authenticity, transparency and proximity between souls, is characterized in terms of such extraordinary optical-visual perceptions and experiences, in which it is difficult to find anything indicating their phonocentric subjugation under, or “marginalization” in relation to voice and hearing. However, we cannot conclude either that Rousseau’s account of confession, truth, and authenticity would be *ocularcentric*, i.e. privileging optic-visual perception. In fact, in the *Dialogues*, Rousseau explicitly argues that the authentic, immediate revelation of the self can take place through signs belonging to *any modality of sensual perception*: “either in his eyes, or through his blushing, or through his voice, or through his posture, or through some other perceptible sign.”¹⁰ There thus appears to be a plurality of different sensual perceptions at play so that we cannot really discover any univocal hierarchical order in which any one modality would occupy the position of preeminence. What is at issue is neither a phonocentric, nor an ocularcentric regime. Rather, we are dealing with a partitioning or a distribution of the sensible, of the sensual-perceptual modalities, which could be called *multi-* or *pluri-sensual*, with an empirical regime that is *centrifugal* rather than *centripetal*.¹¹ Next, after this brief discussion of Rousseau’s understanding of confession, the senses, truth and authenticity, we can enter into the analysis of Foucault’s *Introduction*, and attempt to find out how Foucault actually deals with the material provided by Rousseau’s texts.

⁶ Rousseau, *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse, tome 1* (Paris: Vve Dabo, 1823), 109. (My translation).

⁷ *Ibid.* (My translation).

⁸ Rousseau, *Dialogues: Œuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau IV* (Paris: A. Houssiaux, 1852-1853), 4. (My translation).

⁹ Rousseau, *Lettre à d’Alembert sur les spectacles* (Paris: Garnier, 1772), 224-225, 233; Rousseau, *Dialogues*, 4, 94-95; Rousseau, *Julie 1*, 108-109, 168; Rousseau, *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse, tome 5* (Paris: Rignoux, 1830), 133; Rousseau, *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse, tome 6* (Paris: Rignoux, 1830), 113-114.

¹⁰ Rousseau, *Dialogues*, 94-95. (My translation and emphasis).

¹¹ In the framework of 1950s and 1960s francophone philosophy and literary studies, already before Foucault’s *Introduction*, Jean Starobinski is quite articulate and consistent in bringing to the fore the multi-sensuality in Rousseau’s ideas of transparency and authenticity, although the term “multi”- or “pluri-sensual” is mine, not Starobinski’s. See Jean Starobinski, “Eloquence and Liberty,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 38, no. 2 (1977), 95-210; Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammar (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

Confession, Power and the “Empirical” in Foucault’s *Introduction*

The starting point, one that provides the orientation for Foucault’s *Introduction*, is to analyze confession as a particular modality of truth-speaking or truth-utterance. This takes place through a discussion of a variety of Rousseau’s works, not only the *Dialogues* to which it is devoted as an introduction, but also the *Confessions* above all.

For Foucault, what characterizes the confessional enunciation is first of all the determination of its proper object. In confessional discourse, the object is nothing other than the subject of enunciation itself. Moreover, there are still more specific determinations to this subject-object of confession: it is the *unique* or *singular self*, constituted by its being *inseparably proximate with itself* as well as *unmistakably* and *absolutely different from the others*. Correspondingly, the generation and accomplishment of truth in confession means the revelation of the self, in a manner that is faithful to its singularity as well as total, i.e., *perfect transparency* in which nothing of the self remains secret, obscure or ambivalent.¹²

In many respects, as an analysis of a particular discursive formation with its determinate type of object as well as its modalities of truth-enunciation, the *Introduction* coheres with Foucault’s work from the later 1960s on the archaeology of knowledge. However, the specific issue he sets out to examine, the confession, is one that only later, in the 1970s comes to be central for Foucault. As it tackles precisely the issue of confession explicitly and in detail, one could argue that the *Introduction* stands apart from the “mainstream” of Foucault’s work of the 1960s. In that respect, the *Introduction* actually has more in common with the 1970s genealogies of pastoral power, *scientia sexualis* and the dispositive of sexuality.

One thing that makes the *Introduction* significant in the whole of Foucault’s thinking is precisely that it appears to be the first instance in which Foucault discusses confessional truth and confessional self-expression in the light of their *political significance*, i.e. in their articulation within the practice of judgment as well as the interventionist practice of *punishment*. These take charge of the singular self, soul or personality as such, not only and not primarily of transgressive behavior: “*The judgment, indeed, supposes the burst of speech [l’éclat de la parole]: its edifice is not absolutely solid, unless it culminates in the confession of the accused [...] The torment always supposes an anterior speech [...]*”¹³

The political significance of Rousseau’s confessional discourse, as Foucault quite aptly observes, is in its developing a form of truth by means of which the judgmental and punishing practices can grasp the singular self as such, as a dynamic fabric of thoughts, emotions and desires. In this sense, Rousseau’s confessional discourse is a particularly *modern* articulation of truth and punishment. We should not overlook the importance of the fact that Foucault presents this view already in the *Introduction*, even though the treatment of the issue remains quite brief and it does not become clear whether Foucault considers the relevance of his discovery to be limited to the *œuvre* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, or whether he considers it to have more general historical and political pertinence (which seems, at least with hindsight, more likely). To compare, when Foucault revisits the issue of confession in the 1970s, he leaves no doubt about his belief in the fundamental historical and political importance of the confessional technology of truth and power.

¹² Foucault, *Dits et écrits I*, 203-204.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 211-212. (My translation and emphasis).

Moreover, what is also interesting is the manner in which Foucault proceeds to analyze the particular constitution of the confessional truth-enunciation, which means that he teases out from the works of Rousseau the rules of the confessional utterance, ones that are determined most centrally by the demands of *immediacy* and *authenticity*. In other words, they are determined by the direct and “faithful” revelation of the unique self in the full plenitude of its presence (perfect transparency with no secrecy) and in its unmistakable difference from everyone else. What is needed for this task is a type of utterance that is uncontaminated by dissimulation, pretension and “false appearance,” as well as by all the uncertainties and ambivalences of interpretation.¹⁴

It is when analyzing the determination of this ideal form of confessional utterance, through his reading of Rousseau, that Foucault focuses his attention upon the role of the “*empirical*,” of sensual qualities and sensual perception. Far from neglecting these, and far from considering them to be of secondary importance, we can see that Foucault actually comes to treat confession in terms of a particular *empirical regime* or *order*. This idea of “empirical regime” reoccurs, in a more explicit and theoretically elaborate manner, in his major 1960s works on the archaeology of knowledge.¹⁵ In the *Introduction* it means that the formation, order and organization of confessional enunciation is also, and most centrally, treated as a particular division, distribution, and organization of different modalities of sensual perception, as well as of the different sensual-perceptual qualities of the medium of utterance.¹⁶

In its strong emphasis on the “*empiricism*” of confession, Foucault’s analysis manages to grasp something that was essential in Rousseau’s own depictions of his confessional enterprise. Foucault’s key point in the *Introduction* is that in order to perform a critical analysis of power that is individualizing (such as the power that is at play in Rousseau’s confessions), it is not enough to pay attention merely to the discourse or speech as linguistic events. In the *Introduction*, Foucault shows us that if it wants to be pervasive, the critique of individualizing or “singularizing” power should also recognize the role of the sensual events of expression, of the perceptual manifestations, exteriorizations and appearances of the self. These, together with the empirical regimes into which they are

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 200-216.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Foucault, *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 11-16, 70, 86-91, 139; Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 1972), 40-49, 52-55, 181-186.

¹⁶ Foucault, *Dits et écrits I*, 200-216. These insights of Foucault’s are not without contemporary relevance for discussions in political theory/political philosophy. To point out one noteworthy convergence, I would suggest that Foucault’s concept of “empirical regime” is not very far from what Jacques Rancière has called *partitioning of the sensible*. With this, Rancière means not only the elementary division or demarcation between the “sense/meaning” and “nonsense,” and between the “sensible/signifying” and the “insensible/non-signifying” as such. What he also means is the distribution or division between different modalities of sensuality and sensual perception from the basis of their respective standing, their more or less proximate or distant attachment/detachment with the “sense/meaning.” In Rancière’s vocabulary, *police* refers to the practices that maintain and solidify a determinate partitioning of the sensible, whereas *politics* is associated with the action that challenges and disrupts a given partitioning. See, e.g., Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. by Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics,” *Theory & Event*, vol. 5, issue 3 (2001), http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/toc/tae5.3.html (accessed August 17, 2011).

organized, have a decisive role in the functioning of individualizing power. As we will see below, this is an innovation whose significance in Foucault's thinking extends far beyond his early encounter with Rousseau.

A Vocal Regime of Truth and Power in the *Introduction*

Still, there is more to Foucault's treatment of Rousseau's confessional discourse than his pointing out the centrality of the "empirical." From this basic insight, Foucault proceeds to a more specific analysis of the constitution of the particular empirical regime of confession.

There is one modality of perception and sensuality, which occupies the status of pre-eminence and functions as the center in the organization of the confessional discourse. This particular mode of sensuality is in the key position when it comes to the generation of confessional truth, as well as to the related political practices of judgment and punishment. Foucault stresses that *voice, vocal expression, the sense of hearing and auditory perception (the auditory-sonorous-vocal)* are most strongly invested with the normative claims of immediacy, authenticity, and certainty, and thus given preeminence in the regime of confessional truth: "[...] thus will be opened a space of the *light, faithful, infinitely transmissible speech, where faith and truth communicate without obstacle, that space without doubt, of the immediate voice [la voix immédiate] [...]*"¹⁷

What makes the *Introduction* significant when situated in the framework of Foucault's intellectual history is its being an early case of his presenting a critical account of a vocal-auditory-sonorous regime of individualizing power. It is a very early demonstration of how to apply the archaeological method to the political analysis of voice, sound, and hearing. This is one of the reasons why the *Introduction* deserves much more attention than it has received so far.

Next, if we compare Foucault's text with Rousseau's own treatment of the issue of the senses, confession, and truth, we can see that there is a disjuncture. What Foucault does not seem to acknowledge is that for Rousseau, although the auditory-sonorous-vocal has its irreducible role, it does not have any status of unambiguous preeminence or centrality. Unlike Rousseau, who characterized the diaphaneity of the self as being multi- or pluri-sensual, Foucault insists on there being a hierarchic, centripetal structure in the empirical regime of confession, one in which voice and hearing occupy the center to which other modalities of sensual perception are submitted.

Hence, we can say that in spite of Rousseau's multi-sensual view, Foucault's key argument is that the circuit of voice and hearing functions as the primary medium for the production of diaphaneity of the self, and its becoming an object of interventions. As Foucault suggests, inside this confessional regime, the explanation or justification given for this privilege of voice (and especially, of its "chanting," melodious inflections), is the belief in the "natural affinity" of the former with the flow of the soul's movements, i.e. emotions, passions, and inclinations. Foucault emphasizes that in this regime of truth and power the vocal-auditory is so to speak "naturalized," i.e. determined as the "natural language" of authenticity, faithfulness and singularity, one that would transcend the arbitrariness and uncertainty of signs taken in the ordinary sense.¹⁸

¹⁷ Foucault, *Dits et écrits I*, 200-201. (My translation and emphasis).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 203-204.

The *compelling and penetrating power of voice* is in the first instance entrusted with the capacity and function of immediacy and authenticity, of fully revealing the self in its unmistakable uniqueness. Voice and hearing, more than any other empirical-sensual modality, are invested with the power of eliminating all secrecy, all dissimulation and all attempts of self-censorship. The vocal power is supposed to extinguish all distance, all obstacles and obstructions that could detach and alienate the self from itself (through self-reflection), as well as from the others.¹⁹

Finally, voice is invested with the power of perfect certainty, due to such compelling force of “persuasion” that no room is left for neglect, doubt and misunderstanding, or even any ambiguities of interpretation. The certainty of confessional truth is accomplished through intimate participation, sharing and opening out between souls. The regime encourages this kind of proximity instead of distant surveillance remaining at the mere surface of things. This opening out is one that is supposed to take place, again, by vocal and auditory channels.²⁰

This does not mean that other modalities of sensuality and perception would be wholly excluded from the confession. Rather, they are integrated into its centripetal regime. Vocal expression needs writing to gain more permanence and fixity, but this does not change the fact that it is voice which, in the last instance, alone guarantees the immediacy, authenticity, truth and the proper sense/meaning of utterances. The discursive domain of confession is, as Foucault puts it:

a space of language, where *speech and writing cross, contest, reenforce each other*. This intertwinement [...] justifies them by opening them to each other; *speech to the text that fixes it* [...] *writing to speech that turns it into an immediate and passionate confession* [...]²¹

Foucault’s strong, conclusive statement is that for Rousseau, the *melodious and linear* expression “*was always privileged by him, because he saw therein—for the music as well as for the language—the most natural of expressions, one in which the speaking subject is entirely present, without reserve or reticence, in each of the forms of what he says.*”²² It is always in the last instance the vocal and auditory in which the hope is put when it comes to the transparency of the unique “me.” This hope is put in the *lateral glide*, in which “*language becomes melodious and linear again, a simple trace [simple sillage] of a ‘me’ that is punctual, and thus true.*”²³

Clearly, we have come across something essential in the *Introduction*. Foucault is offering us an early, critical analysis of the confessional practices of power over the unique/singular (“punctual” or “point-like”) self, and argues that this power has its privileged technology in the temporal and linear language of voice and melody, and not in what could be called the spatial, stable and “simultaneous” language of the surveying gaze. It is by this auditory-sonorous and temporal technology, not by the visual and spatial one, that Fou-

¹⁹ Ibid., 200-201, 204.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 200-201. (My translation and emphasis).

²² Ibid., 203. (My translation and emphasis).

²³ Ibid., 207. (My translation and emphasis).

cault wants to demonstrate to us that the unique self is first of all “exteriorized” and grasped by judging and punishing practices.

Together with the emphasis on the role of voice and hearing, it is the relative marginality of the role of optical-visual perception that captures one’s attention. In fact, Foucault’s archaeological analysis also reveals to us a determinate kind of hierarchic rationale that organizes the confession, a rationale according to which sight and the visible realm as such are deemed to be inferior in comparison with voice and hearing. Correspondingly, according to this same rationale, in the repertoire of power, surveillance taking place by means of the gaze is deemed to be inferior in comparison with vocal confession and its auditory reception.

Furthermore, Foucault also discloses that what motivates and legitimates such privileging of the vocal-auditory over the optical-visual inside the confessional regime is the belief that vision stops at the mere surface of things, that it cannot grasp what is most crucial for the functioning of judgmental and punishing power, i.e. the interiority of the self, the soul or the personality. The central outcome of Foucault’s *Introduction* is the critical treatment of confession as a hierarchical order in which the primacy given to the singular, personal interiority over impersonal exteriority, just like the primacy of proximity over distance, are mirrored by the privileging of voice and hearing over the visual image or figure as well as overseeing. It is also an early critique of the kind of power that works by encouraging intimate, interpersonal and sensual sharing and participation, so that we can also characterize confession as a practice of *affective power*.

As it turns out, in the strong emphasis on the centrality of the vocal-auditory, the idea of confession presented by Foucault does not quite correspond with the one found in Rousseau’s work. Consequently, as a reading of Rousseau, the accuracy of the *Introduction* can be called into question. On the other hand, the fact that this central notion of Foucault’s does not have direct correspondence with Rousseau’s texts does not mean that it is unimportant. Rather, it means that we cannot dismiss the *Introduction* as being only a “faithful commentary,” or a paraphrase, in which Foucault would do nothing but reproduce the thought of someone else. Instead, we can now see that Foucault’s point on the *phonocentrism* of confession is one that he elaborates in a relatively creative fashion, not by adopting it from Rousseau.

From the basis of the reading I have presented above, the analysis of confessional discourse found in the *Introduction* could be called an *archaeology of phonocentrism*, of a *phonocentric regime of truth* with its related political practices of judgment and punishment. As noted above, we should keep in mind that Foucault’s treatment of the issue was published a few years before Jacques Derrida introduced the actual term “phono-centrism” and brought it to general knowledge in *Of Grammatology* (1966). As we know, in Derrida’s work of the late 1960s, the deconstruction of phonocentrism—of the interrelated primacy of voice and hearing (in relation to the visual and the graphic) and truth determined as presence—is not limited to the thought of Rousseau, but extends to the history of Western philosophy from Plato at least to Edmund Husserl.²⁴

²⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). I cannot do full justice here to the sophistication of Derrida’s argument, but let me note that, for instance, in his seminal treatment of the phonocentrism in Husserl’s philosophy,

Reading Foucault's *Introduction* from this point of view shows us that Derrida was not the only one, and quite possibly not the first one of the French thinkers of that generation, to have put forth such a critical examination, and to have elaborated it through a reading of Rousseau. Albeit Foucault's general emphasis on the issues of transparency and singularity owes to Jean Starobinski's readings of Rousseau (something which Foucault himself is ready to acknowledge²⁵), what we do not find in Starobinski is precisely the argument on the centrality of voice and hearing, rather than any other modality of sensory perception.²⁶ It is difficult to deny the originality of Foucault's insight on the phonocentric character of confessional truth and power. In this manner, Foucault's somewhat neglected text has significance not only for our understanding of his thinking, but also more generally for our understanding of the appearance and development of the issue of phonocentrism, and of the critical stance taken towards it, in francophone philosophy of the 1960s.

Below, in the final section of the article, my objective is to situate the *Introduction*, or what I have taken to be most central in it, in the context of Foucault's *œuvre*. My aim is to discover whether and in which respects the *Introduction* is an exceptional or even unique piece in Foucault's body of work, or whether instead the central points reoccur in Foucault's thought from the 1970s.

The Sensualization of Power: The *Introduction* and the Genealogies of Pastoral Power, Confession, and Sexuality

In Foucault's analyses of pastoral power, confession and sexuality put forth in the 1970s and still in the early 1980s, there are no references to his own earlier treatment of Rousseau and the issue of confession in the *Introduction*. While we do find a number of scattered, somewhat brief references to Rousseau in Foucault's work from this period,²⁷ among these we find no comparable, detailed treatment on his thinking. Moreover, the issues of confession and pastoral power—as central as they were for Foucault—do not come forth at all explicitly in relation to Rousseau.

Derrida suggests that the phenomenological voice privileged by Husserl is not at all the corporeal/physical voice, or voice as *sonority*: "The necessary privilege of the *phōnē* that is implicated by the entire history of metaphysics [...] it is not in the sonorous substance [*la substance sonore*] or in the physical voice [*la voix physique*], in the body of voice in the world that he [i.e., Husserl] will recognize an affinity of origin with the *logos* in general, but in the *phenomenological voice* [*la voix phénoménologique*], in voice in its *transcendental flesh* [...] The *phenomenological voice* would be this spiritual flesh that continues to speak and be self-present—to *hear/understand itself* [*de s'entendre*—in the absence of the world." Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005), 15-16. (My translation and emphasis). On the auditory-sonorous in Derrida's thought, see Marie-Louise Mallet, *La musique en respect* (Paris: Galilée, 2002); Michel Poizat, "Musique, voix et silence," in Catherine Kintzler (ed.), *Peinture et musique: Penser la vision, penser l'audition* (Villeneuve d'Asq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2002), 133-143.

²⁵ Foucault, *Dits et écrits I*, 200.

²⁶ See Starobinski, "Eloquence and Liberty"; Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*.

²⁷ Foucault, *Dits et écrits I*, 876, 1458; Foucault, *Dits et écrits II, 1976-1988* (Paris: Quarto/Gallimard, 2001), 185, 195-196, 302, 538, 599, 653-654, 677, 1005-1006, 1541, 1597.

Admittedly, in a discussion from 1977, published with the title “The Eye of Power” [*L’œil du pouvoir*],²⁸ Foucault does revisit the idea of transparency in Rousseau’s thought. However, he appears to have abandoned his own earlier account of the phonocentric nucleus in Rousseau’s discourse of diaphaneity. In contrast to the *Introduction*, on this occasion Foucault interprets Rousseau’s concept of transparency in terms of the eye, the surveying gaze and visibility, indeed, bringing it very close to the model of the Panopticon, as it is most notably presented in *Discipline and Punish*. As a critical treatment of Rousseau’s phonocentrism, it can be said that the *Introduction* really does stand alone in Foucault’s *œuvre*.

Still, this does not mean that the more overarching key innovation found in the *Introduction*—the critical scrutiny of confession as a sensual-empirical regime of power—disappeared from Foucault’s writings of the 1970s. What is most significant is that in the various texts by the later Foucault that consider the topics of confession, pastoral power, and sexuality as well as the “empiricism” of this form of power, the name of Jean-Jacques Rousseau is not even mentioned. Together with *History of Sexuality I*, it is above all the 1974-1975 *Collège de France* lecture course *Abnormal* [*Les Anormaux*], as well as the article entitled “The Life of Infamous Men” [*La vie des hommes infâmes*] (published in 1977)²⁹ that are most central in that respect. If we want to locate the *Introduction* in the framework of Foucault’s thinking and recognize its significance therein, we should compare the *Introduction* to these texts.

In Foucault’s works of the 1970s, when he examines the form of power-knowledge called *scientia sexualis* and the *dispositive* of sexuality, ranging from the Christian pastoral and confession to modern psychiatry, he stresses in a somewhat coherent manner that the former are to be understood in terms of the *sensualization of power* [*sensualisation du pouvoir*].³⁰ At the most general level, this sensualization refers to the positive and productive (instead of negative-repressive) functioning of this power, taking place through the intensification of bodies (or certain regions of bodies), through the electrification of their surfaces, through the dramatization and “scandalization” (instead of silencing or hiding) of the distinctive manifestations, appearances and expressions of the singular fabric of pleasures and desires of each human being.³¹ It is also this general sensualization to which Foucault is referring when he states that modern society is “in actual fact, and directly, perverse.”³²

Also, we should observe that Foucault analyzes confession in particular as a technology of power that is sensual or sensualized. Confession is, first of all, a technique of communication, of mutual exchange, but one that is *not* limited to the signifying operations of speech. Besides, confession extends into the exchange and diffusion of *excitements* and

²⁸ Foucault, *Dits et écrits II*, 190-207.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 237-253. Unfortunately, Foucault’s extensive treatment of the genealogy of pastoral power, in the lecture course *Of the Governance of the Living* [*Du gouvernement des vivants*] (1979-1980), had still not been published at the moment of writing this essay. Only the resume of the course was available, in which, however, Foucault did not touch upon the role of the senses and perception. See Foucault, *Dits et écrits II*, 944-948.

³⁰ Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: tel/Gallimard, 1976), 61.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 50-67, 139-142; Foucault, *Les Anormaux: Cours au Collège de France, 1974-1975* (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 1999), especially 3-48, 108-126, 155-186.

³² Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I*, 65. (My translation).

agitations, of intensive sensations and pleasures in the network of power-relations (between the penitent and confessor). Sensualized power works by generating and encouraging what we can call *sensual/sensitive proximities* or “inductive contacts”³³ between bodies, rather than the distance, detachment and “insensitivity” associated with sovereign and juridical forms of power. Instead, what characterizes pastoral power is precisely its functioning through the “exhaustive and instant transfer”³⁴ taking place between the pastor and each and every singular “lamb” in the “flock.” The central medium of pastoral power is precisely the instantaneous and all-encompassing opening out and sharing, so perfect that everything happening in the lives of the “flock”—all their sensations, desires, temptations and pleasures—the pastor must feel and experience just as if they were his/her own, happening in his/her own body and soul, and not in someone else’s. This means also that the practice of pastoral power is only possible through the inevitable exposure of the pastor to the risk of “contamination” and “falling” through the constant and immediate sharing of sensations.³⁵

Thus, we can see that Foucault actually does revisit the central insight found in the *Introduction*—the working of confessional power through intimate, sensual-affective proximity and sharing—and also elaborates it further, without there needing to be any explicit reference either to Rousseau or to the *Introduction*. Furthermore, we see that there are convergences between the *Introduction* and the 1970s genealogies when it comes to Foucault’s more specific examination of the sensualization of power. He recurrently states that from the Christian examination of conscience up until modern psychiatry, the flesh and concupiscence, the field of instincts, desires and pleasures have been constituted as *something to be listened to, as something to be heard*. The *dispositives of hearing and understanding* [*dispositifs à entendre*] are an integral part of the genealogy of sexuality, finding their modern form in the methods of *clinical listening* [*l’écoute clinique*]. In a sense, the genealogy of confession and dispositive of sexuality culminates in the entrance to the scene of “the most famous ear of our epoch,”³⁶ as Foucault calls Sigmund Freud, and in the birth of psychoanalysis in which hearing and listening, as a technique of the unconscious instincts and desires, become perhaps even more significant than ever before.³⁷

We should not think that the listening at issue would only and exclusively be focused on speech, or that the French word “*entendre*” would only refer to the understanding of linguistic utterances. Foucault is very explicit on his view that confession, and the examination of conscience as such, are only partly verbal. The first person singular form of the confession finds its accomplishment in the *sound of the penitent’s voice*. Correspondingly, the techniques and arts of listening, the hearing-dispositives, do not exclude, but *include*, in other words they set out to hear the *sonority* as an indispensable constituent of the confessional truth, indispensable for the strategies of grasping and taking charge of the flesh and concupiscence. In a consistent manner, Foucault notes that the modern,

³³ Ibid., 63. (My translation).

³⁴ Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population: Cours au Collège de France, 1977-1978* (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 2004), 173. (My translation).

³⁵ Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I*, especially 50-67, 139-142; Foucault, *Les Anormaux*, especially 3-48, 108-126, 155-186; Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, 172-175.

³⁶ Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I*, 148. (My translation).

³⁷ Ibid., especially 14, 44-49, 53-54, 84, 91, 146-149.

psycho-medical technology of clinical listening also works through auditory perception of voice, of its *unique sonority*, of its *tone* or *tenor*, and by rationalizing the former as signs through which the singular sexuality, the core of abnormality and the nucleus of dangers is detected.³⁸

The power-knowledge that obstinately searches for the truth of the everyday life of each and every singular human being in the name of immediacy and authenticity calls forth what Foucault characterizes as “rough, awkward and offensive expressions.”³⁹ They are utterances with “a vibration and savage intensities,”⁴⁰ in their perfect fidelity to affective-instinctive origins. Confessional expressions are and should be, in other words, unmediated by decency, neat articulation or eloquence. They should be immediate and authentic rather than follow all the rules of discourse, thus occasionally approximating *noise* rather than speech.⁴¹

Above, I have attempted to show the reemergence and re-elaboration in new contexts of the central ideas discovered already in Foucault’s 1962 *Introduction*: the sensuality or sensualization of power-knowledge taking charge of the singular self, and the role of the auditory-sonorous or vocal in the former. There are, however, also differences that we should acknowledge between the *Introduction* and the 1970s genealogies. As we have seen, in the *Introduction* the question of the historical and political significance, of the more general relevance of confessional power remained inarticulate. In the 1970s work Foucault is very explicit about his view on the centrality of the development of confession and the hearing-dispositives in the history of the Western World, from Christianity to modern psychiatry.

Although, as has been seen, the auditory-sonorous-vocal has its irreducible role, what we do not find in the 1970s genealogies is the point on phonocentrism that was central in the *Introduction*, i.e. the distribution of the different modalities of the “empirical” around the center provided by voice and hearing. What comes to the fore in the 1970s analyses, is the account of power-knowledge in which other modalities of sensual perception besides the vocal-auditory are mobilized as well in the formation of the “singular truth,” without any one modality (neither the auditory-sonorous-vocal nor the optic-visual) occupying the

³⁸ Foucault, *Les Anormaux*, 144, 155-186; Foucault, *Dits et écrits II*, 245-246. In a sense, one could say that the ancient “prototype,” in which voice (its “sound,” its sonority) is taken as the unmistakable expression of singularity, and listening applied as a technique of distinguishing and recognizing of unique selves, is found in the *Old Testament*: “The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau” (*Genesis* 27:22). In the history of psychoanalysis, perhaps the most seminal elaboration of the vocal and listening techniques, with an explicit reference to the religious roots, can be discovered in the work of Theodor Reik, a pupil of Freud’s, who attempted to systematize into a method of analysis the idea of the unconscious of the analyst listening to the vocal (“musical”) expressions of the patient’s unconscious. See, e.g., Theodor Reik, *Listening with the Third Ear: The Inner Experience of a Psychoanalyst* (New York: Grove Press, 1948). Let me also note that when Foucault’s 1970s work is read from this angle, as I have attempted to do, certain similarities come forth with Roland Barthes, who is much better known than Foucault for his treatment of voice, hearing, listening, truth, and surveillance. Cf. especially Roland Barthes, *L’obvie et l’obtus: Essais critiques III* (Manchecourt: Éditions du Seuil, 1982).

³⁹ Foucault, *Dits et écrits II*, 249. (My translation).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* (My translation).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 237-253.

center. Thus, Foucault can state that pastoral power is “the *empirical power of the eye, of the gaze, of the ear, of the hearing of the priest.*”⁴²

Pastoral power is empirical power, in which the eye, the gaze, the ear and the listening of the priest are all at work. Different kinds of sensuality and perception, apparently in an interplay of mutual supplementation, are mobilized in order to track down as perfectly as possible all the movements of the flesh, to reveal the totality of the desiring body, without leaving any zones of secrecy. Correspondingly, modern psycho-medical power (with its objective of taking charge of sexuality as a whole), in its sensual-perceptual operation is characterized not only by hearing and listening. This power tends to “verge on bodies,”⁴³ or to *touch* or *brush against* them. It “caresses them with eyes,”⁴⁴ a sort of mixture of optical with *tactile-haptic* perceptions. Besides these, various similar depictions can be found in Foucault’s analyses of the “empiricism” of pastoral power and the dispositive of sexuality throughout their developments.⁴⁵

Indeed, Foucault suggests that modern psycho-medical power, and its self-legitimation, might actually refer back to a somewhat irrational belief in the powers of immediate sensuality, in some sort of “superhuman” capacity to predict by sensing or feeling (in a quasi-haptic manner), or by “smelling,” all forms of madness and virtual criminality, where no “layman” could suspect anything. This psycho-medical “hyper-sensitivity” comes to the fore, in a humorous tenor, as Foucault compares the psychiatrist with the princess of the fairytale:

You all know the stories of the sort: If you have a foot small enough to fit into the glass slipper, you will be the queen; if you have a finger fine enough to receive the golden ring, you will be the queen; if your skin is fine enough so that the tiniest pea placed under the pile of feather mattresses bruises it, to the point of your being covered with bruises the following day, if you are capable of doing all that, you will be the queen [...] the *medical knowledge-power* will respond: *See how indispensable my science is, because I am capable of feeling [flairer] the danger even where no reason can make it appear [...]* I am capable of showing you that at the basis of all madness, there is the *virtuality of a crime*, and consequently, *justification of my proper power.*⁴⁶

Through all these accounts of “empiricism” and sensualization discovered in Foucault’s 1970s work, neither the optic-visual, nor the auditory-sonorous-vocal has a univocal status of center or preeminence. The empirical regime at issue is neither ocularcentric, nor phono- or audio-centric, but rather multi-sensual or pluri-sensual. We could also say that in this account, the dispositive of sexuality and confessional-pastoral power are *centrifugal* rather than centripetal in their organization and manner of functioning. They are constantly and dynamically articulating across and between the whole spectrum of different kinds of perceptions and sensualities, *none of which* occupies any status of fixed center or preeminence.

⁴² Foucault, *Les Anormaux*, 165. (My translation and emphasis).

⁴³ Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I*, 61. (My translation).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* (My translation).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, especially 60-63; Foucault, *Les Anormaux*, especially 23-48, 108-126, 155-186; Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, 127-198.

⁴⁶ Foucault, *Les Anormaux*, 112-114. (My translation and emphasis).

On this point, there is a disjuncture between the 1970s genealogies and the *Introduction*, in which the confessional regime was characterized as being phonocentric, or organized around the primacy of voice. Moreover, it is interesting to observe that with the argument on the multi- or pluri-sensuality of confession, Foucault's later analysis in fact grasps better the core of Rousseau's idea of confessional discourse than did the *Introduction*, despite the fact that he does not refer to Rousseau in the 1970s works discussed (cf. the discussion on Rousseau at the beginning of the article).

Conclusion: The Centrality of the *Introduction*

In this article, I have focused on one particular text by Foucault which has been given only little notice so far: the *Introduction* (published in 1962) to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Dialogues*. We have seen that in spite of its relative brevity and its marginal appearance, it is a significant piece in more than one respect. The *Introduction*, and the key points Foucault presents in it, are noteworthy already for their early occurrence in his intellectual history. We saw that already in the *Introduction* Foucault elaborates, through his reading of Rousseau, an analysis of confession. Indeed, the *Introduction* is apparently the first text in which Foucault deals with this subject in detail. It was seen that the idea that confession is a determinate form of truth-enunciation intrinsically intertwined with power was already present in Foucault's 1962 work. Already in this early, somewhat neglected piece, Foucault was treating confession as a regime, technology, and practice of individualizing truth and power, as a means through which the singular "I" or unique self as a whole is brought into the reach of judgment as well as punishment. We have noted that all of these issues that became central and well-known in Foucault's 1970s work were already introduced in 1962. Because it shows us all this, the *Introduction* is a seminal part of Foucault's *œuvre*.

I also argued that the *Introduction* is central when it comes to Foucault's manner of dealing with the constitution of the confessional regime. I highlighted his manner of characterizing confession as an empirical or sensual regime, technology and practice, meaning that it is through a particular organization of the senses and perceptions that the singular self is grasped. We saw that already in the *Introduction* Foucault portrays the confession as a mode of sensual as well as affective power, i.e. as one that functions ultimately by encouraging proximity and sharing, and thus differs essentially from the model of distant and "neutral" surveillance.

I stressed that in Foucault's account, the primary empirical-sensual modality at play in the confession is voice and the sense of hearing, the auditory-vocal-sonorous. It is through voice that the exteriorization, the revelation, and the perfect coming to presence of the unique self are first of all brought about. Consequently, I suggested that Foucault's critique of confessional truth and power in the *Introduction* also inaugurates what we can call Foucault's critique of phonocentrism.

Moreover, it came to the fore that the more general historical pertinence of Foucault's text, when we placed it into the context of 1960s francophone philosophy, is that Foucault presented his critique of phonocentrism before that of Jacques Derrida, although (admittedly) it was Derrida who introduced the actual term and made it well-known through his more influential reading of Rousseau. I believe that for this reason Foucault's *Introduction* deserves to be recognized as a significant part of his *œuvre*, but also as recommended reading for anyone interested in the issue of phonocentrism. Reading Foucault's

text from this angle invites us to reconsider how the idea and critique of phonocentrism first developed in the philosophy of the post-World War II era.

As noted, Foucault took up the issue of confessional power-knowledge again in various works dating from the 1970s that are neither minor nor marginal (the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, as well as the extensive *Collège de France* lecture courses). In these, Foucault also revisited the more specific issue of the “empiricism” and “sensualism” of confession. As I pointed out, there are certain significant differences between the early and the later treatments. Above all, in the 1970s Foucault approached confession as a multi- or pluri-sensual regime, and in this fashion he grasped better than in the *Introduction* what was at stake in Rousseau’s idea of confession, despite the fact that Rousseau was no longer the explicit focus of the 1970s works.

These differences notwithstanding, we also noted the coherent thread running through both the *Introduction* and the 1970s genealogies of pastoral power and sexuality. What remains consistent is Foucault’s understanding of confession as a type of power which is empirical and sensual/sensualizing without being centered on the eye, gaze and visibility, which works through proximity and intimate sharing rather than distance and detachment, and which is affective rather than “neutral” and emotionless. In more overtly political terms, this means that in order to be effective, both the critical analyses of power, and the related practices of resistance, should be attentive to the various networks of sensual-affective proximity, participation and attachment. The *Introduction* is the particular text that initiates this line of thinking in Foucault’s intellectual history. By revisiting, re-elaborating and deepening the early insight, Foucault comes to present in the 1970s some of his most significant and influential ideas on this modality of power and its prominent role in the history of the Western world, up until his own days.

In this article, I have attempted to show that the *Introduction* is a central piece in Foucault’s *œuvre* that is significant both for Foucault scholarship and beyond. I do not think it is exaggeration to say that it is a seminal piece which throws new light both on our understanding of some of the key issues in Foucault’s thinking but also on our account of his significance in the history of post-World War II philosophy.

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