

# Foucault Studies

© Cressida J. Heyes & Michael McGarry 2011

ISSN: 1832-5203

*Foucault Studies*, No. 12, pp. 113-123, October 2011

---

## INTERVIEW

### Changing the Subject

Cressida J. Heyes, University of Alberta

Michael McGarry, OISE/University of Toronto<sup>1</sup>

**Michael McGarry:** *Foucault once offered that “The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not at the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think that you would have the courage to write it?”<sup>2</sup> You take up this challenge as you locate yourself in your work. It’s a risky strategy. I wonder if this practice has shifted your sense of your freedom and agency, both in your scholarship and generally.*

**Cressida J. Heyes:** The process of writing has always been deeply satisfying to me, and I write quite a bit of creative non-fiction and journalistic material as well as academic prose. (I would love to try more seriously with fiction, too.) For me what’s great—and agonising—about writing is the way it throws you up against the knots in your thinking and forces you to unravel stuff you might have become smug or lazy about. So I think that the best philosophical work is written from a genuine desire to work through some of the struggles that beset living without any prior commitment to a particular outcome. Once you know what you are going to say and who you’ll be in the saying—well, then you have said it, and that’s who you are! For both these reasons I think that Foucault is quite right to say that (good, real) writing can only be transformative of its author and lead to new places, intellectually and personally. But I don’t know whether there’s anything especially courageous about it, or even risky, because I don’t feel I have a lot of choice in the matter. Other ways of doing philosophy don’t appeal to me and I have no vocation for them. I was lucky to be able to carve out a rather fraught, tiny niche in the academic world where there is just enough sympathy and interest in what I do that I can survive doing it. In fact, I’ve learned that in academia the stakes are so small (as the saying goes) that really I can—speaking of course as a privileged tenured professor in a fairly laissez-faire workplace—do almost whatever I want. I have realised that my investment in myself as someone who takes political risks is wildly disproportionate to the significance of

---

<sup>1</sup> This exchange is one of a series of dialogues that followed the *Agency after Foucault* conference, which was held in 2007 at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

<sup>2</sup> Rux Martin, “Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault,” in Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton (eds.), *Technologies of the Self* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 9.

what I actually do, and that realisation is sobering but also quite freeing. So I pretty much say what I have to say, although sometimes my superego is horrified by what comes out.

**MM:** *In your book Self-Transformations<sup>3</sup> you investigate the possibility of learning to creatively conceptualize normalizing interventions such as cosmetic surgery and dieting in ways that refuse their limiting aspects and begin to rethink embodied identity in compassionate terms. However, when speaking of any form of normalization as an ambiguous source of agency the idea of complicity persists. At the Agency After Foucault conference, Lynda Stone suggested that this may be why Foucault's writings express a sort of "warning" about agency. Barbara Applebaum reflected this suggestion when she spoke of white complicity with racist strategies despite attempts to act in non-prejudicial ways. What are your thoughts about complicity? Perhaps you might talk about it in terms of the bodily modifications that you consider in Self-Transformations? In particular, do you think it's possible to practice such modifications without complicity with patriarchy or gender biases?*

**CJH:** The short answer is "no." I think partly because normalization is what we're made of, as well as what we resist, we're never going to be able to do anything with our normalized bodies that isn't somehow implicated in power structures that contribute to our own oppression. Those who don't buy into this claim risk a bit of hubris, I think: Foucault often alludes sardonically to people who think that they are being subversive, and thereby get trapped in a normalizing script—albeit one that they perceive as somehow resistant or counter-cultural. The risks of complicity with oppressive norms are perhaps hardest to spot when one is righteously convinced that one is being a good feminist, anti-racist, or whatever, and Foucault is right to point this out to us. I think it's an interesting feature of our habitual practices of academic critique, actually, that Foucault's theoretical interlocutors get so exercised about the idea that complicity and resistance are inseparable. (Of course this makes political strategy tremendously difficult, but that's the interesting political challenge, and people do things all the time that strike me as interestingly resistant and transformative.) Rather troubling to me are the endless philosophical debates about "agency," within which the fascination with specification of certain idealised conditions of possibility for free speech or action take precedence over theorising the messier world of political practice. That's why I say in *Self-Transformations* that I am interested in what people actually do, rather than whether they can, in theory, do it. I need to say more about this in future, I realise, but for now I think that remaining on one's toes about the risks of complicity and the limits of agency while still trying to make political interventions into institutions is, practically speaking, a skill-set that I'm very interested in developing.

**MM:** *You remark that "it becomes increasingly difficult in a culture that sells every technology as a form of 'creative self-fashioning' to know how to remain a step ahead of normalization, rather than desperately hanging from its coattails." [ST 125] Yet because we are always subject to normalizing forces*

---

<sup>3</sup> Cressida J. Heyes, *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). Further references to this book are given in parentheses in the text as *ST*, followed by page numbers.

*remaining a step ahead means being subject to more and increasingly powerful normalizing forces. So what I'm interested in here is the idea that anyone engaging in 'creative self-fashioning' as a matter of freedom, especially when starting from a subjugated social and political position, will only have more struggles to look forward to as they get ever more insistent or practiced at becoming who they wish to be, calling, in turn, for more resistance. There appears to be more at stake than, as Foucault claims, finding freedom in "knowing the game is yours to play."<sup>4</sup> Is there a 'way out' of this picture or does desiring a way out risk falling back into humanistic discussions about what you refer to as the "archetypes of authenticity?" [ST 5]*

**CJH:** I'm not sure that this process *does* involve being ever-more subject to normalization: I think the point is to detach one's increased capacities from the intensification of disciplinary power to some extent (as per "What is Enlightenment?").<sup>5</sup> Part of my argument is that normalizing forces are politically educative: one can look at the skills one has developed through being disciplined and turn them against the institutions that cultivated them in the first place. Of course the skills have a tricky relation to the subjectivity: if the example is, I went to Weight Watchers and learned how to plan ahead to achieve my goals, that seems quite useful in a variety of political contexts. But sometimes in our contexts this practice of planning and goal-setting and disciplining oneself sediments a subject-position that is itself contrary to other political goals (being open to process in democratic deliberation, for example) and makes one politically vulnerable in other respects (perhaps I may come to fetishize control of my life in ways that straighten my ability to be compassionate to others who don't obviously exhibit self-discipline.) Figuring out how to separate these things is a tremendously complicated game to play, and a place where practices of deep self-awareness meet one's life as a citizen. As for the endless nature of it all... Well, there just *are* always "more struggles to look forward to," but perhaps they will be struggles in which our deepest commitments are a little closer to the things we are struggling against.

**MM:** *When addressing the tension between lines similar to those drawn in my previous question, Nikolas Rose offers the notion of a "new humanism" that starts with the Foucauldian view that "humans are essentially machinated" and follows with the correlative idea that freedom would involve "an ascetics based upon... the constant detachment of culturally given codes in order to practice a life of constant moral experimentation." He even suggests a "normativity" for this view that "would positively value all stratagems, tactics and practices that enhance human beings' capacities to act" while subjecting "all that reduces such capacities to critical scrutiny."<sup>6</sup> This implies the kind of endless agonistic critique advocated by Foucault in "What Is Enlightenment?" Yet it is possible that such 'endlessness' entails or risks an indefinite discontinuity of the self. I think you refer to this in Self-Transformations when you talk about how "Embracing this deep uncertainty about who we are and who we are becoming is likely*

---

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 352.

<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?" in Paul Rabinow (ed.), Robert Hurley (trans.), *Essential Works of Foucault Volume I: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 303-319.

<sup>6</sup> Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 96-97.

to be a journey through tremendous fear." [ST 120] With this in mind, do you see a necessarily more treacherous and fearful path of identity formation for those who are struggling with normalization from a feminist, post-colonial or critical-race perspective? Is there an alternative for those who Nancy Fraser<sup>7</sup> and Nancy Hartsock<sup>8</sup> have in mind in their criticism of the normative implications of Foucault's ideas on power and subjectivity?

**CJH:** I imagine you are referring to the charge that the ability of oppressed subjects to take an identity-based, self-determining stand on their own behalf is undercut by ill-timed scepticism about the "old humanisms." I respect the political theoretical worry here, and also I know the feeling—even Foucauldians sometimes make claims about "who we are" that provoke irritating, bad-faith responses from political dilettantes who just want to pick things apart instead of building. But I have not found that political formations that solidify "who we are" really offer very much solace. Becoming attached to particular self-identities as central to our politics clearly has its limitations. Of course, the positive affect of being around like-minded others is not something I object to! I'm not against collective action—far from it. Rather I think if we genuinely want to widen certain possibilities for action, we must build political spaces for those new possibilities. (This just seems like a truism of politics.) Where I perhaps part company from Foucault and Rose (although this isn't obviously the case) is in holding to some normative analysis around what possibilities are currently more difficult, why, and for whom. So simply making more possibilities for action could actually mean anything (and in that sense Rose's words need a context): my ultra-Conservative MP claims to be helping Canadians to feel "safe" by promising to "clean up our streets" and "put criminals behind bars—and keep them there." Yet I interpret his rhetoric as a kind of radical Othering of the criminal that functions only to conceal the damages done by more commonplace acts of violence than he imagines, as well as to continue to generate criminality as an exaggerated threat against which his policies will protect us. It must be, though, given that he keeps being elected, that many of my neighbours also feel enabled by the promise of "safe streets" and perhaps walk the dog on a winter evening with some greater degree of comfort. This is a possibility for action, but at what price, and wasn't it a possibility that was there beforehand if only we could understand it as such? Most interpreters of Foucault are on the left, and hold similar views, but we have not been very bold, I think, about engaging the debates about crypto-normativity in praxis-oriented ways.

Nonetheless, at the level of the individual I don't think this demand for normative claims that we can stand behind translates into a unified and self-certain subjectivity. Working together on projects to which we have normative commitments is likely to make us into unpredictably different kinds of people. Because so much of our psychic safety in popular and philosophical self-narratives is organised around certainty about the subjectivity we'll end up with, this is bound to be unattractive, counter-intuitive, and fear-inducing. Conserva-

---

<sup>7</sup> Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> Nancy Hartsock, "Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?" in Linda Nicholson (ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 157-175.

tives who “know” that they are not-criminal, that they are Good Citizens, that their “families” and “values” will be protected by growing the prison-industrial complex, enjoy a great deal of confidence—I would say arrogance—about who they are. Ironically, it’s a threatened subjectivity, of course, but threatened by something (allegedly) outside the self. To be threatened by a sense that political work will involve personal transformation is a different kind of ego threat. The quote you’ve picked out from *Self-Transformations* is just the smallest gesture toward work I’m now doing in which I try to make this point via the language of “political spirituality.”

**MM:** *Is it possible that self-discipline and creative self-formation are the most effective forms of agency? And, if so, how might their individualistic form be translated into collective political agency? More specifically, in terms of pedagogy, is it possible to exemplify for pedagogical purposes an ethics of self-care in such a manner that it inspires collective resistance? Or, is collective agency strictly a matter of local battles that have to be conceived and fought by groups in specific situations and not according to the potentially programmatic disciplinary pronouncements of experts and authority figures? I suppose this brings back into play Fraser’s and Hartsock’s concerns, also expressed by Habermas’ charge of “cryptonormativism”—that is, Foucault cannot answer the question “why fight?”<sup>9</sup> Do you have any further comments on these concerns?*

**CJH:** I don’t know that I’ve ever claimed that “self-discipline and creative self-formation” are the most effective forms of agency, or that I’ve systematically taxonomised agency in a way that would justify this claim. Actually I find it a bit hard to get interested, philosophically speaking, in the more abstract debates about agency where such arguments would be made, and I don’t think this is just a matter of intellectual focus. It has to do with my method, and its sense that working through examples (in writing) and trying out strategies (in political life) is where we discover and create the forms and limits of our agency. In a short interview I can’t set out a bunch of such examples for you, although I think I’ve given some pointers in describing the work I’m doing now. If one thinks like this, then agency can by definition never be an individual matter; it just makes no sense to talk about what I can do without reference to my intersubjective constitution as well as my participation in shared interventions in politics. What agency is will be discovered through political activity, not prior to it (or independent of it). I think of agency as a practice, rather than a state—in the same way Foucault talks about freedom, and obviously these two terms are closely tied. Does it have any epistemic or political traction, on this view, for an “expert” to make a “programmatic pronouncement” about what our agency might consist in? Not really. Sometimes when we act politically it’s useful to apply a little hard thinking to our self-conception, for sure. For example, I was talking with my students about some ways we might embrace aspects of femininity while also challenging gender oppression. The view that doing “what you want” (we were talking about dodgy practices like cosmetic surgery) is just OK and that we needn’t think about how we are constituted through norms even as we resist them when they stop us doing “what we

---

<sup>9</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1990), 284.

want” still has some popularity! But of course concepts of false consciousness (from Marxism), *assujettissement* (from the tradition in which Foucault writes), denial (from psychoanalysis) still have to be dealt with—as very practical matters that influence our collective action no less than our individual self-understanding. Why fight? Well, as I’ve said, I’m more comfortable with normative commitments than Foucault and I think we fight because as members of groups on whom normalization works in particularly aggressive and constraining ways we find ourselves held back from meaningful self-government qua determination of our own shared lives and the creation of conditions of possibility for becoming new kinds of subjects. I don’t see why this claim should belong to the liberals—in the sense that it has to be accompanied by the full panoply of liberal metaphysics and politics.

**MM:** *Challenges to normalization and the programmatic have taken many different forms in your work—for example, the Blizzard teaching award you and your colleagues received for your ‘supersection’ Introduction to Philosophy course. Most would imagine that large classes lead to poor student ex-periences, yet you managed to make philosophy, one of the most individualistic subjects, effective in a large section. Was your experiment in this kind of teaching influenced by the same ideas you bring to your investigation of the effects of institutionalized power and forms of normalization such as cosmetic surgery and dieting? Also, are there any other ideas you have regarding the application of normalizing techniques for growing capabilities among individual students in larger classes and in other pedagogical contexts?*

**CJH:** When I was co-teaching that very big first-year class I was in charge of training graduate teaching assistants, and I noticed that the more pedagogically sympathetic among them had fallen prey to the mistaken belief that disciplinary power is only oppressive. They thought that teaching without structure or rules was “liberating,” or that imposing their beliefs on students was “wrong.” They couldn’t see the enabling aspects of being a disciplined and disciplining teacher, which do include, I think, a certain clarity about what is expected of students and what is actually going on in the classroom. The point is not to avoid structure in teaching but to make that structure explicit; the point is not to pretend you don’t have beliefs but rather to make them visible and model challenging and refining your own positions. So I think the emphasis Foucault places on the Janus-headed nature of disciplinary power is quite useful, perhaps especially when you have to teach a big lecture class that involves a lot of organizational skills and needs “leadership.”

Other aspects of teaching I just find repulsive from any Foucauldian perspective. When you are grading 250 people you see how they organise themselves around a bell curve, and how the top end of the curve is called an “A” and the bottom is called a “D.” Then you hear students saying things like “I am an A student, how could I get a B-?” and sometimes you have to say, “the average student in this class will get a B- so this is not surprising.” Finally, you see someone who was perhaps once at the top of a completely different population struggling to redefine their entire self-identity around this new population, and you wonder, “why are we playing this particular game?” Normalizing judgment is all about telling people who they are relative to a changing peer group, fostering the practice of self-judgment and judgment of others in ways that require constant rethinking, but often masquerade under

essentialising rhetorics. It is this kind of observation that led me to experiment much more self-consciously with contemplative practices in education, including practices that cultivate detachment from outcomes and from destructive self-identities, while still increasing students' capacities. In fact, I've written a paper about this with a couple of my students, now published in the journal *Teaching Philosophy*.<sup>10</sup>

**MM:** *Do you have any other ideas on how Foucault's ideas can be put to work in the classroom?*

**CJH:** I think that Foucault's work invites reflection on many pedagogical aspects of *assujettissement*: might it be a more honest way to teach if we were explicit about the struggles we have with disciplining our students and turning them into certain kinds of subject? When I'm teaching I often talk through my pedagogical methods in this voice, partly because I'm a scholar of Foucault, to point out how (for example) in insisting on certain kinds of skill development to certain standards I am both enabling students to do certain things (ask a good critical question, perhaps) while constraining and punishing them (giving them a D for doing it badly, or refusing to accept interpretive dance as an alternative assignment). I am more self-conscious than ever about how teaching feminism in particular requires that many students be talked out of a popular ersatz liberalism that they find deeply seductive, but that the process of learning alternative political languages is profoundly personally unmooring for students. In the relatively sheltered haven of the university feminist theory class I find it easy to get irritated with students for being so "conservative" but when I ask more careful questions I often discover that students are viewed as politically radical by their peers or family, and have been ostracised for espousing views that seem terribly mild-mannered from inside my world. Some kind of commitment to the view that norms are constitutive makes this seem like a pressing ethical problem: we are not just showing students how to be more free by opening their eyes to feminist politics, but rather we may be undoing the kinds of people they are without providing anything much of an alternative. This provokes (for them as for me in writing) significant anger, fear, and doubt, and thus poses a dilemma that I suspect Chemistry professors don't worry about nearly as much. Finally, studying Foucault on bio-power and the political body has made me much bolder about introducing bodies to teaching in practical rather than abstract ways: I once taught a course that combined physical movement (mostly yoga) with reading and discussion, and I'm interested in the ways that the built environment of education, our relation to space and movement, and our political possibilities are played out through embodied practices. It's quite odd to teach *Discipline and Punish* or *History of Sexuality* and discuss the examples from education that litter those texts without thinking about how we as students and teachers are rendered "docile" and how we might make bodily *assujettissement* more perspicuous. I think in my new project—which is closely linked to pedagogical questions—I will want to make my brand of Foucauldian work more phenomenological as well as more explicitly practical when it comes to teaching.

---

<sup>10</sup> Natalie Helberg, Cressida J. Heyes, and Jaclyn Rohel, "Thinking Through the Body: Philosophy, Yoga, and Physical Education," *Teaching Philosophy* 32, no. 3 (2009): 263-84.

**MM:** *In your own attempts to break away from the images, pictures, and assorted social pressures that operate as normalizing forces on the body—that is, which break what you refer to as the “match demanded between aesthetic and proprioceptive” [ST 131]—you write about your experience with yoga. Is this an extension of your Foucauldian exhortation that one develop greater humility about one’s will to truth and your concern about the implications this has for feminist philosophy? I am asking, in part, because I’d like to know more about how your yoga practice fits with your scholarly work.*

**CJH:** I wrote about yoga because I was doing a lot of it while writing the book, and because it was the one place where I felt I was really practicing in a transformative way—as opposed to writing about what it would be, hypothetically, to practice. (Of course this also shows how politically isolated I have become, working in the academy and living in a very conservative part of Canada, but that’s another story.) The new project I’m working on will centre on alternative somatic practices and their relation to politics. Interestingly, after finishing *Self-Transformations* I tried to move my practice to the “next level,” by taking a lengthy retreat, and I found myself getting injured very early on. I kept on going with my injury and then got more injuries. I really pushed myself into a place of serious physical and mental pain, and then when the retreat ended I felt I never wanted to do yoga ever again. I took six months off from practice and spent a lot of it at my chiropractor’s office! I had a lot of shame and guilt about that experience; I’ve always found it very psychologically difficult to maintain a regular solo yoga practice, and just quitting in that way at my stage felt profoundly hypocritical as well as like a personal failure to follow through on my own projects. I had just explained to everyone publicly for the first time how potentially transformative yoga is for somaesthetics, and then suddenly I hated it! That experience made me interested in the ways that any practice can be co-opted by habits we’ve learned under normalisation, and in the kind of necessary supporting framework for self-transformative practices that might make this less likely to happen. Anyone thinking about how somatic practices (yoga, but also the Feldenkrais method, martial arts, meditation techniques, and so on) are political is going to have to confront the problem of how these practices can be brought into political shared space and given a more explicitly intersubjective and socially transformative cast, and so that’s the direction of my thought nowadays.

**MM:** *Self-Transformations concludes on a rather mystical note, I think, when you say of your yoga practice, “I don’t really know what to say about this experience, philosophically, without delving into spiritual and psychological literatures that take me in an unanticipated and unknown direction.” [ST 132] Do you have any further thoughts on this?*

**CJH:** By the time I got to the end of *Self-Transformations*—and I always leave the conclusion (and preface) to the very end of the process—I was really amazed by how far away from the beginning I was. That sentence you quote is, among other things, my way of saying “I’ve got really surprisingly eccentric and if I say anything else I’ll start sounding like Khalil Gibran. Better stop now.” I thought it worth just remarking on the way my own writing life exemplifies my philosophical claim. Absolutely there is mystical experience behind the sentiment, but I just didn’t want to take that experience and turn it into philosophical fodder. In this I am



reminded of some of Wittgenstein's earlier aphorisms when he says that "it's not *how* the world is that is mystical, but *that* it is."<sup>11</sup> For him the mystical was unspeakable; rather, the mystical reveals itself.

**MM:** *If one is constrained and enabled by normalization, then how can one practice parrhesia? Ladelle McWhorter asks this, I believe, with her question, "how can I affirm the 'truth' of my normalized... (homo)sexual 'identity' while at the same time I refuse the cancellation of freedom and the foreclosure of becoming that sexual identities have produced?"<sup>12</sup> You offer this question in Self-Transformations as an entry into your reflections on speaking about dieting from the "contradictory position" of critical observer and participant. [ST 66] In what ways is it possible to speak the truth from such a position? Does one hazard becoming trapped in a kind of conflict of interest such that the truth is obscured?*

**CJH:** I don't think of questions of objectivity and truth using the model that the phrase "conflict of interest" implies—at least not in the context of this kind of example. We all "have" a normalized identity, and so there is really no alternative than to speak from "within the position." Those who think they can be *disinterested* are typically over-invested in dominant identities that they haven't understood *as* identities—a familiar enough methodological and political claim, I think. Of course, lots of people don't really care about dieting and weight all that much (which one cannot say about sexual identity—in part, as I suggest, because it has a longer history), but that's not exactly the point. The point is that the politically significant subject-position is that of the normalized individual who nonetheless has an ambivalent, critical relation to structures of normalization. Who wants to hear from a feminist who thinks that dieting is just an example of silly false consciousness? How patronising, and how epistemically uninteresting! The place from which meaningful *parrhesia* can happen is the place where we are cognizant of our own history, and recognise it as our "truth," yet continue as individuals to resist the specific practices that want to draw us ever-deeper into an over-determined, painfully normalized future. In writing about something as mundane—and, frankly, abject—as Weight Watchers, I wanted to show that one could *want* to lose weight, could *want* the assistance of a disciplinary technology, and yet could also learn from the experience in ways that exceed and challenge its stated goals, its ideology, its practices, and its mechanisms for instilling docility. I find it very interesting that many people say that reading my work has put them off joining a weight loss group. Yet my work is, among feminist critiques, probably the most accepting in its analysis, emphasising the positive, capacity-enhancing aspects of such groups. This shows, I think, that false consciousness models (for example), while they have their moments, have very little political traction for most women.

**MM:** *At the end of Self-Transformations you mention and then leave open a number of interesting projects, questions and concepts—"somaesthetics," [ST 123ff] for instance. Could you remind us of the*

---

<sup>11</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logicus-Philosophicus*, trans. Daniel Kolak (Mountain View, California: Mayfield, 1998), 6.44.

<sup>12</sup> Ladelle McWhorter, *Bodies and Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 180.

*line of thought that leads you to describe “somatic” askeses as a complement to the agential possibilities you explore? Have you pursued this work since writing Self-Transformations?*

**CJH:** I have been developing a couple of papers in which I talk about the gap that exists for me between teaching philosophy of the body, and teaching yoga. It’s so revealing the way we talk endlessly in the humanities about “the body” (even that phrase is telling) but academics are, by and large, an incredibly somatically dissociated bunch! It’s very rare in a humanities classroom that anyone will undertake a self-consciously physical activity aimed at illuminating some intellectual point. We are physical beings only in the un-self-conscious sense that we sit at our desks and (usually) use our mouths to speak and our hands to write. Lots of political theorists claim interest in “the body,” and Foucault does a better job than most, but even in his work I don’t think there’s much sense of how embodied experience matters in the world—for reasons that have to do, of course, with his emphasis on the structural determination of subjectivity. So I find all this stuff really rather removed from lived experience even as it purports to be accounting for it. On the other hand, there is a whole world of “alternative” somatians out there—from Reichian therapists to Pilates instructors to aikido masters—surprisingly many of whom manage to get by with no articulated theoretical vision of the politics of the body. There are also a lot of bizarre, artifactual folk beliefs about body and character or psychosomatics that circulate outside academia that represent themselves as “theories” by which one might organise one’s life. So I’m trying to read about and practice some of these very different things in order to create a somaesthetic space that can talk in an intelligently theoretical way about embodied practices and can show why a practice-oriented physicality might be central to philosophy as an art of living.

**MM:** *You write that “Foucault consistently resists any theory of the subject in favour of a pragmatic recognition that making power more flexible and multivalent will open up new possibilities for thinking and acting—a project we are already tacitly inclined to consider politically valuable. Whether this move can ground a philosophically adequate account of freedom is a question I cannot do justice to here.” [ST 118] Do you have any thoughts on how an account of freedom might be grounded even in the face of scepticism, or how to support a refusal to accept normalized trajectories so we can, as you quote McWhorter, “begin to experience ourselves as other than what we have been made to be?” [ST 119]*

**CJH:** This is, I think, the other big question for my current work. I was clear in *Self-Transformations* (I hope) that not all possibilities for acting are *a priori* valuable; rather it’s the way the technologies of the self I theorised tend to close down our possibilities at the price of implicating us in certain forms of suffering that renders us unfree. I’m not going to argue that suffering is always bad, or even that suffering is readily identifiable as such, but I guess my next work is going to look at the relation between freedom and suffering. I’d like to say—between freedom and joy, but that is going to take a bit more empirical research!

Cressida J. Heyes  
Canada Research Chair in Philosophy of Gender and Sexuality  
Professor of Philosophy

Adjunct Professor of Political Science  
Department of Philosophy, Assiniboia Hall 3-70  
University of Alberta  
Edmonton, T6G 2E5 Alberta  
CANADA  
[cressida.heyese@ualberta.ca](mailto:cressida.heyese@ualberta.ca)

Michael McGarry  
Theory and Policy Studies  
OISE/UT  
6<sup>th</sup> Floor, 252 Bloor Street West  
Toronto, M5S 1V6 Ontario  
Canada  
[michael.mcgarry@utoronto.ca](mailto:michael.mcgarry@utoronto.ca)