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## INTRODUCTION

### ***Foucault Studies* Special Issue: Foucault and Feminism, September 2013**

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#### **Foucault and Feminist Philosophy Now**

Michel Foucault died nearly thirty years ago, in 1984. He enjoyed widespread intellectual celebrity in France, and, towards the end of his life, in the United States, but his influence on the emerging field of feminist studies was minimal until well after his death. This is noteworthy only because of his overt queerness and engagement with radical politics during his life; Foucault quickly became the most influential twentieth century commentator on the politics of sexuality, yet his grasp of *feminist* politics seems tenuous, and his overt pronouncements, as well as the tacit implications of his writing, have long been labelled sexist. On the other hand, there is by now an enormous literature that takes up the implications of his work for feminism, without worrying too much about whether Foucault would have approved. The field has matured, in other words, and still has potential: the relatively long delay between Foucault's death and the publication of his lectures (and various ephemeral essays, speeches, and interviews) as well as the even longer interval in getting all this work translated into English means that the reception of his ideas in 2013 still feels ongoing, open to debate, and unresolved.

In this context, the time seemed ripe for a special issue of *Foucault Studies* devoted to the interface of feminist theory and the ongoing interpretation of Foucault's *oeuvre*. The five articles published here represent only a small part of this work. They discuss a range of issues, from Foucault's potential to motivate and undergird a queer feminism, to his incipient critique of neoliberalism, to his last work on the ethics of self and desubjectivation. In this introduction, I very briefly lay out the history of Foucault's relation to feminist scholarship and politics, and survey the various strands of recent literature. My focus—and that of the articles—is with Foucault's relation to the methods and questions of feminist philosophy. This emphasis has proved to be an interesting one. While the essays here do discuss some specific examples of feminist problems and interventions (the economy of sex work, or how to respond to sexual violence, for example) they are by and large concerned with the deeper conceptual bases of Foucault's corpus. Rather than featuring a slogan or fragment from Foucault's enormous output and then running an empirical analysis that would have been much

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Chloë Taylor for the original invitation to guest edit this special issue, as well as eight anonymous reviewers, the contributing authors, and everyone at *Foucault Studies* (especially Jyoti Puri, supervising editor) for their generous assistance.

the same without it—as scholars across the humanities and social sciences have been prone to do—the essays here ask carefully after his larger ideas and how they cohere with feminist theoretical goals. They ask, for example, whether feminist thinkers should fully embrace a project of desubjectivation, or should retain a commitment to norms of reason; what form of critique would enable us to reverse the transposition of social justice into a realm of economics-as-truth; or how Foucault’s ethics represents a form of queer thinking. In doing so they may be relatively inattentive to particulars: in which nation states or economic sectors is the critique of neoliberalism most powerful? How do the complex genealogies of postcolonial and indigenous subjects with regard to norms of reason influence any feminist account? My hope, then, is that this special issue will encourage more serious scholars of Foucault to variegate, specify, and challenge these analyses, bringing the interface of Foucault studies and feminist studies into a new and exciting phase.

### **Foucault the (Anti-)Feminist**

Foucault had relatively little to say about the second-wave feminism that was one of the key political movements of his time. To give one of not many examples, he was asked in a late interview that focused on his sexual politics whether he endorsed the distinctions between “male and female homosexuality” made by “American” “radical feminists”—the different physical acts that characterize the two forms of sexual encounter, and the proposition that “lesbians seem in the main the want from other women what one finds in stable heterosexual relationships: support, affection, long-term commitment, and so on.” In his initial response Foucault “[Laughs],” then says, “all I can do is explode with laughter.” The puzzled interviewer follows up: “Is the question funny in a way I don’t see, or stupid, or both?” Foucault replies again:

Well, it is certainly not stupid, but I find it very amusing, perhaps for reasons I couldn’t give even if I wanted to. What I will say is that the distinction offered doesn’t seem to be convincing, in terms of what I observe in the behavior of lesbian women. Beyond this, one would have to speak about the different pressures experienced by men and women who are coming out or are trying to make a life for themselves as homosexuals. I don’t think that radical feminists in other countries are likely to see these questions quite in the way you ascribe to such women in American intellectual circles.<sup>2</sup>

Foucault is cryptic here. On the one hand, his response could be taken as a sympathetic nod to the diversity of lesbian experience, the traditionalism embedded in the question, and the way experiences are mutually constituted by gendered relations of power. On the other, it could be read as ignorance of the postulates of contemporary radical feminism, and a denial of the salience of femininity as a ubiquitous (if variable) structuring subjectivity. That the former interpretation is not only charitable but correct is supported by Foucault’s more thoughtful statement that:

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, “Sexual Choice, Sexual Act,” [1982] in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth* (New York: New Press, 1997), 145.

The real strength of the women's liberation movements is not that of having laid claim to the specificity of their sexuality and the rights pertaining to it, but that they have actually departed from the discourse conducted within the apparatuses of sexuality... Ultimately, [they have led to] a veritable movement of desexualization, a displacement effected in relation to the sexual centering of the problem, formulating the demand for forms of culture, discourse, language, and so on, which are no longer part of that rigid assignation and pinning-down to their sex which they had initially in some sense been politically obliged to accept in order to make themselves heard.<sup>3</sup>

Here Foucault clearly praises feminism for identifying and undermining the forced sexual subjectivity within a forced discourse of sexuality that was (and, in some ways, remains) a pressing political problem.

There are many moments when Foucault speaks like this, and not only in his comments on gender. Often one can sense him juggling competing claims, and pondering the political implications of making any sort of definitive pronouncements. It is partly for this reason that Foucault's relation to feminist politics has remained contested for so long. This contestation takes its sharpest form in engagement with Foucault's remarks on sexual violence—and especially sex crimes—which for many years were taken to be the most overt form of his political incompatibility with feminism. In a 1977 essay written for the Parisian anti-psychiatry group *Collectif Change*, Foucault famously stated that “when one punishes rape one should be punishing physical violence and nothing but that. And to say that it is nothing more than an act of aggression: that there is no difference, in principle, between sticking one's fist into someone's face or one's penis into their sex.”<sup>4</sup> His blunt remark emerges, of course, from his then-recently published critique of the repressive hypothesis in *History of Sexuality Volume 1*, as well as his earlier work on madness and the rise of psychiatry as a forensic strategy of power. Foucault believed that state legislation of sexuality and the interventions of the criminal justice system into “sex crimes” would only further entrench normalizing judgments and practices of domination. While violence *simpliciter*—whatever that is—should be punished (and it is not clear why he makes this claim in this quote), to imbue sex crimes with some special affect, somatic implication, or political consequence, was, he thought, to contribute further to the hold of disciplinary power over our bodies, the sex/sexuality of which such power had helped to form and limit.

In keeping with this position, Foucault also endorsed the decriminalization of consensual sexual acts, including between adults and minors. In a 1978 radio interview (alongside Guy Hocquenghem and Jean Danet), he defended his view, arguing that psychiatric and judicial engagement with sex crimes risked creating the very kind of deviant subjects it purported to classify and punish, while treating children's sexuality paternalistically. These “dangerous

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<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh,” [1977] in Colin Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 219-220. The first quote is from an interview conducted in 1982, while the second is from 1977. Thus another way of reading them is to note that Foucault was perhaps increasingly exasperated with under-informed interviewers who asked him to speculate about women's sexuality and liberation.

<sup>4</sup> Later published in English as “Confinement, Psychiatry, Prison,” in Lawrence Kritzman (ed.), *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984* (New York: Routledge, 1988). Quote is from page 99.

individuals” would then be seen as having a generically dangerous sexuality; the pedophile is the main example, but Foucault is also concerned about the too-quick assumption of an equivalence between the perversion of homosexuality and that of pedophilia, as well as the state’s homophobic eagerness to prosecute gay men who had sex with boys just below the age of consent.<sup>5</sup> Throughout this period of his career Foucault was particularly interested in thinking critically about adult-child sexual relationships—a formation he also explored in his treatment of the 1867 case of Charles Jouy in *History of Sexuality*. Jouy, as most of us now know all too well, was described there as a “somewhat simple-minded” “farm hand” who “obtained a few caresses” from a little girl. The girl’s parents reported him to the mayor, who in turn reported him to the police, and thence to a judge. Jouy ended up the subject of medical experts who wrote a report on his physiognomy and psychology and shut him up in a psychiatric hospital: “a pure object of medicine and knowledge.” “What is the significant thing about this story?” Foucault asks. “The pettiness of it all; the fact that this everyday occurrence in the life of village sexuality, these inconsequential bucolic pleasures, could become, from a certain time, the object not only of a collective intolerance but of a judicial action, a medical intervention, a careful clinical examination, and an entire theoretical elaboration.”<sup>6</sup>

From these best-known moments it is probably already clear that Foucault was in some conflict—both explicit and tacit—with his feminist contemporaries. As early as May 1978, Monique Plaza, in the journal *Questions Féministes*, sharply criticizes Foucault’s remarks on rape:

What exactly is rape? ...*Rape is an oppressive practice exercised by a (social) man against a (social) woman...* If men rape women, it is precisely because they are socially women, or... because they are “the sex”—i.e. they have bodies that men have already appropriated by exercising the “local tactic” of nameless violence. Rape is essentially sexual because it rests on the *very social* difference of the sexes.

Therefore, using the reversals and the paradoxes Foucault likes so much, I would say: If someone sticks his fist in someone else’s face, or his penis in their sex, there’s a difference: the difference between the sexes. Men rape women to the extent that they belong to the class of men, which appropriates for itself the bodies of women. They rape those they have learned to think of as their property, i.e. those individuals of the other sex class, the class of women (which, I repeat, may also contain biological men).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This interview is published in English as “Sexual Morality and the Law,” in Lawrence Kritzman (ed.), *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge* [1976] (New York: Random House, 1978), 31-32.

<sup>7</sup> Monique Plaza, “Nos dommages et leurs interest,” *Questions Féministes* 3, May (1978), 93-103, 97, my translation. Italics in original. See also the comments on Plaza and more ambivalent treatment of Foucault in Bidy Martin, “Feminism, Criticism, and Foucault,” *New German Critique*, No. 27, Autumn (1982), 3-30, as well as Cahill’s reconsideration of the same issue in Ann J. Cahill, “Foucault, Rape, and the Construction of the Feminine Body,” *Hypatia* 15:1 (2000), 43-63.

Fast forward eighteen years (and through several less well known feminist discussions of related issues<sup>8</sup> to Linda Alcoff's widely cited "Dangerous Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Pedophilia."<sup>9</sup> Alcoff takes up Foucault's defence of consensual sex involving minors and his apparent trivialization of the girl's experience in the Jouy case, to argue that he inconsistently places (male, adult) pleasure outside of discourse, as a resistant force against domination. In the latter part of the essay she also offers a complex reading of the US context, highlighting many subtleties of the dynamics of exploitation, and showing how social organization (contingently) makes sexual contact with children into damaging abuse, especially when combined with "the phenomenology of sex itself, which involves uniquely sensitive, vulnerable, and psychically important areas of the body, a fact that persists across cultural differences."<sup>10</sup>

Alcoff's reading was based on the France-Culture interview and *History of Sexuality*; only in 2003 were Foucault's 1974-5 lectures published in English translation under the title *Abnormal*. In these lectures, as Jana Sawicki points out in her review, Foucault discusses a second sexual encounter between Jouy and the now-named Sophie Adam:

Jouy dragged young Sophie Adam (unless it was Sophie Adam who dragged Charles Jouy) into the ditch alongside the road to Nancy. There, something happened: almost rape, perhaps. Anyway, Jouy very decently gives four *sous* to the little girl who immediately runs to the fair to buy some roasted almonds.<sup>11</sup>

As Sawicki correctly predicted, this disclosure—arguably minimized again in the lecture but tellingly omitted altogether from *History of Sexuality*—has fueled the flames of this controversy rather than dousing them.<sup>12</sup> Chloë Taylor considers all of Foucault's treatments of violence and gender (including the matricide Pierre Rivière) to argue in great detail (and with full reference to his more recently translated texts) that "some of the aspects of existence that Fou-

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<sup>8</sup> Martin; Winnifred Woodhull, "Sexuality, Power, and the Question of Rape," in Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, (eds.), *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 167-176; Kate Soper, "Productive Contradictions," in Caroline Ramazanoglu (ed.), *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 29-50; Laura Hengehold, "An Immodest Proposal: Foucault, Hysterization, and the 'Second Rape,'" *Hypatia* 9:3 (1994), 88-107.

<sup>9</sup> Linda Martin Alcoff, "Dangerous Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Pedophilia," in Susan Hekman (ed.), *Re-Reading the Canon: Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1996), 99-136; see also Linda Martin Alcoff, "Phenomenology, Poststructuralism, and Feminist Theory on the Concept of Experience," in Linda Fisher and Leslie Embree (eds.), *Feminist Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000), 39-56.

<sup>10</sup> Alcoff, "Dangerous Pleasures," 127-8.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975*, edited by Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni, translated by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2003), 292. In the original French, the phrase translated in the Picador edition as "almost rape, perhaps," is "moitié viol, peut-être." It is elsewhere translated, including by Kelly Ball in her 2013 article of the same title, as "more or less raped." See Kelly Ball, "'More or Less Raped': Foucault, Causality, and Feminist Critiques of Sexual Violence," *philoSOPHIA: A Journal of Continental Feminism* 3:1 (2013), 52-68.

<sup>12</sup> Jana Sawicki, "Review of Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975*," *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*: <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/23977/?id=1581>, 2005.

cault fails to see in his dogged focus on what he reads as agonistic medical-legal battles and power relations between men include the family, gender relations, victimization of women and children, suffering, and love.”<sup>13</sup> This is a nuanced treatment, but others are more partisan, and the feminist pendulum may be swinging back to Foucault’s side: Holly Henderson suggests that Foucault’s account of rape as violence could inform a feminist account of rape prevention<sup>14</sup>; Johanna Oksala has attempted to recuperate Foucault’s account of (sexual) experience from Alcoff’s critique (while acknowledging his “male and adult pattern of epistemic arrogance”<sup>15</sup>); and Kelly Ball argues contra Alcoff “that [her] practice of making judgments about sexual violence relies upon a concept of causality that is an extension of the modern framework of power-knowledge-pleasure,” as Foucault is trying to show us through his ambivalent and inconclusive repetitions of the Jouy-Adam case.<sup>16</sup>

I could go on, but suffice to say that this extended conversation between Foucault and his feminist interlocutors has lasted more than thirty years because of the complexity and (unfortunately) persistent topicality of political analyses of sexuality, power, gender, and violence.<sup>17</sup> It is a conversation that places Foucault’s actual words in relationship with various forms of feminism, and gives me some confidence that his overall political analyses remain salient—perhaps more than ever—even if he is sometimes glosses over the experience of women and girls in his specific examples. The other genre of feminist critique to which Foucault has been subject is equally familiar: while sometimes trivializing the particulars of feminine subjectivities, more often he simply generalizes from his genealogies of populations of men. As Sandra Bartky famously argued in her germinal essay “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,”

Foucault treats the body throughout as if it were one, as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ and as if men and women bore the same relationship to the characteristic institutions of modern life. Where is the account of the disciplinary practices that engender the “docile bodies” of women, bodies more docile than the bodies of men? ...To overlook the forms of subjection that engender the feminine body is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom those disciplines have been imposed. Hence, even though a liberatory note is sounded in Foucault’s critique of power, his analysis as a whole reproduces that sexism which is endemic throughout Western political theory.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Chloë Taylor, “Infamous Men, Dangerous Individuals, and Violence Against Women: Feminist Readings of Foucault,” in *A Companion to Foucault*, edited by Christopher Falzon, Timothy O’Leary, and Jana Sawicki (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), 419-435, 433.

<sup>14</sup> Holly Henderson, “Feminism, Foucault, and Rape: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention,” *Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law, and Justice*, 22 (2007), 225-253.

<sup>15</sup> Johanna Oksala, “Sexual Experience: Foucault, Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Hypatia* 25:1 (2011), 2-17, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Ball.

<sup>17</sup> See Adrian Howe, *Sex, Violence, and Crime: Foucault and the ‘Man’ Question* (New York: Routledge-Cavendish, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Sandra Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,” in *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 62-82, 65.

Two other texts from the early 1990's, which likewise challenge Foucault's sexism, simultaneously, as Bartky does, extrapolate his work into feminist territory. Note that Jana Sawicki's early book is titled *Disciplining Foucault*<sup>19</sup>, as if Foucault were an errant schoolboy, while an early collection of critical feminist essays on Foucault is called *Up Against Foucault*<sup>20</sup>, as if he were a boxing opponent.<sup>21</sup> At least among serious scholars of Foucault, debate has moved on from the tired questions of whether his "postmodernism" is compatible with feminist positions, whether he was a political sellout in turning to ethics at the end of his life, and whether his refusal of normative or programmatic statements precludes him being a responsible interlocutor.<sup>22</sup> But where has it gone?

### Recent Feminist Scholarship on Foucault

Although he is often represented as an antagonist for feminists in this earlier literature, it was always the case that Foucault's work was appropriated for feminist purposes without either close or obedient reading. Judith Butler famously offers us a Foucault re-read through, at various points, ordinary language philosophy and psychoanalysis, taking up his antifoundationalist position on sexuality and discourse and his methods of critique, while reinserting the performative significance of speech-acts and "the psychic life of power."<sup>23</sup> Foucault has been taken to be a useful commentator for feminist thinking on psychopathology, gender, and culture<sup>24</sup>; the family<sup>25</sup>; on racial formations and gender<sup>26</sup>; on gender and sexuality in the context of

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<sup>19</sup> Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> Caroline Ramazanoglu (ed.), *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> Other collections of feminist essays on Foucault include Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, (eds.), *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988); Susan Hekman (ed.), *Re-Reading the Canon: Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1996); Dianna Taylor and Karen Vintges (eds.), *Feminism and The Final Foucault* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> For discussions situating and engaging these questions, see Margaret McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004); Amy Allen, *The Politics of Our Selves: Power, Autonomy, and Gender in Contemporary Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Dianna Taylor, "Normativity and Normalization," *Foucault Studies* 7 (2009), 45-63.

<sup>23</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Studies in Subjection* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); Judith Butler, "What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue," in David Ingram (ed.), *The Political: Blackwell Readings in Continental Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> Susan Bordo, "Anorexia Nervosa: Psychopathology as the Crystallization of Culture," in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 139-164; Cressida Heyes, "Diagnosing Culture: Body Dysmorphic Disorder and Cosmetic Surgery," *Body and Society*, 15:4 (2009), 73-93; Lynn Huffer, *Mad For Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Cressida J. Heyes and Chloë Taylor, "Between Disciplinary Power and Care of the Self: A Dialogue on Foucault and the Psychological Sciences," *PhaenEx* 5:2 (2010), 179-209.

<sup>25</sup> Ellen Feder, *Family Bonds: Genealogies of Race and Gender* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Chloë Taylor, "Foucault and Familial Power," *Hypatia* 27:1 (2012), 201-218.

<sup>26</sup> Feder; Ladelle McWhorter, *Racism and Sexism in Anglo-America: A Genealogy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

(post-)colonialism<sup>27</sup>; and as a thinker whose political biography as it relates to his method as a philosopher of practices might inform a related, feminist approach.<sup>28</sup>

If there are any trends in the last decade of this scholarship, they crystallize around three themes: Foucault's account of subjectivity and of desubjectivation as it relates to his methods of genealogy and critique, and especially to his last (and less well explored) work on ethics<sup>29</sup>; reevaluations of his work on sexuality and the attempt to delineate a "queer feminism;"<sup>30</sup> and the growing conversation around Foucault's lectures on neoliberalism and their relation to biopolitics.<sup>31</sup> Of these, the latter likely needs the most contextualization, not least since Foucault has only recently been read as an economic commentator. For example, in her 2003 critique, Nancy Fraser suggests that "if we now see ourselves as standing on the brink of a new, postfordist epoch of globalization"<sup>32</sup> then we need to reconsider Foucault's corpus (especially the middle works that have been most influential in political thought) as grasping the logic of social regulation—like the Owl of Minerva—on the cusp of a major transformation in economic systems:

From this perspective, it is significant that his great works of social analysis...were written in the 1960s and 1970s, just as the OECD countries abandoned Bretton Woods, the international financial framework that undergirded national Keynesianism and thus made possible the welfare state. In other words, Foucault mapped the contours of the disciplinary society just as the ground was being cut out from under it. And although it is only now with hindsight becoming clear, this was also the moment at which discipline's successor was strug-

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<sup>27</sup> Laura Ann Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); and see Robert Nichols, "Postcolonial Studies and the Discourse of Foucault: Survey of a Field of Problematization," *Foucault Studies* 9 (2010), 111-144.

<sup>28</sup> Ladelle McWhorter, *Bodies and Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Mariana Valverde, "Experience and Truth-Telling in a Post-humanist World: A Foucauldian Contribution to Feminist Ethical Reflections," in Taylor and Vintges (ed.), 67-90; Cressida J. Heyes, *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>29</sup> E.g. Dianna Taylor and Karen Vintges; Johanna Oksala, "Anarchic Bodies: Foucault and the Feminist Question of Experience," *Hypatia* 19:4 (2004), 97-119; Oksala, "Sexual Experience."

<sup>30</sup> See Shannon Winnubst, *Queering Freedom* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Huffer; and the articles in the special issue of *Foucault Studies* 14, 2012 (on Foucault and queer theory, guest edited by Shannon Winnubst and Jana Sawicki).

<sup>31</sup> See Lois McNay, "Self as Enterprise: Dilemmas of Control and Resistance in Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics*," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 26:6 (2009), 55-77; the articles in the special issue of *Foucault Studies* 6, February 2009 (on neoliberal governmentality); 2010 interview with Nancy Fraser at <http://www.againstthegrain.org/program/274/id/041516/wed-1-27-10-feminism-and-neoliberalism>; Ladelle McWhorter, "Darwin's Invisible Hand: Feminism, Reprogenetics, and Foucault's Analysis of Neoliberalism," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 48 (2010), 43-63; Andrew Dilts, "From 'Entrepreneur of the Self' to 'Care of the Self': Neo-liberal Governmentality and Foucault's Ethics," *Foucault Studies* 12 (2011), 130-146; Johanna Oksala, "Violence and Neoliberal Governmentality," *Constellations* 18:3 (2011), 474-486; and the 2012 University of Chicago seminar "Becker on Ewald on Foucault on Becker," which can be viewed at <http://vimeo.com/43984248> or downloaded in edited form at [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2142163](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2142163).

<sup>32</sup> Nancy Fraser, "From Discipline to Flexibilization? Rereading Foucault in the Shadow of Globalization," *Constellations* 10:2 (2003), 160-171.



gling to be born. The irony is plain: whether we call it postindustrial society or neoliberal globalization, a new regime oriented to “deregulation” and “flexibilization” was about to take shape just as Foucault was conceptualizing disciplinary normalization.<sup>33</sup>

It is ironic that a thinker as deeply committed to undoing our own presentism as Foucault should be vulnerable to this charge. Fraser is surely right that Foucault did not fully foresee the neoliberal turn of the 1980s or imagine its long-term consequences. Nonetheless, his untimely death in 1984 hardly makes this a reasonable expectation. Further, Foucault did speak and write insightfully and at some length on postwar neoliberalism in his 1978-9 lecture course at the Collège de France, published as *La Naissance de la Biopolitique* [*The Birth of Biopolitics*] in 2004 (2008 in English translation), which Fraser could not have read prior to making her critique.

In this series Foucault has two foci: first, on German post-war economic reconstruction, which he argues represents “a new programming of liberal governmentality,” within which the market economy became the guide of governmental action: “the problem of neo-liberalism is...how the overall exercise of political power can be modeled on the principles of a market economy. So it is not a question of freeing an empty space, but of taking the formal principles of a market economy and referring and relating them to, of projecting them on to a general art of government.”<sup>34</sup> His second focus is on the twentieth century US neo-liberalism of, most notably, Gary Becker. In Becker he identifies *homo oeconomicus*—the individual who is an entrepreneur of himself<sup>35</sup>—and who has “human capital” through a series of investments made by himself and others. Human flourishing, neoliberal proponents imply, is best supported by creating an institutional context in which each individual can best exercise his entrepreneurial capacities and make his own unfettered, rational choices. This context includes minimally restricted markets, trade, and unconstrained rights to accumulate capital. While all these remain important features of contemporary political economy, in the last forty years neoliberalism has become more a set of anti-Keynesian political and economic practices that no longer require systematic empirical or conceptual defence. While the state plays a role in developing this practice, neoliberals typically view state intervention with suspicion (at least, as we’ve seen recently, state intervention on behalf of the poor or even the middle classes. State support for the very wealthy is necessary for economic sustainability, apparently). Increasingly, political economic institutions (e.g. central banks, regulatory overseers) have been moved by neoliberals outside the realm of state control. Critics of neoliberalism have pointed out that it creates a dwindling but ever more powerful economic elite, and an ever-larger economic underclass, both within nation states and on a global level.

This history is important scene-setting both for Foucault studies now, and for the essays that follow. At first, the three themes I identified (desubjectivation and ethics, queer feminism, and neoliberalism) might seem unrelated—or, at least, directions for Foucault scholarship inspired only by the late translation of some of the lecture series. In fact, I think they are

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>34</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, edited by Michel Senellart, translated by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2008), 94, 131.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 226.

linked, and form an important indicator of the political and economic context of contemporary academic feminists working in a theoretical vein with Foucault in English. As the articles in this issue illuminate, neoliberalism renders more and more of our lives into a series of flattened, affectless quasi-economic transactions—for privileged westerners, a self-oriented but ultimately self-destroying project of cultivating our specialness and human capital in the face of ever-greater exploitation and consumerist rhetoric. In the face of this flattening and the gross material exploitation that accompanies it for more and more of us, we obviously need to reclaim radical critique of economics, bringing the zone of the politically unquestionable back into one of vigorous, democratic challenge. As part of this project, we have become more interested in critical genealogies of the subjectivities presented to us as inevitable or natural. While previous feminist commentators might have attempted to recoup notions of authenticity, such efforts now feel inflationary, as if the very idea of a feminist self comes via a new sales pitch in which we work harder, “lean in,” embrace the commodification of our bodies, and aspire only to individual success. The dangers of specifying the content of “women’s experience” (including endless recycling through the market mechanisms we were trying to question) have made many academic feminists interested in what is left of experience, and how deflating the subject might prove a useful resistance strategy (or, how more modest and immanent norms of reason or autonomy might be salvaged). Finally, one of the few areas of political life where genuinely challenging and novel understandings of self and community have emerged has been queer politics. The intrinsic challenge of “queer” to the identity political formations that struggled to be responsive to their own genealogies fits it for the task of critique. Queerness is perhaps sufficiently flexible and slippery that it both mimics and undercuts neoliberalism’s ersatz love of individual distinctiveness, while offering in its practices (such as new kinship and family forms, new ways of making and raising children, new ways of networking and creating social life, a new sexual ethics, new understandings of space and time) ways of living that resist its imperatives.

### The Special Issue

The five articles in this special issue engage Foucault’s writing throughout his life, from a critical reexamination of the significance of the *History of Madness*<sup>36</sup> for queer feminism, through the 1979 lectures on neoliberalism, to an appropriation of his late remarks on *parrhesia*. Amy Allen’s article takes up the question of whether feminists (especially those who are readers of Foucault) should reject norms of reason as part of a project of desubjectivation in the name of freedom. This challenge, she points out, has long presented feminist thinkers with a double bind. On the one hand, we can refuse reason as an “Enlightenment” ruse that has functioned through the rejection of the feminine, and risk reinforcing the long history of claims that women are irrational while losing reason’s potentially strategic and empowering functions in communicative action. On the other hand, we can posit reason as only contingently phallogocentric, and argue that feminist critics should position ourselves as within its remit—thus risking our participation in a political language always already organized around our constitutive exclusion. Allen reinterprets and updates this debate through her reading of Lynn Huffer’s

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<sup>36</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Madness* [1961] (New York: Routledge, 2006).

recent book *Mad For Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory*.<sup>37</sup> Huffer, Allen argues, remains caught in this double bind, her important and original interpretation of *History of Madness* notwithstanding. By linking madness explicitly to queerness (both historically and politically) Huffer is able to mount a queer feminist interpretation of Foucault in which he is presenting reason as a “despotic” force, freedom from which can only appear in the form of a kind of unreason, or madness. Allen offers a close reading of this aspect of Huffer’s text in the service of both showing the contemporary salience of an old ambivalence in feminist thought, and challenging Huffer’s Foucault. Instead, Allen articulates a Foucault who implicitly, and more soberly, advises feminists that we practice critique with regard to those norms of reason in which we have no choice but to be implicated.

Three of the five essays engage directly with Foucault on neoliberalism. Johanna Oksala, in “Feminism and Neoliberal Governmentality,” argues that socialist feminist critiques of poststructuralism as an ineffective tool for challenging neoliberalism fail to understand Foucault’s distinctive contribution. Tracing leftist critiques of poststructuralism as overly concerned with language, focused at the level of the individual, and unable to provide structural analyses of late capitalism, Oksala responds with a defence of Foucault. His 1979 lectures provide, she argues, a convincing account of neoliberal governmentality that places its roots in the early self-proclaimed science of economics. By showing how specifying a claim as “economic” transposes it from a discourse of justice to one of truth, and how the realm of the economic has gradually expanded into the social and political, Oksala’s Foucault is able to show how neoliberal governmentality represents itself as outside politics and undercuts modes of political objection (including feminist critique). A key part of expanding the domain of the economic is the construction of a neoliberal subject: one of the ways that structural feminist analyses are undercut, Oksala argues, is through the constitution of a feminine neoliberal individual who is rationally self-interested, maximizes her own utility, and makes free choices—primarily through consumer purchasing, untrammelled heterosexual expression, and competitive and self-interested economic behaviour. Reading Foucault can teach us to more effectively unpack the tension between the imposition of unrealistic and oppressive norms onto women, and our constitution through (and even embrace of) those norms. Oksala briefly concludes with the example of sex work, to show how a Foucauldian-feminist approach can avoid capitulating to neoliberal ontology by viewing sex work solely as a set of market transactions, without falling back on a human rights discourse that cannot grasp the genealogy of the prostitute.

Ladelle McWhorter also addresses the implications of Foucault’s thinking for feminist critiques of neoliberalism, but taking a different tack. She argues that Foucault’s account of *domination* is sufficiently similar to feminist accounts of *oppression* at least to make the two initially comparable, making her case through readings of Marilyn Frye and Iris Marion Young’s classic analyses. She goes on to show that these structural analyses are paradigmatically incompatible with Friedrich von Hayek’s libertarianism, according to which “oppression” can only be understood as acts of direct coercion between individuals. This position has received extraordinary uptake within contemporary neoliberal economic regimes, discrediting (rather

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<sup>37</sup> Huffer.

than disproving) any analysis of oppression as a relation between social groups. Foucault's analytics of power, McWhorter argues, provides a strategic grammar for rethinking feminist resistance to oppression—a term that uncritical acceptance of neoliberal dogma has rendered “impotent.” Effective resistance, for Foucault, occurs in three registers: “intensification of specific forces to overcome opposing resistance. ...mobilizing forces at right angles, so to speak, to specific power relations as a means to disrupt or redirect them. And ...developing what Foucault calls ‘practices of freedom’.” McWhorter explores this last option, arguing that contemporary feminism should be centrally concerned with what Foucault considered to be “ethics:” the relation of self to self, understood as a communal problem and practice, and concerned with developing enhanced capacities for the future, rather than battling around the discourse on oppression.

Jana Sawicki's article approaches critique of neoliberalism more obliquely, through the connection with queerness I hinted at earlier. She defends a queer feminism as “an eccentric, provocative and unruly... practice, one able to risk, challenge and transform itself, any static sense of its beloved objects and self-understandings, its sense of temporal and spatial orders.” The way Foucault thinks, she argues, can be understood as a model for this kind of critique. Sawicki explores how Foucault's last work on the ethics of concern for self as a practice of freedom might be distinct from the kind of enterprising self cultivated by neoliberal ideology.

Finally, a similar concern with desubjectivation through Foucault's ethical thinking is found in Dianna Taylor's “Resisting the Subject: A Feminist-Foucauldian Approach to Countering Sexual Violence.” Taylor argues that the necessary implication of subjectivization with normalizing judgment can be resisted. While most feminists take the view that challenging sexual violence—both as a social phenomenon, and as an individual experience—requires that women assert our position as subjects, Taylor suggests that “subjectivity” (as Foucault understands it) is a historically specific and politically ambivalent way of constituting and being constituted as a self. She turns to Foucault's later work on the relation of self to self to find that methods of desubjectifying oneself, including as a victim of sexual violence, can have surprising and positive consequences. Contrasting the confessional and the parrhesiastic modes of speaking, Taylor closely analyzes the activism of the Garneau Sisterhood, a group of feminists in a Canadian city who anonymously protested the actions of a neighbourhood serial rapist and the inadequate police response to his assaults. For Taylor, Foucault indirectly offers a way of speaking (out) about sexual violence that can be turned to feminist ends. In this paper and Taylor's other work on these themes we see, finally, a way of reading Foucault that neither dwells on apologia for his insensitivity to the harms of sexual violence, nor decries his refusal to specify a subject-position that grounds our liberation.

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