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REVIEW

Lauri Siisiainen, *Foucault and the Politics of Hearing* (New York: Routledge, 2012), ISBN: 978-0415519267

In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault claims to be transcribing a fable into history. That fable is Diderot's *Indiscrete Jewels*: the tale of a sultan who, bored by courtly life, acquires a magic ring. This ring, when turned upon any person, equips and requires their sex to speak of its exploits. Through Diderot's tale, Foucault argues that sexuality, far from being either repressed or liberated, is instead mobilized by the subjectivizing forces around it. The more we know of *Indiscrete Jewels*, then, the richer our understanding of Foucault's account. At first glance, for example, Diderot's tale is heavily voyeuristic. Lauri Siisiainen, author of *Foucault and the Politics of Hearing*, however, would have us detect its pluri-sensual character. The sultan touches the ring, looks on, and listens. Each person's sex, Foucault states, has "such finely tuned ears, such searching eyes, so gifted a tongue and mind, as to know much and be quite willing to tell it, provided we employed a little skill in urging it to speak."[1] From this vantage point, we can deduce that Foucault's history must not only analyze sexuality as a concept and an institution, but it must also account for the senses as primary conduits through which sexuality and subjectivity are produced.

Lauri Siisiainen's *Foucault and the Politics of Hearing* sets out, at the most fundamental level, to contribute to our understanding of Foucault as a pluri-sensual thinker. It does so by focusing on one organ in particular: the ear. By tracing a constellation of related concepts across Foucault's corpus—concepts like sound, voice, listening, hearing, music, murmuring, and noise—this book establishes not only the presence but the critical position of the ear within Foucault's thought. Siisiainen demonstrates along the way that Foucault's thinking of the ear has dramatic implications for philosophy and politics today. On the one hand, Foucault's account of knowledge, inflected as it is with auditory-sonorous sensibilities, works against the philosophical tradition of ocularcentrism. Rather than granting that the eye is the superior locus of enlightenment, Foucault excavates the place of the ear in everything from reason to games of truth. On the other hand, Foucault's account of power, made so often in an aural key, provides insight into contemporary politics. The ear marks the critical ground on which battles between normalization and resistance are waged. Ultimately, then, Siisiainen argues

[1] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 77.

the eminently Foucauldian thesis that the ear is an under-theorized and under-appreciated channel of power-knowledge.

Siisiainen proceeds very systematically to delineate Foucault's contribution to a theory of aurality. He divides *Foucault and the Politics of Hearing* into three chapters and dedicates each chapter to one of the three periods in Foucault's career. These he refers to chronologically (rather than methodologically) as the 60s, 70s, and 80s. In each period, Siisiainen demonstrates that sound plays a crucial role in Foucault's theoretical analysis. In Chapter 1, "The Archeology of Our Ears," Siisiainen takes up *History of Madness*, *Birth of the Clinic*, and *Order of Things*. Here he observes that the ear is critical to Foucault's philosophy of language, whether commenting on medieval thought or classical linguistics. Auditory perception, of course, also enables the rise of anatomo-clinical intervention. In Chapter 2, "The Genealogy of Auditory-Sonorous Power and Resistance," Siisiainen considers *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality*. Dissatisfied with the sensorial limitations of panopticism, he develops a complementary account of panauditory surveillance. He then turns to unpack the corresponding "sensualization of power" in the production of sexuality. In Chapter 3, "Voices of Care, Friendship, and *Parresia*," Siisiainen reinvigorates the now well-worn concept of self-care by investigating the often occluded aural practices of affection and *franc-parler*. Throughout this volume, it is not Siisiainen's aim to radically contest our understanding of Foucault but rather to enrich it by adding another layer or tonal voice.

Although quite systematic, *Foucault and the Politics of Hearing* is also rich with unexpected twists and turns. You will find, beside the necessary discussion of confession, intriguing forays into 'Foucault on music' or 'the ear of homo-economicus.' Siisiainen punctuates his monograph, moreover, with rare texts, shifting genres, and other scholars. He draws seminal points from some of Foucault's lesser-known texts like "*Message ou bruit*?," "Introduction" to Rousseau's *Dialogues*, and "*Pierre Boulez, l'écran traversé*." Into his exegesis, he also weaves illuminating readings of literary texts like Franz Kafka's "The Burrow" and Italo Calvino's "The King Listens." Finally, Siisiainen locates Foucault's account of auditory perception within the context of Foucault's predecessors and contemporaries. There is a delightful discussion of Nietzsche's ear. I would be interested to know what Siisiainen thinks of Heidegger's. Foucault's positions, moreover, on the sensible, listening, statements, and phonocentrism are contextualized with reference to Jacques Rancière, Jean-Luc Nancy, Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Derrida (not *The Ear of the Other*, incidentally, but *Of Grammatology*). As such, Siisiainen has written a book for not only the scholarly but the curious mind.

Inevitably, such a stimulating volume will generate a whole series of reflections, from questions of method and content to considerations of context. Here, I will offer just one reflection of each sort. *Foucault and the Politics of Hearing* identifies a fresh, cohesive thread in the Foucauldian corpus: auditory perception (130). In doing so, it uses two classic elements of philosophical method: the author function and close reading. First, consider the author function. Siisiainen is committed to periodizing Foucault's thought. He is also committed to remedying some of Foucault's inconsistencies across those periods. It strikes me that these commitments would be stronger were Siisiainen to address Foucault's own disavowal of the author function and sometimes virulent disdain for consistency. Perhaps a brief Foucauldian excursus into whisper down the lane would have sufficed. Second, Siisiainen uses a

"hermeneutic" of "close reading" and "intellectual-historical context" (4-5). He focuses, in his own words, on the textual "development of the 'auditory-sonorous'" and leaves to one side "any broad discussions on the general lines of Foucault's thinking" (55). Although this method permits a rich reading of numerous texts, I think it would be well-served by more meta-analysis. How do the techniques and strategies of power on an ocular level differ from those on an auditory level? What is the relationship between speech and language, sound and signs? Are norms heard and how many ways do they resonate?

For Siisiainen, perhaps Foucault's most glaring inconsistency lies in *Discipline and Punish*. In the context of a corpus-wide engagement with the auditory-sonorous, Siisiainen observes Foucault's "almost complete omission of the issue of sound and hearing" here (59). This is not for want of inspiration. Bentham himself provides a long discussion of the panopticon's tin speaking-tubes, by which "the inspector hears even the faintest whisper of the inmates" (57). Why, then, Foucault's silence? Siisiainen suggests that Foucault has succumbed to what he calls "the right of origin argument." According to this argument, the eyes—and not the ears—are by right, by "'natural,' trans-historical necessity" (60), the "sensual medium of truth," knowledge, and power (27). In other words, Siisiainen identifies a secret ocularcentrism in Foucault, which he then traces back to *Birth of the Clinic*. While Siisiainen is certainly right to supplement panoptic with panauditory surveillance, I want to suggest that *Discipline and Punish* cannot be read alone on this or any other point, but must be read in light of Foucault's coterminous involvement with Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons (GIP). This activist organization had two main aims: 1) "*donner la parole*," to give prisoners a voice, to give them the floor, and 2) to serve as a relay station so that their voices "*rebondissent*," or reverberate, across France, in and outside of prison walls.[2] In this work of giving-voice, moreover, the GIP also deployed noise and publicity, media and silence. As such, the GIP is highly relevant to any interpretation of the auditory-sonorous in *Discipline and Punish*.

Finally, I would like to return to Diderot's *Indiscrete Jewels*. Siisiainen's discussion of *History of Sexuality* provides a rich account of the sensualization of power, through which not only is the discourse of sexuality produced, but various "sensual/sensitive proximities or inductive contacts between bodies" are generated (67). As I have already indicated, the *Indiscrete Jewels* supports Siisiainen's concern for the pluri-sensual nature of Foucault's analysis. But it does something more. The *Indiscrete Jewels* suggests that the sensualization of power is highly feminized. The sultan's scavenger hunt for tales of sexual exploits is suggested by his lover, Mirzoza, when she runs out of stories to tell him herself. Moreover, the vast majority of people upon whom the sultan turns his ring are women. This leads me to wonder what Siisiainen would say about the feminization of sound—whether through sexuality, gossip, or beyond. How does this account of the auditory-sonorous allow us to revise the relationship between Foucault and feminism? Furthermore, how can it be used to re-analyze the broadly gendered and racialized schemas that accuse those without a voice of nevertheless speaking too much?

[2] See for example "Enquête sur les prisons: brisons les barreaux du silence" and "Le grand enfermement," in *Dits et Ecrits* I, 1954-1975, (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), no. 88 and 105.

Finally, what resources does this account offer for our understanding of the new globalized world of mass media and the internet? Clearly, Siisianen's work is a springboard to contemporary issues of increasingly international import.

Foucault and the Politics of Hearing is a valuable resource for graduate students and scholars, philosophers and political theorists alike. It will intrigue not only those who research in the fields of post-structuralism and Foucault, but also those who are interested in the more contemporary crisis of politics in a multi-media age. While we might well exist in a world like Kafka's burrow, obsessed with security and auditory surveillance, Siisiainen's book is an excellent rabbit hole through which to see it differently.

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