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INTRODUCTION: SPECIAL ISSUE

New Work on Foucault and Disability: An Introductory Note

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The theme of this special issue of *Foucault Studies* is “New Work on Foucault and Disability”. Although the theme of the issue may seem modest and unassuming, the tenor of the issue is strident and celebratory. The issue is designed to mark both the tenth anniversary of the publication of the pathbreaking first edition of *Foucault and the Government of Disability* (University of Michigan Press, 2005) and the publication of the second, expanded and revised edition of the collection (University of Michigan Press, 2015). As a tribute to both the past and the present, the issue includes contributors to the first edition of the book, as well as authors whose work on Foucault and disability has, in certain ways, been motivated, influenced, or shaped by contributions to the first edition. The five disability theorists and philosophers of disability whose articles appear in this issue of *Foucault Studies* variously reflect back upon the earlier critical work on Foucault and disability, extend it, elaborate upon it, and problematise it, while showing that Foucault’s ideas still hold much potential for disability theory and research.

In the ten years since the first edition of *Foucault and the Government of Disability* appeared in 2005, theoretical and empirical work on disability has become increasingly varied, extending to every corner of the humanities and social sciences, as well as to other areas of the university, to community college courses, to high school curricula, and even to instruction in elementary schools. The *Foucault and the Government of Disability* collection itself has been an integral part of this growing momentum of the field of disability studies. Indeed, the first edition of the collection has had a formative impact and lasting effects on the field. Readers of this special issue of *Foucault Studies* unfamiliar with the history and composition of disability studies and, thus, unsure of how to situate critical theoretical and philosophical work on disability that uses Foucault’s approach can glean some of the pertinent intellectual and institutional history from the five contributions to this issue; nevertheless, they are strongly encouraged to consult my expansive introduction to the first edition or the condensed introduction to the second edition in order to get a fuller picture of this history. In fact, one aim of this special issue is to bring work on Foucault and disability to the center of Foucault scholarship from the position it currently holds on the margins of this area of inquiry. In other words, this special issue of “new work on Foucault and disability” is intended to be a critical intervention into Foucault scholarship, as well as a renewal and

reappraisal of work on Foucault and disability in fields such as philosophy of disability, disability studies, and disability history.

Although work on Foucault and disability has had significant effects on the shape of the field of disability studies, there has not been unanimous agreement within the field about the potential of Foucault's claims to offer insights into the category of disability and the social position and circumstances of disabled people. In the opening article of the issue, therefore, I endeavor to articulate an historicist and relativist feminist philosophy of disability that talks back to claims that some disability theorists have made according to which Foucault's work is inappropriate and inadequate to the tasks that disability theory should aim to accomplish. Kelly Fritsch's engaging contribution to the issue also indicates the relevance of Foucault for current thinking in disability studies. Fritsch uses Mel Chen's work on toxicity and Rod Michalko's insights about blindness and his relationships with his guide dogs to demonstrate how Foucault's claims about the milieu, governmentality, and heterotopia can be combined with both my critique of the U.K. social model's impairment-disability distinction and Karen Barad's work on agential realism as a means to reconfigure and subvert neoliberal perceptions and understandings of disability as an undesirable state of affairs. Xuan-Thuy Nguyen's article in the issue draws upon Foucault's claims about biopower, the subject, and neoliberalism (among others) in order to interrogate the conceptions of disability that underlie policy instruments utilised in the context of development. Nguyen maintains that although Foucault's genealogical analysis has the potential to illuminate work on disability and development, this work would be improved were it informed by postcolonial studies. As a contributor to the first volume of *Foucault and the Government of Disability*, Scott Yates continues the discussion of Foucault scholarship and neoliberalism by reflecting back on claims that he made in his chapter in the first edition of the collection. In the course of his pointed examination of neoliberal disability policy in the U.K. and Foucault's remarks about neoliberalism, Yates explains why he is far less optimistic about the usefulness of Foucault for disability theory than he had been a decade ago. In the final article of this special issue, Aimi Hamraie argues for historical epistemology as a methodology for critical disability studies by examining Foucault's archaeology of cure in *History of Madness*. In Hamraie's view, a comprehensive understanding of the frame in which heretofore work on disability circulates requires a more nuanced approach that historical epistemology can offer.

A journal issue that is as innovative and subversive as this issue of *Foucault Studies* will prove to be does not spring out of a lacuna, but rather emerges from a community of dedicated colleagues. The friendship, encouragement, and collegiality of many people enabled me to bring the issue to fruition. I should like to take this opportunity to extend my thanks to at least some of them. First of all, I want to thank the contributors to the issue who eagerly addressed my finicky editorial comments and (repeated) requests for revision. I would also like to thank Alain Beaulieu and the other editors at *Foucault Studies* who entrusted me with an issue of their exciting and provocative journal. Finally, I especially want to acknowledge the efforts of the following people who served as reviewers for the issue or

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