

Foucault Studies

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ISSN: 1832-5203

Foucault Studies, No. 21, pp. 3-6, June 2016

INTRODUCTION: SPECIAL ISSUE

Counter-Conduct Introduction

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While many on the academic left still regard the work of Michel Foucault with some measure of ambivalence, others turn to his works as a source of revitalization and renewal, and it is in this latter spirit that we offer these essays on conduct and counter-conduct. This is an effort made possible by the recent availability of English translations of Foucault's lectures, where one discovers a rich repository of categories and themes that did not make their way into his publications, such as governmentality, counter-conduct, security, and race war— ideas which, without necessarily resolving the tensions accompanying Foucault's early reception on the left, point out new pathways through his thought. We hope these essays will find their way into the interdisciplinary fields of feminist and queer theory, ethnography, post-colonial, social movements, science, legal, and cultural studies. It is there that Foucault's work is pressed hardest into service for conceptually, historically, and politically innovative studies that extend his work into new fields, to study different kinds of subjects, and of far flung relations of power and knowledge. For example, it is as the result of materials only made available through his lectures that his implicit eurocentrism, resulting in his share of overt rejection during the 1980s, was taken up again and scrutinized in a new light by post-colonial scholars of the left. By the same token, Foucault's treatment of conduct and counter-conduct merits revisiting Foucault's reception and provides new cause for pressing him into further service.

During his life, Foucault's archaeological and genealogical works earned praise for advancing a uniquely post-Marxian critical project, illuminating complex relations of power and knowledge within a plurality of political domains and introducing new objects for critical analysis (madness, bodies, discipline, sexualities, subjectivities, practices). But by the time of his death and in subsequent years, his legacy remained troubled by what was perceived to be the unresolved normative foundation of his critical enterprise. "Where is the resistance in Foucault?" was the question everyone was asking by the mid-80s, summarized forcefully in Nancy Fraser's charge against the "empirical insights and normative confusions" characterizing Foucault's

work.¹ In 1986 Edward Said asserted that while Foucault studied power, he supplied nothing for those interested in actually combatting power: “[i]t seems to me that Foucault was mainly attracted to [...] thinking about power from the standpoint of its actual realization, not of opposition to it.”² Fraser and Said were joined by other famous intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky, Jurgen Habermas, and Michael Walzer in rejecting Foucault’s standing on the left.

Yet despite his rejection by exalted figures, Foucault nevertheless remained a vital source for re-thinking power and resistance on the left. His 1982 essay, “The Subject and Power,” served as a partial summation of themes that emerged from his preceding lectures and as a pointed response to his critics. In fact, the earliest uses of his lectures (by way of tape recordings, the circulation of illicit transcriptions, as well as the publication and translations of a very small number of his lectures) came from these quarters and generated considerable interest prior to their publication in completion. For example, Ann Laura Stoler’s extraordinary effort to “decolonize” Foucault in her 1999 book, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*,³ drew significant attention to the promise held in Foucault’s unpublished (at that time) 1975-76 lectures. Similarly, interest in Foucault’s lectures on neoliberalism and governmentality was piqued by the publication in Italian of just one lecture in 1978 that soon after generated a torrent of scholarship with its English translation in 1979 and reprinting in Colin Gordon’s 1991 volume, *The Foucault Effect*. Nikolas Rose’s highly influential 1990 book, *Governing the Soul*, introduced a wide audience to Foucault’s lecture themes and exemplified their use by applying them to the history of psychology. Subsequent discussions of neoliberalism and the ethics of critique were particularly sparked and enriched by the publication of Foucault’s courses from 1978-9: *The Birth of Biopolitics* and 1982-83: *Government of Self and Others*. The lectures exhibit Foucault’s nuanced consideration of the problem of normativity, critique and resistance, particularly in relation to domains only cursorily noted in Foucault’s books. For example, though Foucault’s comments on race and biopower were marginally developed in *Volume I of History of Sexuality*, they were significantly augmented by the publication of his lecture courses of 1974-5: *Abnormal* and 1975-6: *Society Must Be Defended*. On the basis of his lectures we, and others, propose that it is now possible to revisit the debates around normativity from a new standpoint, given the richness and variety of new materials made available by these lectures.⁴

¹ Nancy Fraser, “Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions,” in *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 17-34.

² Edward Said, “Foucault and the Imagination of Power,” in David Couzens Hoy (ed.), *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (Basil Blackwell, 1986), 151.

³ Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Duke University Press, 1995).

⁴ Christopher R. Mayes, “Revisiting Foucault’s ‘Normative Confusions’: Surveying the Debate Since the *Collège de France* Lectures” *Philosophy Compass* vol. 10/12 (2015), 841-855.

Perhaps most consequential for his readers on the left is the 2007 publication of an English translation of his lecture series of 1976-7: *Security, Territory, Population*, and specifically his comments on what he terms “counter-conduct.” Surprisingly, these lectures contain more than just background ruminations on themes already present in his published works. *Security, Territory, Population* represents a novel and essential domain of Foucauldian thought that never manifested itself in a significant monograph, but at the same time provides an indispensable “hinge,” as Arnold Davidson put it, between his genealogical studies of the 1970s and his inquiry into the ethics of subjectivity that characterized his work in the 1980s. These lectures retain his engagement with power, centered as they are on processes of individual and collective subjectification organized around the problem of “conduct.” Pastoral power serves as the model of conduct, but it does not disappear with the modern formation of secular states. It is by taking conducts into account that we can recognize and study the ways in which the problems posed in the conducts of pastoral power are carried over into the widespread and fervent focus on exercising power under the name of government, or “governmentalities.” Breaking with the disciplinary focus on power as a deductive effect on a body characterized by docility and utility (although not yet at a study of an ethics of conduct, as it became the following year), the problem of conduct is one that opens up the study of power to the many ways in which subjectification occurs through practices of and by the self. Generalized, individual and collective subjects may be understood simultaneously as instruments, objects, and agents of conduct. Whereas his earlier genealogies focused on institutions, in these lectures, the concepts of conduct, counter-conduct and governmentality are developed historically as a means of critically re-telling the history of how power works and how it is resisted. Also important, these lectures exhibit Foucault engaged in the critical modification of his earlier work, a feature of Foucault’s works expressed most fully in the introduction to the *Second Volume of the History of Sexuality* published in 1984. *The Use of Pleasure* was interpreted by many readers as Foucault’s “turn” away from politics to ethics. That interpretation is challenged in the essays collected here.

In his influential commentary on these lectures, “In Praise of Counter-Conduct,” Arnold Davison has written: “[i]t is astonishing and of profound significance, that the autonomous sphere of conduct has been more or less invisible in the history of modern (as opposed to ancient) moral and political philosophy.”⁵ Davidson’s brief treatment of this question has already greatly expanded the conversation on power and practices of resistance by drawing out this theme embedded in Foucault’s lecture course. What’s more, the focus on the production of subjectivity through the government of conduct necessarily opens up new terrain for reflection on government’s undoing, also through conduct. A reflection on “counter-conduct” takes up modes of resistance and opposition that operate specifically through the government and self-government of conduct. As such, counter-conduct allows us to revisit the question of resistance, this time against the backdrop of a different relationship between power and subjectivity, and thus to reconsider the normative objections to Foucault’s work of the 1980s. Moreover, Foucault

⁵ Arnold Davidson, “In Praise of Counter-Conduct,” *History of Human Sciences* vol. 24, no. 4 (2011), 31.

introduced “counter-conduct” as a category for capturing resistances to conduct that do not simply refuse or reject power, but resist by enacting counter-conducts. By conceiving the freedom to conduct oneself and others differently, counter-conduct opens a breathtaking expanse of new territory for analyzing the history and practices of resistance and change.

Essays in this volume dig deeply into the historical disappearance of conduct to which Davidson refers, while retaining an openness to the prospect of rethinking resistance as counter-conduct. We find the concepts of conduct and counter-conduct add force to Foucault’s project for making his readers see that we are, in truth, freer than we feel. Indeed, counter-conducts abound today in agriculture, economics, politics, arts, consumption, and so on, and, we hope this volume will ignite further interest in exploring the histories, domains, knowledges, and practices of conduct and counter-conduct. Davidson emphasizes that conduct and counter-conduct “share a series of elements that can be utilized and reutilized, reimplanted, reinserted, taken up the direction of reinforcing a certain mode of conduct or of creating and re-creating a type of counter-conduct.”⁶ As opposed to thinking of counter-conduct as resistance to power or disobedience to conduct, the relation of conduct and counter-conduct is immanent and they are equally productive. What does counter-conduct signify apart from Foucault’s earlier emphasis on resistance? “On the one hand,” Davidson writes, “the notion of counter-conduct adds an explicitly ethical component to the notion of resistance; on the other hand, this notion allows one to move easily between the ethical and the political, letting us see their many points of contact and intersection.”⁷ These are the general themes animating the articles appearing in the present volume, themes which resonate differently in the works of each author.

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⁶ Ibid., 27.

⁷ Ibid., 28.