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BOOK REVIEW

James D. Faubion (ed.), *Foucault Now: Current Perspectives in Foucault Studies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-6378-4.

In presenting twelve contemporary treatises on Foucault from both European and American philosophers, this volume edited by James D. Faubion augurs well as a landmark work. In the words of Faubion, it does not claim to be “a topical compendium,” nor “a mere sampler,” acknowledging “its limits,” while extolling its “enduring focus” – an elaboration on Foucault’s project – the “historical ontology of ourselves” (1). The editor proudly presents this as the distinguishing feature of this volume, rendering it unique from the innumerable collections on Foucault being published at the moment.

And indeed, the publication does build on this “historical ontology” in a different manner and by various means, touching on various concepts of Foucault, without, obviously, exhausting his list. In this review, I set out to present the main arguments of each chapter, with my writing serving as an appetizer, taking potential readers through all the chapters, exposing the main concepts these Foucauldian philosophers chose to share with us.

The Use of Foucault by Faubion, which serves as an introduction, does exactly what it purports to do—it eases the reader into this compendium of contemporary Foucauldian studies. Although clearly not intended for someone unfamiliar with Foucauldian theories, the editor carefully leads us through the winding paths followed by Foucault’s works, moving on to “receptions and applications” (7) of these same works, which the great philosopher himself defined as “tracks of research, ideas, schemas, stipules, instruments: do with them what you want.”¹ And this is what the twelve contributors do, introduced briefly to us by Faubion, before we come to read their individual works. This introduction ends with a postscript—giving suggestions for further reading, for those who would like to follow up on the concepts addressed in this book—offering the potential for an ongoing dialogue and debate.

This volume is divided in two sections, with the first six chapters constituting Part 1: *Object Lessons*, dealing with Foucauldian theories, while Part 2: *Cases in Point*, relate to applications in diverse fields. According to Faubion, the essays constituting Part 1 address the question of “the use—and abuse—of Foucault” in general terms (15), while Part 2

¹ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, as cited in book under review, 7.

captures “the most salient of the many analytical purposes to which the Foucauldean corpus is currently being put” (17). Faubion further outlines the points of divergence and convergence of these twelve chapters—something I will not discuss separately, but which will emerge in my commentaries on the individual chapters.

In the first chapter, *The Undefined Work of Freedom: Foucault’s Genealogy and the Anthropology of Ethics*, James Laidlaw explores the application of Foucault’s writings to anthropology, more specifically, his “genealogy of ethics.” Laidlaw attempts to demonstrate how Foucault’s concepts of power and freedom provide anthropologists with the tools to challenge the “science of unfreedom” by “making freedom a part of [their] conceptual vocabulary [...] a concept [they] think about and also think with” (25). Laidlaw further addresses what he deems to be “two compelling questions” (27) left by *HS1*²—completing his reconceptualization of power and the sources of the “desiring subject” — which according to him, coincide in, “the purposeful art of a freedom perceived as a power game.”³ Laidlaw moves beyond Foucault’s ethics-morality distinction in order to discuss Zigon’s elaboration on that of Foucault — unconsciously implying a preference for Foucault’s formulation in the process, while celebrating his “conceptual originality” (31)—arguing how Zigon’s “moral breakdown” is not the equivalent of Foucault’s ‘problematization.’ Laidlaw’s central argument—that of anthropology describing diverse forms of ethical reflection and practice—gives way to an ambiguous and somewhat paradoxical conclusion: that of Foucault “giv[ing] no warrant for supposing that any pursuit of freedom is intrinsic to ethics as such” (37), while concurrently tying ethics conceptually to an *exercise* of freedom.

On a different note, in his essay *Déraison*, Ian Hacking traces the ‘development’ of the title of one of Foucault’s earliest oeuvres, what is known today as *Madness and Civilization*,⁴ bemoaning the fact of how it has been rendered quasi-unrecognizable from the original *Folie et Déraison; Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique*.⁵ In what he labels as “the tale of titles” (39), Hacking laments the loss of the word *déraison* [unreason] not only from the English translations, but from the title of Foucault’s original work. While outlining discrepancies between the translations, especially the use/misuse/abuse of the word *déraison*, Hacking wonders about Foucault’s ‘playing around’ with the word, expressing his incomprehension at all this. Hacking goes on to situate Foucault’s thesis within other writings on madness in the 1960’s, describing the global reception of this oeuvre which led to a misunderstanding of Foucault as “a critic of psychiatry” (41)—with *HM*⁶ ironically acting as a precursor of what was to follow in Foucault’s works. This ‘obsession’ with titles

² References to Foucault’s work are presented in abbreviated form as in the book under review. *HS1* refers to Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1: An Introduction*, translated by R. Hurley (Pantheon, New York, 1978).

³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol.2*, 253, as cited in book under review, 35.

⁴ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (Tavistock, 1967)

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Folie et Déraison; Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique* (Plon: Paris, 1961), xi + 674 pages.

⁶ *HM* refers to *History of Madness*.

leads to a title trip as from 1961—what Hacking describes as “a gradual disappearing act” (43).

This theme of ‘unreason’ is further explored in the third chapter *Foucault’s Evil Genius*, where Lynne Huffer traces the emergence of the evil genius across the pages of *HM* to *HS1*, in her attempt to explain the distinction between madness and unreason, while problematizing the transposition of madness into sexuality. Huffer describes Foucault’s ‘evil genius’ as a “time-scrambler,” a “double’s double,” due to its representation of both the Cartesian original and Hegel’s version of it, which according to Derrida, serves as a “perpetual threat,” a “fiction whose alterity undoes us” (53). Huffer explores Foucault’s appropriation and transformation of the ‘evil genius’ from Descartes, drawing a comparison between their different conceptions of unreason: that of Descartes being “a voluntary exercise,”⁷ with Foucault’s being described as “a ground-shattering force” (56), with Derrida, in turn, implicitly equating madness with unreason. Labelling the ‘evil genius’ as a “Foucauldian fiction” (58), Huffer problematizes Foucault’s reversal of the character/author relation, thus exploring the consequences of the power of the ‘evil genius’ to unsettle. Huffer concludes her essay by highlighting the present-day biopolitical and ethical stakes of “this fictional destabilization of subjectivity and truth,” on the ending note that, “A new evil genius has replaced the old one: the matrix has replaced the cosmos” (69).

Didier Eribon situates his essay in the intellectual ferment of France of the 1970’s, aptly choosing the title as a clear indication of what is to follow: *Toward an Ethics of Subjectivation: French Resistances to Psychoanalysis in the 1970’s*. Eribon attempts to demonstrate this resistance through the work of two contemporaries: Roland Barthes’ (1978) *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*,⁸ and Foucault’s (1976) *HS1*. Eribon regards these two books as emblematic of “this will to escape from the dominance of psychoanalysis,” “the battle waged against it,” as well as “reactions to the way psychoanalysis had invaded the social body” through Freudo-Marxism. Barthes threatens psychoanalysis through his subversion of the Lacanian ‘Imaginary.’ Eribon presents psychoanalysis as ‘riding the high horse’ on p. 81, exposing the arrogance of Lacan’s blind disciples, with Foucault being one of their ‘victims’—as evidenced in the critique of Miller and Butler.

Eribon’s question centres around his incomprehension of rereading Foucault via Freud, if the end result is going to be entangling Foucault’s theories into the psychoanalytic way of thinking from which he was striving to free himself. Eribon rejects Bersani’s combination of Freud and Foucault, urging us readers to make a choice—undoubtedly harbouring a preference for the politics proposed by Barthes and Foucault due to their understanding of subjectivation and re-subjectivation that opens possibilities for reinvention, experimentation, and innovation.

⁷ As described by Foucault in *History of Madness*, as cited in book under review, 56.

⁸ Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, translated by R. Howard (Hill and Wang: New York, 1978).

Colin Koopman celebrates the ‘fecundity’ in Foucault’s writings while simultaneously posing questions in relation to our use of Foucault’s works in his chapter *Michel Foucault’s Empiricism Today: Concepts and Analytics in the Critique of Biopower and Infopower*. Koopman distinguishes between analytics and concepts, outlining genealogy as a form of critical inquiry, demonstrating an application of Foucault’s ‘critical empiricism’ through his exploration of present-day biopower and infopower. Koopman regards Foucault’s analytics as “the truest source of the ongoing fecundity of his work” at present, in order “to make use of Foucault to go beyond Foucault” (108).

Taking an entirely diverse stance, John Forrester explores another aspect of Foucault’s work—anonymity as a strategy—hence the title, *Foucault’s Face: The Personal is the Theoretical*, inspired by Foucault’s direct order (in his will) “Pas de publication posthume.” Forrester traces the notion of the author in Foucault’s works, namely the division of author roles in his tri-partite function of ‘the author’ and his eventual detachment from them, in addition to Foucault’s motivation for writing. Forrester also ventures into the power issue, exploring panoptical power, the eventual production of individuality, and Foucault’s dissatisfaction with all this. He answers his own question in the concluding paragraph, “[a]nd the use of this thematic of the absent and anonymous face at the window? [...] [in order for us] to make our theories out of all the resources that each of us has to hand” (127).

Eric Fassin’s essay *Biopower, Sexual Democracy, and the Racialization of Sex* introduces the second part of this volume through an address of sexuality as an inescapable political issue due to it being in the midst of biopolitical technologies of power, which is also entangled in race. Fassin speaks about Foucault’s defamiliarization of the family, due to friendship among males utilized as his model of conjugality and filiation in his exploration of “invention.” Fassin proposes Foucault’s work as a means of moving beyond the limits of the present-day opposition between liberal and radical politics, through a consideration of the same-sex and different-sex marriage, sexual democracy in the public sphere and its relation to biopower, concluding that it all amounts to the difference between discourse and rhetoric.

Cary Wolfe takes the issue of biopolitics further by relocating it in the realm of the animal slaughterhouse in his essay *A New Schema of Politicization: Thinking Humans, Animals, and Biopolitics with Foucault*. Wolfe explores the biopolitical in the works of Agamben and Foucault, drawing a definite distinction in terms of resistance and agency, and exploring this in the case of genetic markers and Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) in contemporary livestock breeding. This is a case of biopolitics acting on the “flesh,” not the “person,” or the “individual,” nor even the “body.” Does this offer the potential to “actually radicalize biopolitical thought beyond its usual parameters” (167) as stated by Wolfe?

In their essay, *Parrhesia and Therapeusis: Foucault on and in the World of Contemporary Neoliberalism*, Laurence McFalls and Mariella Pandolfi take Foucault’s conception of biopolitics to another dimension by showing how his genealogy of liberal and neoliberal

governmentality anticipates the emergence of the neoliberal subject dominated by the “therapeutic.” They argue how Foucault’s work can be utilized to understand the contemporary political and economic crises within the European Union—in their belief that “his work carries the seeds for a radical critique of the post-Cold War explosion of neoliberal governmentality and of its current paroxysmic crisis” (177). They thus develop an argument around post-liberalism, the post-liberal subject, and post-liberal governmentality, with its reliance on the discursive coupling of diversity and vulnerability. “Europe faces its moment of truth” (182) due to the claims of its various bodies to legitimate authority which take the form of ‘therapeutic domination.’ The solution offered by the authors does not sound very promising, “Only the extreme courage to pursue our own ethos [...] can [...] perhaps [...] burst the cage of the post-liberal present” (185).

In *Foucault, Marx, Neoliberalism: Unveiling Undercover Boss*, Toby Miller promises for a ‘lighter’ reading of biopolitical neoliberalism. Miller explores the affinities between Foucault and Marxism in terms of methodology, concepts of class, biopower, governmentality, and political action—demonstrating how Foucault’s work has underappreciated ties to Marxism in terms of biopolitical activism and research. Miller then moves to an analysis of the marketing of biopolitical neoliberalism in two distinct spheres: the neoliberal policies in a corporatized university, and the gentler neoliberalism on the reality show ‘*Undercover Boss*.’

The two final essays in this volume move to a different scenario—that of art. Paul Rabinow’s *Assembling Untimeliness: Permanently and Restively*, presents a juxtaposition between the understated rhetoric of Foucault’s inquiries into technologies of the self and his proposal of a “permanent” and “restive” relation to politics, and the poetics in Gerhard Richter’s paintings of the Baader-Meinhof group. Rabinow discovers Foucault’s and Richter’s convergence on a common problematization—that of adopting a reversal of recent and distant relations of the past and the future, and their relationships with the present as sites of “*melete*.” Rabinow concludes by presenting us readers with a challenge—that of making “history painting contemporary” or presenting “historical elements in a contemporary assemblage such that new visibilities and sayable things become actual, inducing motion and effect” (223).

In the final essay *Constantine Cavafy: A Parrhesiast for the Cynic of the Future*, which is described as “a complement to Rabinow’s” (19), Faubion explores Foucault’s prevailing preoccupation with *parrhesia*—regarded as a triangle with three vectors—the frank speaking of truth of and about ethos, the ethics of the care of the self, and of the governance of others (225-26)—through a bioethnographic approach to the works and days of Constantine Cavafy. This leads Faubion to the conclusion he offers to us readers: “Here’s one use of Foucault, then: he invites us to render Cavafy a Cynical modern, a modern Cynic. It has mileage” (242).

This volume, whose readability and accessibility is enhanced by end notes accompanying each chapter, a complete bibliography of all the works, and a very detailed

index, is a must-read for those scholars who are looking further towards extending their applied knowledge of Foucault's concepts. While definitely not intended as an introductory text or a companion, and at times focusing too strongly on biopower, somewhat excluding other Foucauldian concepts, it is a wonderfully provocative book that deserves to be read and critically appreciated.

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