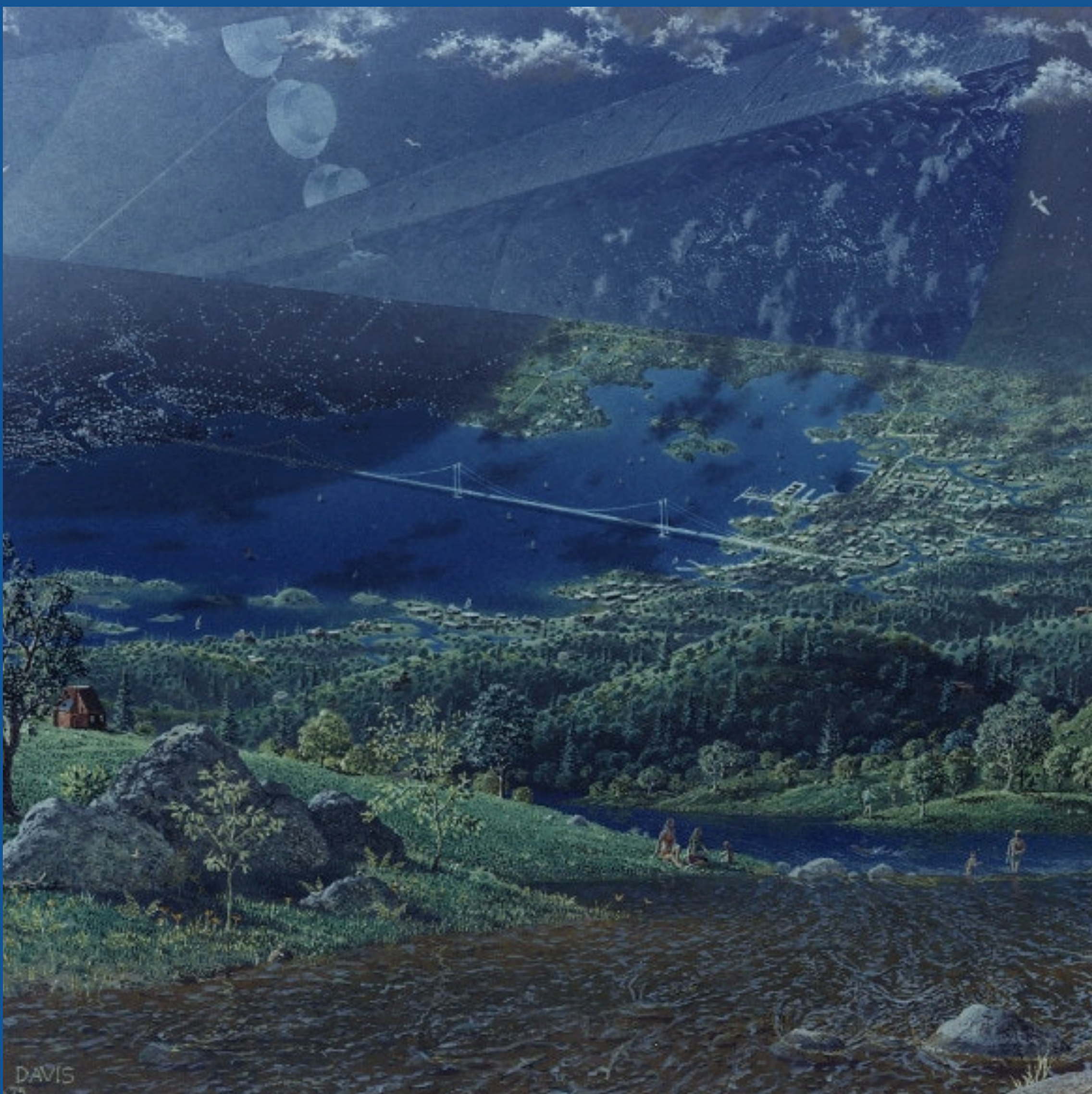
FOUCAULT STUDIES

October 2022
Issue 32



Foucault and Brown — Foucault and Benjamin — UK Lockdown Governmentalities — 8 Book Reviews

FOUCAULT
STUDIES

© Sverre Raffnsøe, Alain Beaulieu, Barbara Cruikshank, Bregham Dalgliesh, Knut Ove Eliassen, Verena Erlenbusch, Alex Feldman, Marius Gudmand-Høyer, Thomas Götselius, Robert Harvey, Robin Holt, Leonard Richard Lawlor, Daniele Lorenzini, Edward McGushin, Hernan Camilo Pulido Martinez, Giovanni Mascaretti, Johanna Oksala, Clare O'Farrell, Rodrigo Castro Orellana, Eva Bendix Petersen, Alan Rosenberg, Annika Skoglund, Dianna Taylor, Martina Tazzioli, Andreas Dahl Jakobsen, Rachel Raffnsøe & Signe Macholm Müller 2022
ISSN: 1832-5203
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.vi32.6713
Foucault Studies, No. 32, i-iii, October 2022

EDITORIAL

Sverre Raffnsøe, Alain Beaulieu, Barbara Cruikshank, Bregham Dalgliesh, Knut Ove Eliassen, Verena Erlenbusch, Alex Feldman, Marius Gudmand-Høyer, Thomas Götselius, Robert Harvey, Robin Holt, Leonard Richard Lawlor, Daniele Lorenzini, Edward McGushin, Hernan Camilo Pulido Martinez, Giovanni Mascaretti, Johanna Oksala, Clare O'Farrell, Rodrigo Castro Orellana, Eva Bendix Petersen, Alan Rosenberg, Annika Skoglund, Dianna Taylor, Martina Tazzioli, Andreas Dahl Jakobsen, Rachel Raffnsøe & Signe Macholm Müller.

The editorial team is pleased to publish this issue of *Foucault Studies* containing three original articles as well as eight book reviews.

ORIGINAL ARTICLES

In the first original article, "Foucault and Brown: Disciplinary Intersections", Niki Kasumi Clements (Rice University, USA) allows us to enter into the archives of the Fond Michel Foucault at the Bibliothèque nationale de France to revisit the significant influence the work of Peter Brown, versatile historian of late antiquity and authoritative biographer of St. Augustin, had on Foucault's long-time engagement with writing the history of sexuality and his genealogy of the desiring subject. Using all available sources, not only published writings and lectures but also archival material, Foucault's personal notes, testimony from ongoing conversations between the two authors, and private correspondence, Clements shows how elements most central to Foucault's turn towards the problematization of sexual matters, uses of pleasure and desire in antiquity have provenience in Brown's work of cultural history. In particular, this concerns the reading of St. Augustin as it is now presented in Foucault's posthumous *Confessions of the Flesh,* volume four of *History of Sexuality* but, more generally, also the necessary methodological and conceptual innovations that serve as the starting point for volumes two and three. It was Brown's detailed attention to the fact that the "watershed" between the late pagan and the early Christian world was almost impossible to establish that led Foucault to write a philosophical history of subjectivity, one that that did not take moral codes, interdictions and their transgressions as points of departure but instead asks how it is that we have ethically

worked upon ourselves in very different ways in response to a rather monotonous sexual morality. The historian, Clements thus shows, assisted the philosopher in truly writing a genealogy without Great Origins but with many smaller beginnings and transformations that eventually allow us to truly think differently. (See also this issue's Review Section for a review of Clements' recent book *Sites of the Ascetic Self: John Cassian and Christian Ethical Formation.*)

In "Askesis and Critique: Foucault and Benjamin", Ori Rotlevy (Tel Aviv University, Israel) reconstructs an illuminating juxtaposition between the two thinkers' conceptions of how critical work and writing relate to different forms of "exercise" in a broad and committed sense. In Walter Benjamin's case, this concerns attention to the schooling characteristic of the scholastic tractates, the exercise (*Übung*) of presentation as indirection, known from his *Origin of the German Trauerspeil,* as well as the practice of *flânerie* portrayed in his later work. In Michel Foucault's case, it concerns how critical activity relates to *askesis* in various forms over time and to the self-changing ethical work of the self upon itself well-known from his later writings. Recognizing both differences and family resemblances between the two approaches, Rotlevy is able to shed new, important light on how the "ascetic" or "spiritual" exercise for both Benjamin and Foucault embodies at once a preparation and a set of conditions for the act of truth telling and therefore also for critique. At the same time, Rotlevy clarifies how the debt to the Kantian critical project articulated by both thinkers gives way to two different modes of exercising the critical work. While Foucault emphasizes critique as exercising an attitude attentive to possibilities of self-transformation and change in the present, Benjamin gives emphasis to an exercise of critique that involves attitude-transformation and a propaedeutic formation for a modern tradition. Indeed, taking notice of this distinction will contribute to the ongoing discussion of how to understand the purpose and practice of critical work and writing in Foucault and thinkers akin to him such as Benjamin.

In "UK lockdown governmentalities: What does it mean to govern in 2020?", Seb Sander (University of Warwick, United Kingdom) present an important discussion concerning the rise of new forms of governmentality that seem to differ from the neoliberal framework within which Michel Foucault's inquiry into the art of government as a largely economic rationalization of the conduct of conduct is typically cast. Investigating a series of recent imperatives directed at the population by the UK government with reference to a human-to-human transmittable virus, Sandel shows the emergence of what he, with reference to Soshana Zuboff's work on surveillance capitalism, labels "instrumentarian governmentality". Working both alongside and as an extension of "algorithmic governmentality" – that is, the more wide-ranging and general efforts to continuously manage and re-manage the population's conduct based on biometric data – this new instrumentarian form re-establishes more direct attempts to control peoples' behavior using disciplinary features of individual surveillance, exposition and cohesion, which appear to be much more authoritarian in outlook than the well-known neoliberal government at a distance. What Sandel's work, very soundly, suggests is thus that the analysis of contemporary arts of government, exercise of sovereignty, and expressions of authority would ben-

efit from taking into account the mutable interaction between different types of governmentality; key among them the neoliberal but now also the algorithmic and the instrumentarian forms.

REVIEW SECTION

The present issue contains eight book reviews:

- Chloë Taylor, *Foucault, Feminism and Sex Crimes: An Anti-Carceral Analysis.* New York, and London: Routledge, 2019. Reviewed by Kurt Borg (University of Malta, Malta).
- Aliraza Javaid, *Masculinities, Sexualities and Love.* Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2019. Reviewed by Andrea Colombo (University of Padua, Italy).
- Cory Wimberly, *How Propaganda Became Public Relations: Foucault and the Corporate Government of the Public.* Routledge: New York, 2020. Reviewed by Fabio Cescon (University of Amsterdam, Netherlands).
- Niki Kasumi Clements, *Sites of the Ascetic Self: John Cassian and Christian Ethical Formation.* Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020. Reviewed by William Tilleczek (Harvard University, USA).
- Thomas Lemke, *The Government of Things: Foucault and the New Materialisms.* New York: NYU Press, 2021. Reviewed by Conor Bean (John Hopkins University, USA).
- Paul Allen Miller, *Foucault's Seminars on Antiquity: Learning to Speak the Truth.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. Reviewed by Toon Meijaard (University of Amsterdam, Netherlands).
- Stuart Elden, *The Early Foucault.* Cambridge: Polity, 2021. Reviewed by Jasper Friedrich (University of Oxford, UK).
- Karsten Schubert, *Freiheit als Kritik. Sozialphilosophie nach Foucault.* Bielefeld: transcript. Reviewed by Jonas Lang (University of Frankfurt, Germany).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The journal is most grateful to managing editors Signe Macholm Müller, Rachel Raffnsøe and Andreas Dahl Jakobsen for their most reliable and highly competent assistance in running the journal. We would also like to thank Stuart Pethick for copyediting this issue of *Foucault Studies* with great care and meticulousness. Finally, we would like to offer our thanks to Andreas Dahl Jakobsen for his great work in creating the cover of this issue of *Foucault Studies.*

The journal is sponsored by *The Danish Council for Independent Research|Social Sciences* and *The Danish Council for Independent Research|Humanities* as well as by *The Joint Committee for Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities and the Social Sciences*. The editorial team is most grateful that these bodies have awarded funding for *Foucault Studies* over the years and have recently decided to do so in the coming time. The continuous funding is an essential prerequisite for running the journal and makes it possible for the editorial team to look and plan ahead.

FOUCAULT
STUDIES

© Niki Kasumi Clements

ISSN: 1832-5203
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.vi32.6701
Foucault Studies, No. 32, 1-27, October 2022

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

ARTICLE

Foucault and Brown: Disciplinary Intersections

NIKI KASUMI CLEMENTS
Rice University, United States of America

ABSTRACT. From the 1981 "Sexuality and Solitude" to the 1982 "Le combat de la chasteté" to the 1984 *History of Sexuality, Volume 2*, Michel Foucault's published works have long recognized the influence of the historian of late antiquity, Peter Brown. With the 2018 publication of Foucault's draft of *Les Aveux de la chair* (*Confessions of the Flesh*) bearing no mention of Brown, the depth of this influence requires further elaboration. Despite Brown not appearing in the "Index of Modern Authors," *Confessions of the Flesh* reflects Foucault's debt to Brown for his readings of Augustine of Hippo and his conceptualizations of sexuality and subjectivity.
Analyzing archival evidence alongside biographical narratives helps us better understand Brown's vital influence as Foucault was shifting his *History of Sexuality* project, his archival practices, and his genealogy of subjectivity. Appreciating the textual and conceptual engagement between Foucault and Brown thus illuminates not only *Confessions of the Flesh* as Volume 4 in the *History of Sexuality* series but also the conceptual and methodological developments of both scholars in their disciplinary intersections.

Keywords: Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions of the Flesh*, genealogy of subjectivity[1]

INTRODUCTION

In August 2019, researching in the Fonds Foucault at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, I came across a twelve-page lecture by Peter Brown titled "Augustine and Sexuality" in Box 84 *Les aveux de la chair*, Folder 11. Archival encounters often produce surprise and open questions, yet this find was particularly moving, since this folder carries the note by Daniel Defert: « Chemise trouvée sur la table de Michel ».[2] Less legibly

[1] The author thanks Peter Brown, James Bernauer, Elizabeth Clark, Philippe Chevallier, James Faubion, Charles Mathewes, Elias Bongmba, John Mulligan, the Foucault estate, the editors of *Foucault Studies*, Laurence Le Bras, and the conservators and staff in the manuscript room at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France at the Richelieu site.

[2] Folder for *Les aveux de la chair*, NAF 28730, Box 84, Folder 11, Fonds Foucault, Bibliothèque Nationale de France (B.N.F.), Paris, France (hereafter cited as B.N.F. Fonds Foucault).

underneath is written: « voir si exercice fait partie des Aveux ».[3] These notes suggest Michel Foucault had this folder ready to hand at the end of his life. And these materials might have contributed to his ongoing edits of *Les Aveux de la chair* before his death in June 1984.[4]

The 2018 posthumous publication of Foucault's draft of this fourth volume in his *History of Sexuality* series—*Les Aveux de la chair* (*Confessions of the Flesh*)—continues to arouse interest and confusion. Expertly edited by Frédéric Gros for 2018 and translated into English by Robert Hurley in 2021, *Confessions of the Flesh* evokes as many questions as it provides answers. Is this the key to Foucault's work? Is the *History of Sexuality* series, begun by Foucault in August 1974, now complete? Why is this volume devoted to close analyses of early Christian texts? Foucault's final folder for this final work suggests that the influence of Peter Brown can help us form responses to some of these questions.

As even the casual reader can see, Foucault dedicates more of *Confessions of the Flesh* to Augustine than any other figure, yet these treatments are mostly found in Part III of the volume.[5] Better understanding *Confessions of the Flesh* requires a keener sense of how Foucault comes to this late ancient Bishop of Hippo amidst his growing appreciation for early Christian texts and the genealogy of the desiring subject. Addressing these questions involves analysis of both the textual records (published and archival) and historical encounters between Foucault and Brown. Brown has long acknowledged his reliance on Foucault's work, and Foucault's influence on late ancient studies has been given sustained critical interest within the field as seen in Elizabeth A. Clark and Averil Cameron's treatments of the subject.[6] The question remains of what role Brown's work also played in

[3] Ibid. Thanks to Laurence Le Bras for clarifying the handwriting.

[4] Foucault hand-edits the typescripts for *Les Aveux* between March and May 1984 with an anticipated publication in October foreclosed by his death on June 25, 1984. Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité Vol. IIII, Les aveux de la chair* (2018), vii.

[5] Foucault cites John Chrysostom with second-greatest frequency and then John Cassian third. It is notable that Augustine and Chrysostom both heavily feature in Part III of *Confessions of the Flesh* but not in the rest of the draft; there are only 18 references to Augustine in the rest of *Confessions*. This suggests to me a similar timeframe for research and composition for Part III on marriage that is distinct from Parts I and II; Annex 4 concludes Foucault's typescript for Part III, although Gros moves it to an annex (Foucault, *Les aveux de la chair*, 404-406; trans. *Confessions of the Flesh*, 321-323).

[6] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*: *Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (1988), xvii-xviii; *The Body and Society* (2008), xxi, xxxv-xxxvii; "A Life of Learning," *ACLS Occasional Paper* 55 (2003), 2, 13-14. We are also indebted to Brown for sharing his reflections on May 6, 2021, in the virtual series *Foucault's Confessions* at Rice University. https://foucaultsconfessions.org/peter-brown/.
See in particular, Averil Cameron, "Redrawing the Map: Early Christian Territory after Foucault," *Journal of Roman Studies* 76 (1986), 266-71; Cameron, "Patristics and Late Antiquity: Partners or Rivals?," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 28:2 (2020), 283-302; Elizabeth A. Clark, "1990 Presidential Address: Sex, Shame, and Rhetoric: En-Gendering Early Christian Ethics," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59:2 (1991), 221-45; Elizabeth A. Clark, "Foucault, The Fathers, and Sex," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 56.4 (1988): 619-41; Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Foucault's *tournant antique* and what these dynamics help us understand about their disciplinary intersections.[7]

In this article, I present evidence that Brown contributes to Foucault's understanding of late ancient social history and Christian textual sources in ways that have ramifications for Foucault's *History of Sexuality* series and his conceptualization of the genealogy of the desiring subject.[8] Scholars have long noted the importance of Foucault to cultural historians and philosophers of antiquity, Paul Veyne and Pierre Hadot.[9] There is important archival evidence for how prominently Foucault also engaged the history of Christianity, amplifying his attention to historical lines of continuity between "pagan" and "Christian" antiquity through the influence of Brown.[10] That Augustine becomes a central figure for Foucault only after Foucault meets Brown is also suggestive, when considering the dominance of Augustine in *Confessions of the Flesh*.[11]

I. FOUCAULT ON AUGUSTINE

Before his October 1980 meeting with Brown at the University of California, Berkeley, Foucault's public engagement with Augustine is very minimal. With Foucault's

[7] This is not a question of a one-way influence but of the significance that overlapping intellectual movements from philosophical and historical disciplines could prove mutually beneficial for Foucault and Brown; even as their uses of these materials diverge, they took place within and shaped important academic movements which we remain subjects in and of. See Cameron, Clark, and John Behr, "Shifting Sands: Foucault, Brown and the Framework of Christian Asceticism," *The Heythrop Journal* 34:1 (1993), 1-21.

[8] James Bernauer has long argued for the importance of Christianity to Foucault's shifts in the *History of Sexuality* series and attention to ancient care of the self (James Bernauer, "Fascinating Flesh: Revealing the Catholic Foucault," *Foucault Studies* 29 (2021), 38-47; James Bernauer and David Rasmussen, ed., *The Final Foucault* (1988); James Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward an Ethics for Thought* (1990). See also Jeremy Carrette's crucial edited volume *Religion and Culture* (1999); Carrette, *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporeality and Political Spirituality* (2000); Jonathan Tran, *Foucault and Theology* (2011). Elizabeth Castelli and Daniel Boyarin presciently frame these movements in "Introduction: Foucault's "The History of Sexuality": The Fourth Volume, or, A Field Left Fallow for Others to Till," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10:3-4 (2001): 357–374.

[9] Paul Veyne explains his own engagement with Foucault in *Michel Foucault. Sa pensée, sa personne* (2008). For the influence of Paul Veyne on Foucault, see Sandra Boerhinger, "Paul Veyne, historien de la sexualité antique ?" in *Autour d'une « œuvre en porte-à-faux » : Paul Veyne et l'Histoire*, ed. Paul Cournarie and Pascal Montlahuc (forthcoming, 2022). Foucault thanks Brown, Hadot, and Veyne in his introduction to *History of Sexuality, Volume 2*; the influence of Ilsetraut Hadot's work on Stoic philosophers remains understudied (despite Foucault's reliance on her scholarship evident in the archives).

[10] Johannes Zachubber notes the suggestiveness of this influence of Brown on Foucault in "L'interiorite" in *Foucault, les Pères, le Sexe : Autour des Aveux de la chair*, ed. Philippe Büttgen, Philippe Chevallier, Agustín Colombo, and Arianna Sforzini, 2021. For Foucault's engagement with forms of Christianity, see Philippe Chevallier, *Foucault et le christianisme* (2011); Niki Kasumi Clements, "Foucault's Christianities," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 89:1 (2021), 1-40; Michel Senellart, "Gouverner l'être-autre : la question du corps chrétien," in *Foucault(s)*, ed. Jean-François Braunstein et al., 205-222 (2017).

[11] Foucault's reading of Augustine is not the same as Brown's, as Agustín Colombo recently argues in "What is a desiring man?" *Foucault Studies* 29 (2021), 71-90. For a superb critique of Foucault's reading of Augustine, see Elizabeth A. Clark, "L'Augustin de Foucault au risqué d'Augustin," in *Foucault, les Pères, le Sexe : Autour des Aveux de la chair*, trans. Philippe Büttgen, ed. Philippe Büttgen, Philippe Chevallier, Agustín Colombo, and Arianna Sforzini (2021), 233-245.

monographs and posthumously published lectures, I begin by establishing a chronology of how Foucault publicly engages the texts and figure of Augustine. Understanding how Foucault's engagement with Augustine intensifies after his encounter with Brown highlights how Foucault's readings of Augustine change over time, in a correlative if not causative engagement with the cultural historian. My analysis in this section contributes to a larger methodological claim concerning how we read Foucault's work today, as I emphasize the need to differentiate between Foucault's direct references and the source attributions of his editors.

i. from the Collège de France

A casual listing of Augustine in his 1964 « Postface à Flaubert » and a brief challenge to Noam Chomsky's reading of Descartes vis-à-vis "le courant augustinien de la pensée chrétienne" in their 1971 interview suggest the extent of Foucault's public engagement with Augustine in the 1960s and early 1970s.[12] Before 1979, Foucault barely mentions Augustine's name directly and we mainly infer the relevance of Augustine through Foucault's editors of his posthumously published lectures. In November 1973, for example, Foucault frames the history of disciplinary apparatuses (*dispositifs*) as linked to the Middle Ages through the sixteenth century in "religious communities"; Jacques Lagrange as editor of these 1973-1974 *Psychiatric Power* lectures includes a footnote on monastic orders as following the Rule of Augustine.[13] The single reference to Augustine in the 1977-1978 *Security, Territory, Population* lectures comes from Michel Senellart as editor linking Foucault's discussion on *ἀπάθεια* to Augustine's *City of God* 14.9.4.[14]

At the University of Tokyo in April 1978, speaking about "the problem of the production of theories of sexuality in Western society," Foucault highlights Augustine for the first time: "For this massive production, which goes back a great distance, at least since St Augustine, since the first Christian centuries, is a phenomenon to be taken seriously."[15] Published that same year in *Gendai-shisô*, Foucault ties Augustine to constructions of sexuality while revising his *History of Sexuality* series.[16] In the October 1979 Tanner Lectures

[12] Michel Foucault, "Postface à Flaubert," in *Dits et Écrits, Tome 1 : 1954 - 1975* (2001), 321-353; Michel Foucault, "De la nature humaine: justice contre pouvoir," in *Dits et Écrits, Tome 1 : 1954 - 1975* (2001), 1339-1380. A brief reference to an archbishop quoting Augustine "on the bishops' power of intercession" appears in his *Penal Theories and Institutions: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1971-1972*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Bernard Harcourt (2019), 61.

[13] Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France 1973-1974*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Jacques Lagrange (2006), 63-64. A similar footnote on the Augustinian rule appears in *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni (2003), 53fn5.

[14] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Michel Senellart (2007), 189. Perhaps the editors found associated notes in Foucault's folders, but I have not found any indication in the published records.

[15] Michel Foucault, "Sexuality and power" [1978], in *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy Carrette (1999), 75. Published as "Sexualité et pouvoir" in *Gendai-shisô* (1978), see *Dits et Écrits, Tome 2 : 1976 - 1988* (2001), 552-570.

[16] For the larger context of Foucault's editing and redrafting of the second volume, see Philippe Chevallier's magisterial treatment, "The Genesis of Confessions of the Flesh," *Foucault's Confessions*, Rice University, May

at Stanford University, Foucault unfolds his account of early Christianity and pastoral power without any reference to Augustine, instead noting "Chrysostom, Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome, and for the monastic life, Cassian or Benedict."[17] He does not cite Augustine, nor any other ancient Christian figure, during his 1978-1979 Collège de France lectures, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.[18]

In his 1979-1980 Collège lectures, *On the Government of the Living*, Foucault refers to Augustine six times.[19] Yet because this year's lectures are dedicated to early Christian texts, having so few references to Augustine is surprising. On February 20, Foucault notes how Augustine describes the baptismal ceremony to the catechumenate in *Sermon 216*, urging examination of the heart.[20] Foucault draws out a contrast between the later practice of penance and the earlier examination of conscience "at the time of Saint Augustine, that we find this idea of a verbal confession addressed to the priest or bishop."[21] Foucault's most substantive note on Augustine occurs on March 12: "We have the impression that we can draw a direct line from the *gnothi seauton* to the obligation of the examination of conscience in Evagrius Ponticus, Cassian, Saint Jerome, and Saint Augustine."[22] The question of connecting truth and subjectivity to one another will prove influential for Foucault's last four years.

In his 1980-1981 Collège lectures, *Subjectivity and Truth*, Foucault refers to Augustine only four times yet closes in on two constructs vital to *Confessions of the Flesh*. First, how "the conjugalization of marriage" raises "the big question in Christian thought, Saint Augustine's question, but also our question: 'What in truth is our desire?'."[23] Second, Augustine's *De bono conjugali*'s attention to "affective bond [and] procreation" and the *debitum conjugale* where "[o]ut of charity, one owes sexual intercourse to the other."[24]

11, 2021; https://foucaultsconfessions.org/philippe-chevallier/. This vital work has been published as "The Birth of *Confessions of the Flesh*," *Maynooth Philosophical Papers* 11 (2022): 55-73.

[17] Michel Foucault, "*Omnes et Singulatim*: Towards a Criticism of 'Political Reason,'" *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (1981), 225-254, 236.

[18] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Michel Senellart (2008).

[19] Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1979-1980*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Michel Senellart, (2014). By contrast, Foucault dedicates at least two complete lectures to Cassian: March 19, 1980 engages largely *Institutes* 4, and March 5 and 26, 1980 discuss *discretio* largely in *Conferences* 2, 7, and 24. There is not much on Chrysostom this year, either, who Foucault cites second to only Augustine in *Confessions of the Flesh*.

[20] Foucault, *Government of the Living*, 149; 163fn23.

[21] Ibid., 154.

[22] Ibid., 228. Senellart as editor notes that this is perhaps an allusion to Pierre Courcelle's *Connais-toi toi-même de Socrate à Saint Bernard* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1974), which draws out the Delphic precept of "know thyself" from antiquity through pre-Scholastic Christians like Bernard of Clairvaux (Foucault, *Government of the Living*, 274fn6).

[23] Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1980-1981,* trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Frédéric Gros (2017), 39, 159, 167.

[24] Ibid., 230-231.

ii. from the Archives

Such minimal engagement with Augustine is surprising because, as Daniel Defert notes, Foucault began reading Tertullian, Cassian, and Augustine in August 1977.[25] The Fonds Foucault at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (B.N.F.) also includes a large folder of 144 pages of Foucault's meticulous reading notes on Augustine.[26] This raises the questions of *when* and *how* Foucault came to Augustine's texts.[27]

Circa 1974-1975, Box 20 (Réforme, Contre-Réforme) includes an early mention of Augustine in a bibliographical list of scholarly works.[28] Box 21 (Notes de lecture) includes notes on a volume edited by Charles Kannengiesser, *Jean Chrysostome et Augustin: Actes du Colloque de Chantilly 22-24 septembre 1974*, which shows up often in Foucault's reading notes.[29] Box 22 (Pères de l'Église, Lecture de notes prises vers 1977, Préparation des Aveux de la chair) includes a handful of scholarly sources which briefly refer to Augustine.[30] These scholarly references assume familiarity with Augustine but do not develop arguments or concepts that Foucault ties to his *History of Sexuality* series.

The paucity of references to Augustine in Boxes 20-22 differs starkly with the folder dedicated to Augustine in Box 24 (Dire vrai sur soi-même). This Folder 7 (Saint-Augustin) includes the 144 pages of Foucault's meticulous notes with close readings on more than twenty of Augustine's texts.[31] Yet I know of no lectures dedicated to Augustine, either at the Collège de France or internationally, that engage this range of texts.

---

[25] Michel Senellart, "Le cours de 1980, Du gouvernement des vivants, dans la perspective de l'Histoire de la sexualité," in *Michel Foucault: éthique et vérité: 1980-1984*, ed. Daniele Lorenzini, Ariane Revel, and Arianna Sforzini (2013), 31-51, 33; Michel Foucault, *Dits et Écrits, Tome 1 : 1954 - 1975* (2001), 71.

[26] Notes for Box 24, Folder 7 (Saint-Augustin), B.N.F. Fonds Foucault.

[27] Although my research in the Fonds Foucault remains in process, as of 2021, I have found Foucault to briefly reference Augustine in notes ranging from the 1960s through the 1980s in Boxes 30.7, 70.1, 91.5, 92.19, 92.20, 93.22, and 93.26. Longer treatments of Foucault on Augustine are discussed in the rest of this article (particularly Boxes 24.10, 24.14, 84.11, 87.15, 87.16, 88.6, and 88.9).

[28] Notes for Box 20, Folder 6, Sheet 162, B.N.F. Fonds Foucault: "E Lamirande: Et sur l'ecclésiologie de St Augustin (1969)" referring to E. Lamirande, "Études sur l'ecclésiologie de saint Augustin," *Theological Studies* 31 (1970), 585-586. Please note datings for these notes are provisional as I work through archival and published works.

[29] Dated after Kannengiesser's 1975 publication, this bibliography seems penned between 1977 and 1980. Foucault's reading notes specify particular articles in Kannengiesser's volume—as "In <u>J. Chrysos et Augustine</u> / Coll. Ed. Kannengiesser / (1975)"—such as that in Box 21.3.88 of A. Natali and in Box 21.3.89 of C. Lepelley's "St Augustin et la Cité Romano-Africaine" (whose references to *DCD* XIX.6.17 might be important for Foucault's navigation of that massive tome of Augustine). There is also a photocopy of Jack Winkler's "Auctor & Actor: Apuleius and his metamorphoses" in Box 21 (Notes de lecture), Folder 3, with this note (probably from Winkler) on page 64: "This contrast might be interesting to you: the provocatively absent self of Apuleius vs. the all-present self of Augustine." Thanks to Sandra Boehringer for insight into Winkler's connection to Foucault.

[30] Of the scholarly sources on Christianity important to Foucault's work in the late 1970s, there are brief references to Augustine in Foucault's notes on Owen Chadwick's *John Cassian*, J-P Guy's entry for the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* "examen de conscience," Rouet de Journel's *Textes ascétiques*, and Josef Schmid's entry for *Das Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* "Brautschaft, heilige" (Box 22, Folder 1, B.N.F. Fonds Foucault).

[31] Folder 7 also includes notes or photocopies of scholarly works related to Augustine by Berrouard (*Notes sur Homelies sur l'Ev de 1er Jean*), Bonnardière (*Revue d'Études Augustiniennes*, 1967), Dodds ("Augustine's *Confessions*," 1927), Guichard (*Cahiers d'histoire*, 1979), Guy (DS IV, "examen de conscience"), Mandouze

Still, we can chart a series of international lectures from late 1980 where Foucault engages Augustine with greater textual selection and analytical rigor.[32] Foucault's second conference at Berkeley includes references to Augustine's *Confessions*.[33] Foucault continues this line of thought in the "Discussion of 'Truth and Subjectivity'" on October 23, 1980, responding to a question concerning what kind of confession Augustine's *Confessions* present.[34] In his second Dartmouth lecture in November 1980, Foucault briefly paraphrases Augustine while reflecting on how institutionalized confession contributes to the emergence of disciplinary subjectivity: "*qui facit veritatem venit ad lucem*."[35]

Foucault's lectures at Louvain in spring 1981 refer to Augustine with the juridical reading of sexuality and subjectivity. As he frames his Louvain lecture on April 29, "I would like to study this obligation in Christianity—at least in the early Christianity that we could

(*Actes du colloque de Chantilly*, 1974), Meslin (*Mystique et continence*, 1952), Sage (*Revue d'Études Augustiniennes*, 1964, 1967), Thonnard ("La prédestination augustinienne," 1963; "La morale conjugale," 1969), and Toubert ("Théorie du mariage," 1976). The presence of Guichard's article confirms that at least part of this folder is post 1979, even though Foucault uses works published in earlier decades.
There is also a reading note with reference to Augustine's *DCD* XXIX.19 in Box 24, Folder 13 (Cynisme et christianisme), B.N.F. Fonds Foucault. Folder 13 also includes a bibliographic list with G. I. Bonner's "Libido and concupiscentia in St Augustine," *Studia Patristica* 81 (1962).

[32] The closest we get to a dedicated lecture on Augustine takes two forms explored in the next section, both from Box 40, NYIH; one, the English version of the James Lecture for NYIH; the other, the French draft called "Séminaire IV" understood to be the draft of the James lecture but which is significantly different. A further study of the relation between the French drafts and the English lectures for NYIH in Box 40, Folder 6 is needed. I look forward to the upcoming volume of Foucault's NYIH lectures, edited by Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini.

[33] "Berkeley, Deuxième conférence, Manuscrit autographe et dactylogramme," Box 40, Folder 2, Sheets 21-23, B.N.F. Fonds Foucault. In relation to Foucault's primary categories of *ἐξομολόγησις/exomologēsis* (Tertullian) and *ἐξαγόρευσις/exagoreusis* (Cassian) that he largely expanded at the Collège de France in 1980 and repeats at Dartmouth, Foucault also sets Augustine apart from the movements that he sees as regulating the institutions of Catholicism and mechanisms of disciplinary subjectivity (gleaned in confessional practice of the hermeneutics of the subject with Cassian and ritual disclosures of status in baptism and penance with Tertullian). Foucault's remarks suggest why he did not incorporate Augustine before—but I think they also show how Foucault shifts his views on *both* Augustine and his relevance for a possible history of the juridical subject *and* the emergence of the subject of desire.

[34] "I had prepared a rather long development about Augustine, but, of course, I had no time to read it. You see, if I insisted more on what the Greek Fathers called *exomologēsis* and *exagoreusis* than on Augustine, the reason is that *exomologēsis* and *exagoreusis* were an institutionalized way of confession, and they had all the characteristics of institutions: they were constraining for people, and they had, like all institutions, an evolution through the history of the Church and through the history of Christianity." (Michel Foucault, *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self, Lectures at Dartmouth College, 1980*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini (2016), 93-95.) This excellent volume includes "Subjectivity and Truth" (17 November 1980), "Christianity and Confession" (24 November 1980), "Discussion of 'Truth and Subjectivity'" (23 October 1980), and "Interview with Michel Foucault" (3 November 1980). The Discussion of 'Truth and Subjectivity' takes place two days after Foucault's discussion with Brown.

[35] Michel Foucault, "Christianity and Confession," in *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self*, 79fn4 includes the editor's reference: "Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1961), 207: 'We know that you are a lover of faithfulness, for the man whose life is true comes to the light' (*Ecce enim veritatem dilexisti quoniam qui facit eam venit ad lucem*).'" Foucault repeats this formula in his 1982 Toronto lectures, *Speaking the Truth about Oneself: Lectures at Victoria University, Toronto, 1982*, ed. Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini, English ed. est. Daniel Louis Wyche (2021), 95.

say ended and culminated in Saint Augustine."[36] Between October 1980 and May 1981, then, we can see two readings of Augustine that Foucault will continue to bring together. First, his interpretation of Augustine's theory of *libido* and its libidinization of "the self." Second, Augustine's "*cordis affectus*, not in the movements of thought but in the movements of the heart."[37]

Foucault comes to read Augustine as a complex subject wrestling with desire where, in contrast to his contemporaries, Augustine is not primarily concerned with one's status (as penitent with Tertullian) nor one's thoughts (in an examination of conscience with Cassian). Foucault refers to Augustine's *Confessions* in 1980 yet only cites this text once in his *History of Sexuality* series (in the 1984 Volume 2, *The Use of Pleasure*). In an eponymous irony, *Confessions of the Flesh* does not have a single reference to Augustine's *Confessions*, even as Foucault carefully analyzes nineteen texts of Augustine and devotes more of the text to Augustine than any other figure.[38] So how does Foucault come to his readings of Augustine and the use of concupiscence in marriage that becomes so central to *Confessions of the Flesh*?

iii. Brown and Augustine

The first published evidence of Foucault's sustained engagement with Augustine occurs in "Sexuality and Solitude" published in the *London Review of Books* in May 1981. Here, Foucault reads Augustine's conception of *libido* in relation to Brown's framing of sexuality as becoming the seismograph of subjectivity. Brown is part of the bridge to Foucault's foregrounding of Augustine in terms of sexuality, which will be centrally elaborated in *Confessions of the Flesh*.

According to Didier Eribon, Foucault deeply admired Brown's historical biography, *Augustine of Hippo*, which "Foucault knew almost by heart" in Betsy Wing's translation.[39]

[36] Michel Foucault, *Wrong Doing, Truth Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice*, ed. Fabienne Brion and Bernard E. Harcourt (2014), 93.

[37] Foucault, *About the Beginning*, 94. See also Foucault's notes on "contradictory movements of his heart. 'Affectus cordis'" in "Berkeley, Deuxième conférence, Manuscrit autographe et dactylogramme," Box 40, Folder 2, Sheet 23, B.N.F. Fonds Foucault. Foucault's reading of the centrality of *affectus cordis* to Augustine might even be from *Augustine of Hippo* without citing Brown directly (Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo. A Biography* (1967), 163).

[38] Foucault, *Les Aveux de la chair*, III.II-III focus on Augustine (283-361). Foucault cites these works as follows: *De bono conjugali*, *De bono uiduitatis*, *De catechizandis rudibus*, *De conjugiis adulterinis*, *De continentia*, *Contra duas epistulas*, *Contra Faustum*, *Contra Julianum*, *La Cité de Dieu*, *Discours sur les Psaumes*, *De Genesi ad litteram*, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, *De gratia Christi et peccato originali*, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, *Opus imperfectum*, *Quaestiones in Evangelium secundum Matthaeum*, *Retractiones*, *De sancta virginitate*, and *Sermons*.

Philippe Büttgen convincingly frames the omission of Augustine's *Confessions* in relation to Foucault's neglect of « la confession de foi » in his accounts of l'aveu et la confession (« Aveu et confession, » in *Foucault, les Pères, le Sexe : Autour des Aveux de la chair*, eds. Philippe Büttgen, Philippe Chevallier, Agustín Colombo, and Arianna Sforzini. (2021)).

[39] "Les auditeurs de Foucault sont surtout des étudiants en histoire, ceux par exemple qui avaient suivi les enseignements de Peter Brown, l'historien de l'Antiquité tardive, dont Foucault admire le livre magistral sur saint Augustin." (Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault* (2011), 508.) Betsy Wing's English translation of this passage

What remains unclear is when and where Foucault took up Brown's text.[40] Box 22, Folder 10 (Examen chrétien) includes a bibliography of works on ancient Christianity, virginity, and marriage that lists "P. Brown: *Christianisme* [sic] *and society*."[41] A reference to a 1976 work helps date this bibliography to between 1976 and early 1981, so this hand-written reference probably points to Brown's *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine* (1972).[42] As editor of the 1977-1978 Collège de France lectures, Senellart notes "Foucault was no doubt familiar with Peter Brown's first articles on the question" when delivering that year's lectures.[43]

Foucault's fall 1980 lectures and seminars for Berkeley, Dartmouth, and the New York Institute for the Humanities (NYIH) in Box 40 at the B.N.F. become significant. Box 40, Folder 6, Subfolder 7 includes a draft in French titled "Séminaire IV," most likely meant for NYIH, that I believe is the first evidence of Foucault's extended engagement with Augustine.[44] In this draft for November 1980, Foucault refers to *De bono conjugali*, *Contra Julianum*, *De Genesi ad litteram*, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, and *De sancta virginitate*.[45] What

---

reads: "Foucault's audience consisted primarily of historians, such as the students of Peter Brown, whose book on St. Augustine Foucault knew almost by heart…"(Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault* (1991), 313-314).

[40] Ibid.

[41] « Examen chrétien, » Box 22, Folder 10, Sheet 371, B.N.F. Fonds Foucault. This folder also includes full photocopies of Aline Rousselle's "Abstinence et continence dans les monastères de Gaule méridionale à la fin de l'antiquité et au début du moyen âge : Étude d'un régime alimentaire et de sa fonction," in *Hommage à André Dupont : 1897-1972* (1974) and Krister Stendahl's "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," (1963), with references to Cyrille Vogel, *La discipline pénitentielle en Gaule* (1952).

[42] Peter Brown's *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine* (1972) was available at the Bibliothèque de Saulchoir [332 C 382] and his engagement with Pelagius might inform Foucault's treatment in *Les Aveux* (alongside the volume 23 selections in Augustine's Œuvres complètes). It is possible that this reference points to Brown's collection *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (1982), which includes several articles that Michel Senellart notes Foucault "was no doubt familiar with"—however, I think that is too late a dating for such a preliminary reference.

[43] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 234. Senellart crafts the following footnote translated on page 272 of the English edition:

> On Egyptian *anachōrēsis*, P. Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1978), ch. 4, 'From the Heavens to the Desert: Anthony and Pachomius.' At this time Foucault was no doubt familiar with Peter Brown's first articles on the question (for example, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,' *Journal of Roman Studies*, LXI, 1971, pp. 80-101; reprinted in P. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982) pp.103-152 as well as the book by A. Voöbus, *A History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient* (Louvain: CSCO, 1958-1960).

In my current understanding of the archives, Foucault moves between (1) general and encyclopedic sources, (2) particular scholarship, and (3) particular ancient texts (in editions from the 17th through 20th centuries). When Foucault's editors add references in the posthumously published lectures (at the Collège and abroad), these references contribute mightily to the critical apparatus of the text yet should not be assumed to have been selected by Foucault.

[44] These notes in French are understood to be a part of the NYIH lectures, yet Foucault simply titles them "Séminaire IV" without a direct reference to NYIH. "Séminaire IV," Box 40 (Berkeley et New York University 1980), Folder 6.7, Sheets 24-37, B.N.F. Fonds Foucault. I believe there are elements of *Les Aveux* pages 325-328 in this section "—C—". Foucault writes this part of the fourth seminar in notes more than narrative, and it is even possible that he writes this part of the NYIH talks in the weeks after his Berkeley talks where he meets Brown.

[45] Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh*, part III.I for Chrysostom (195-220); part III.II-III for Augustine (221-285).

will be published as "Sexuality and Solitude" correlates with Foucault's English treatment of Augustine in Box 40, Folder 3 (Conférence), along with materials from Folder 6.6.1, which Foucault delivers as the James Lecture.

While at NYIH in 1980, Foucault makes a series of references to Augustine in his journal (now in Box 93, Folder 22 at the B.N.F.). Foucault begins this journal (a stenographer's notebook) with "1980 NY Institut Humanités / avec Richard Sennett / en preparation de Sub et ver au Collège de France," making a series of nearly forty references followed by brief themes, notably concupiscence, excès, consentement, le plaisir, le mariage, la masturbation, and les péchés.[46] So when did Foucault write his notes on Augustine's texts (Box 24.7), and when did Foucault write "Séminaire IV" (Box 40.6.7)? These questions lead me to the direct encounters between Foucault and Brown in the 1980s.

II. FOUCAULT AND BROWN

The friendship between Michel Foucault and Peter Brown has been long noted.[47] As a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, Brown attended Foucault's second Howison Lecture on October 21, 1980, and afterwards the two spoke for two hours in the university pub, the Bear's Lair.[48] Brown recounts how Foucault asked continuous questions on John Cassian in that first meeting, wanting feedback on his reading of Cassian in the Howison Lecture. They also discussed "Augustine's notion of concupiscence."[49] Before traveling to Seabury-Western Theological Seminary the next day, Brown gave Foucault a packet of materials, including an article by Philip Rousseau on Cassian ("Cassian, Contemplation, and the Cenobitic Life"), Brown's 1976 *The Making of Late Antiquity*, and a copy of the Hale Lectures Brown was about to deliver in Chicago.[50] Foucault would discuss Augustine's *Confessions* more directly two days later on October 23 at Berkeley, as noted above.

After his time at Berkeley, Foucault would go to New York and give a series of seminars and a lecture in October and November 1980 at the New York Institute for Humanities (NYIH). In his three seminars delivered in English, Foucault does not expand on Augustine in detail. In his second seminar, Foucault argues how Christian sexual ethics are rooted in Roman practices even as Latin authors including Augustine change "not the

[46] Notes for Box 93 (Le Journal Intellectuel de Michel Foucault), Folder 22 (Sans date [vers 1980] Bloc Steno), B.N.F. Fonds Foucault.

[47] "It is in this context—the context of the discovery of the strangeness of the bodies of past ages—that I must both acknowledge and delimit my personal debt to Michel Foucault." (Brown, *Body and Society*, xxxv.)

[48] Brown, personal correspondence, August 12, 2019.

[49] Brown, *A Life of Learning*, 2.

[50] Philip Rousseau, "Cassian, Contemplation, and the Cenobitic Life," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 26 (1975), 113-126. Timothy Sedgwick refers to "The Face of Poverty" and "Towards a Sociable Philosophy" as two of Brown's 1980 Hale Lectures in *The Christian Moral Life: Practices of Piety* (1999), 85. I am grateful to Sedgwick for his help tracking down the lectures to Styberg Library at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and Mary-Carol Riehs for generously helping me (even in the doldrums of July 2020!) access a scan of Lecture 5 from Brown's Hale Lectures listed as "Culture, Society, and Renunciation in Late Antiquity" (Stacks Oversize BX5937.A1 H2 1980), Styberg Library at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL.

code itself, but something more difficult to analyse and to decipher… an experience Latin authors called: concupiscentia. This change took place after Clement of Alexandria and was completed by Augustine. That means that it took place between the 3rd and the 5th century."[51] Foucault's third seminar at NYIH argues for seeing continuities of practice between "the Hellenistic world and in the Roman societies" and Christian sexual behaviors, even as they diverge in "the techniques—or technology of the self."[52]

The most substantive treatment of Augustine comes in the James Lecture, engaging *The City of God* and *Contra Julianum*. English typescripts for the three NYIH seminars do not specifically refer to the texts or role of Augustine in Foucault's developing genealogy. However, in the French draft labeled "Séminaire IV," Foucault has a sustained engagement with a broader range of Augustine's texts. "Sexuality & Solitude" (the May 1981 publication resulting from Foucault's and Sennett's NYIH communications) concentrates on Artemidorus and Augustine and directly refers to Brown.[53] Foucault analyzes Augustine more rigorously than before, focusing on *De Civitas Dei*, Book XIV, and a singular mention of *Contra Julianum*, for their "rather horrifying description of the sexual act."[54]

Most notable is Foucault's conceptualization of concupiscence in Augustine, which he comes to understand through Brown, where "in Augustine's analysis we witness a real libidinisation of sex [sic]."[55] Foucault notes in the November 20, 1980 NYIH manuscript: "Few weeks ago, Dr Peter Brown told me: 'What we have to understand is why sexuality became in the Western Christian culture the seismograph of our subjectivity.'"[56] Scholars often cite the version of this phrase in the 1981 *London Review of Books* publication

---

[51] "Séminaire N.Y.U. 2," Box 40, Folder 6.3, Sheet 17, B.N.F. Fonds Foucault. Thanks to Daniele Lorenzini for sharing part of his and Henri-Paul Fruchaud's transcript for Foucault's English lectures at NYIH.

[52] Foucault describes these "technologies" in an earlier draft of the October Howison lecture only present in the archival manuscript (dated by Foucault as September 1980) but not in the final typescript nor delivered lecture at Berkeley (XL.6.3.18). ("Berkeley, Première conférence; Texte en anglais daté *Paris, 1980*," Box 40, Folder 1, Sheets 6-7, B.N.F. Fonds Foucault.)

In fact, the material in this archival manuscript bears the extended treatment on "technologies of the self" in relation to other technologies of domination, production, and signification that one will find in a near match with his first 1982 lecture at the University of Vermont (Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton (1988)). In these Vermont lectures, Foucault mentions the *Confessions* and cites Augustine's "*quis facit veritatem*" as he does in the second Dartmouth lecture (see footnote above), which makes sense considering the 1980 archival overlap in Box 40 (see "Les techniques de soi," *Dits et Écrits, Tome 2 : 1976 - 1988* (2001), 1624, note 1612).

[53] Michel Foucault and Richard Sennett, "Sexuality and Solitude," *London Review of Books* 3:9 (1981).

[54] Foucault, "Sexuality and Solitude," 13.

[55] In the manuscript, Foucault originally writes "a real libidnisation of the self [sic]"—and continues to note: "And more techniques, relayed by the Augustinian theory of *libido*, had, I think a huge influence on the western technology of the self." (Box 40, Folder 3, Sheet 26, B.N.F. Fonds Foucault) I do wonder about Foucault's attention to the language of *libido* and libidinisation over *concupiscentia*. Foucault has a bibliographic reference to G.I. Bonner, "*Libido* and *Concupiscentia* in St. Augustine," *Studia Patristica* (1962), 303-314 in Box 24, Folder 13, Sheet 21 (currently unnumbered in the archives). The libidinisation of sex informs the developing western technologies of the self; Foucault's emerging genealogy of subjectivity involves technologies of managing *libido*.

[56] Manuscript in Box 40, Folder 6.1 (Anglais N.Y.U.), Sheet 29, B.N.F. Fonds Foucault. "Why such a fundamental connexion [sic] between sexuality, [truth and] subjectivity, and truth obligations?" (Ibid., Sheet 30.)

"Sexuality and Solitude."[57] Yet the timeframe of this influence is also important, with Foucault clearly struck by Brown's views and immediately exploring the ramifications of this claim about sexuality and subjectivity, which he will continue to explore over the last four years of his life.

These lines of influence continue to develop in his 1980-1981 lectures at the Collège de France. Although Foucault refers to Augustine only four times, there are significant conceptual moves made. For example, Foucault cites Brown for the language of "watershed" in his understanding of antiquity: "It is about this that we should say something now: how to establish this division, how to make the cartography of this 'watershed,' as Peter Brown expressed it, between what one calls Christianity and what one calls paganism?"[58] In a difficult-to-date archival draft (probably destined for an earlier version of *Les Aveux de la chair*), Foucault writes : « Pour s'être donné d'autres éléments de savoir, les discussions d'aujourd'hui sur les communications et les lignes de partage—le Water ________ comme dit Peter Brown entre la culture païenne et la pensée chrétienne, sont toujours aussi chargées d'enjeux (24). »[59] Foucault writing « le Water ______ » in French suggests he had not yet settled on how to translate this historiographical concept into French.

Foucault delves more deeply into this problem already stressed by Paul Veyne of imputing a separation of "pagan" from "Christian," notably in relation to practices of sexual ethics. In what I think is a slightly later draft of this same chapter, Foucault notes : "Sur ce point, comme sur tant d'autres, on ne peut pas tracer de ligne droite séparant le christianisme du monde où il est né et où il s'est développé : tout au plus peut-on essayer de débrouiller les faits enchevêtrés d'un écheveau. P. Brown, à propos de cette période, évoquait la difficile cartographie d'un « partage des eaux »."[60] These two chapter drafts are in the same Box 87, and the differences are more modest than their similarities, notably when it comes to "le partage" as the organizing principle of Foucault's deepening explorations in antiquity.

For his part, Brown says that the "separation of the waters" is difficult to map. And the separation, here, is between "pagan" and "Christian" elements of late ancient Mediterranean culture. Foucault particularly rejects the myth that ancient morality was more easygoing and that the responsibility for stringent moralities lies squarely with Christianity—

---

[57] Michel Foucault, "Sexuality and Solitude," in *Essential Works, 1: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (1997), 179. Jeremy Carrette, for example, then refers to Brown's authorship of *Augustine of Hippo. A biography* in the London: Faber and Faber, 1967 version—and other scholars cite Carrette's footnote in turn (in his excellent edited volume of Foucault's work, *Religion and Culture* (1999)). Editors for the Collège de France lectures similarly include references to Brown in the footnotes, such as Michael Senellart's inclusion of *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (1988) for understanding Marcion on page 192fn39, even though this work comes out well after Foucault's death. With the archives now consultable, we can better track what Foucault read and how he engaged this material.

[58] Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth*, 37.

[59] Manuscript in Box 87 (*La Chair et le corps*), "Chemise 16 3. Importance de la vérité," B.N.F. Fonds Foucault.

[60] Manuscript in Box 87 (*La Chair et le corps* [projet abandonné de l'Histoire de la Sexualité]), Folder 15 (Sans titre), Sheets 415 (numbered by Foucault as 35) and 416 (numbered as 36), B.N.F. Fonds Foucault.

"la thèse d'une rupture" does not hold up against the historical evidence.[61] Following the work of his cultural historian friends, Veyne and Brown, Foucault comes to reject both declension and ascension narratives, refusing the naïvete of separating "pagan" and "Christian" as radically separate worlds.

Foucault will go on to cite Brown in his 1982 publication on John Cassian, "Le combat de la chasteté."[62] Recapitulating the watershed reference in 1981, Foucault closes this piece by rejecting any large rupture between "earlier moralities" and Christian sexual ethics: "As Peter Brown says, in speaking of Christianity as part of our reading of the giant mass of antiquity, the topography of the parting of the waters is hard to pin down."[63] This passage is particularly important for understanding the development of *Les Aveux de la chair*. Nearly the entirety of "Le combat" features in part II.III of *Les Aveux* (pp.230-245), replacing only the last paragraph for the article Foucault publishes in a 1982 *Communications* piece. *Les Aveux* replaces that paragraph in the transition between part II (Être vierge) and part III (Être marié), dropping out direct reference to Brown.[64]

It is significant that Foucault refers to Brown in the two publications related to *Confessions of the Flesh* published while he was alive: "Sexuality and Solitude" (1981) and "Le combat de la chasteté" (1982). It is not just that Brown is included in these two texts—it is that Brown is the *only* scholar Foucault refers to in these two texts. In addition to the fact of influence, the content of influence is important, with Foucault citing Brown for the vital conceptual linking of subjectivity and sexuality that informs his genealogy of ethics over the last few years of his life.

These methodological and conceptual features are present in Foucault's most public declaration of Brown's influence at the beginning of his 1984 *History of Sexuality: Volume 2, The Use of Pleasure*. In his desire to not impose "alien forms of analysis" on the ancient texts, Foucault notes: "In dealing with this risk, I have benefited greatly from the works of Peter Brown and those of Pierre Hadot, and I have been helped more than once by the

[61] Foucault then describes western societies as identifying their moral universe within the question of « dire vrai selon les règles propres à leur savoir ». This provides a solid link to Foucault's framing of the injunction to tell the truth about oneself.

[62] Michel Foucault, "Le combat de la chasteté," *Dits et Écrits, Tome 2 : 1976 - 1988* (2001); Michel Foucault, "Le combat de la chasteté," *Communications* 35 (1982), 15-25. See notes from Michel Senellart in the Pléiade edition, where Foucault notes: "Ce texte est extrait du troisième volume de *L'Histoire de la Sexualité*" (Michel Foucault, *Œuvres* (2015), 1365). Noting this excerpt as from the third volume in 1982 indicates that Foucault had not yet split *Le Souci de soi* into two volumes when Foucault submitted this article.

[63] "Comme le dit P. Brown, à propos du christianisme dans la [cul]ture de l'Antiquité [tard]ive, la cartographie du partage des eaux est difficile à établir." (Ibid., 1379); Michel Foucault, "The Battle for Chastity," in *Essential Works, 1: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (1997), 196.

[64] Foucault, *Les Aveux*, 245. As the institutionalization of Catholicism expands, "forgetting" Augustine's use of concupiscence while also requiring forms of confession that become increasingly punitive and disciplinary, the juridico-legalistic framework (from Augustine) within which *libido* was regulated and permitted comes together with the hermeneutics of the confessing subject (from Cassian in Foucault's reading) producing the conditions for interiority and disciplinary power over time. Foucault's disengagement with Augustine's *Confessions* after Fall 1980 is not an oversight, I believe, but a commitment to reading the institutionalization of confessional practices ("les aveux") not vis-à-vis Augustine but rather Cassian.

conversations we have had and the views they have expressed."[65] Foucault refers to Augustine's *Confessions* in relation to friendship and "the flesh" in *The Use of Pleasure*. Foucault also references *Contra Julianum* in *History of Sexuality: Volume 3*, *The Care of the Self*, published that same spring. As Foucault does not begin writing *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* until after he has met Brown in 1980, this opens an interesting question of influence not only on particular readings of ancient Christian texts but even the architecture of the *History of Sexuality* project.[66]

Recall that the published Volumes 2 and 3 began as a single volume under the title *Le Souci de soi*. Foucault starts with the Greco-Roman materials that populate the published Volume 3 and writes the Volume 2 on ancient Greek sexual ethics afterwards; and he cites a different Augustine in these two volumes—not the robust treatments from *Confessions of the Flesh*, part III, but instead the texts of Augustine that Foucault cites in 1980 (at Berkeley) and 1981 (in "Sexuality and Solitude"). Brown was important for not only particular readings of Foucault in terms of the "watershed" and "seismograph" metaphorics that contribute to Foucault's genealogical readings of subjectivity and that Brown would go on to develop in his own work. In an interview on May 28, 1984 for *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, Foucault also credits Brown for his use of "*le style*" and as engaging in a shared project in antiquity: « Ce que Peter Brown et moi essayons de faire permet d'isoler, dans ce qu'ils ont de singulier, des individus qui ont joué un rôle dans la morale antique ou le christianisme. »[67]

If only there were more time for direct communication. Aside from a delightful dinner party with Foucault and Paul Veyne in Paris, Brown indicates that before his move to Princeton in 1983, he and Foucault "met on a few, somewhat formal occasions for coffee in that summer term."[68] In a note from March 25, 1983, Foucault notes to Brown he would be happy « d'assister à votre Colloque. Je viens juste de parcourir votre texte qui me paraît extrêmement intéressant et stimulant. »[69] Brown had completed the lecture "Augustine and Sexuality" on March 5, 1983, delivering the talk at Princeton as the Rabbi Irving Levy Lecture "on or around March 22."[70] This would be the article found in the folder of exercises for *Les Aveux de la chair* "sur la table de Michel."[71]

---

[65] Foucault, *History of Sexuality: Volume 2*, 7-8. The draft of this appears in NAF 28284, Boite 3 (L'usage de plaisir), Chemise 9, beginning with "Avant Propos. Avril 83."

[66] I see suggestive continuities with *Le Gouvernement de soi et des autres*, the final manuscript by Foucault on ancient ethics, which he declared to be ready for editing, according to Daniel Defert as per B.N.F. Boxes 72-74. See Frédéric Gros's commentary in the Pléiade edition of Foucault's *Œuvres* (2015), 1533.

[67] Michel Foucault, "Le retour de la morale," *Dits et Écrits, Tome 2 : 1976 - 1988* (2001), 1515-1526.

[68] Brown, personal correspondence, August 12, 2019.

[69] Brown, personal correspondence, August 12, 2019; reference to Foucault's correspondence with Brown, March 25, 1983.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Manuscript in Box 84 (*Les Aveux de la chair*), Folder 4 "Dans le dossier contenant le dactylogramme, on trouve également, 1 chemise de 11 ff. autographes avec nombreuses corrections, Pour les Aveux de la chair? (11) ff," B.N.F. Fonds Foucault. Frédéric Gros' introduction to *Les Aveux de la chair* refers to these components (Foucault, *Les Aveux*, vii).

III. BROWN AND FOUCAULT

In this final section, I present two additional archival sources that contribute to an understanding of how Foucault was rethinking the *History of Sexuality* series in relation to Brown's work. This material has been corroborated by drafts I found in my July-August 2021 consultations at the B.N.F.[72] The first is in the University of California, Berkeley archives at Bancroft Library in the thirteenth folder of Foucault's archival box (90/136 Z).[73] Labeled "Preface and Introduction to 'Genealogy of Ethics'," this folder is noted by archivists as written in 1981 as an earlier draft to the *History of Sexuality, Volume 2*; a part of this draft is published in *The Foucault Reader*, and Philippe Chevallier has also noted the importance of this earlier form of the introduction.[74]

i. Between Bancroft and the B.N.F.

From pages 34 to 38 in this Berkeley document, Foucault directly engages and cites Brown in French. Although without pagination or titles, Foucault cites four passages I identify with corresponding passages from *The Making of Late Antiquity* (probably in his own translations, perhaps from the copy Brown gave in October 1980):[75]

I.

> « la Koiné de l'expérience religieuse méditerranéenne en son ensemble » (Foucault quotes in Bancroft Folder 13, page 34)
>
> "Instead, we sense that the koiné of Mediterranean religious experience as a whole has shifted in an insensible tide that washed all its shores and has touched all its inhabitants." (Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, 97)

---

[72] The author is grateful to Laurence Le Bras and her colleagues for their daily support in the Manuscripts reading room at the Richelieu site of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

[73] Manuscript in 90/136 Z, Folder 13, University of California, Berkeley, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California.

[74] Michel Foucault, "Préface à l'Histoire de la sexualité," in *Dits et Écrits, Tome 2 : 1976 - 1988* (2001), 1397-1403; Michel Foucault, "Preface to *the History of Sexuality, Volume II*," *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (1984), 333-339.

Philippe Chevallier notes the importance of the earlier form of the introduction to the *History of Sexuality, Volume 2*, as published in the *Foucault Reader* (Chevallier, "The Birth of Confessions of the Flesh," *Maynooth Philosophical Papers* 11 (2022), 55-73, and Chevallier, "The Genesis of Confessions of the Flesh." *Foucault's Confessions* lecture series, Rice University, May 11, 2021). That Foucault cites and engages Brown so directly in the Bancroft version which precedes the published form in the *Foucault Reader* suggests that Foucault rethinks the preface to the revised *History of Sexuality* series earlier than commonly understood and in rigorous relation to Brown's work (making better sense of Foucault's debt to Brown in the 1984 publication *The Use of Pleasure*).

Work remains to be done on the relation between the Bancroft draft, Foucault's "Préface à l'Histoire de la sexualité," and Foucault's revised general introduction for *L'Usage des plaisirs*, of *Le Souci de soi*, and of *Les Aveux de la chair* in "Usage des plaisirs et techniques de soi" (*Dits et Écrits, Tome 2 : 1976 - 1988* (2001), 1358-1380).

[75] Foucault cites E. R. Dodds in this Berkeley draft, but the citation might also come vis-à-vis page 5 of *The Making of Late Antiquity* (citing Dodds' *Pagan and Christian*, 100).

II.

> « Il ne s'agit pas de nier les transformations qui s'y sont effectuées, mais de bien comprendre que 'les mots et les habitudes dans lesquels les nouvelles options devaient bien s'exprimer, existaient déjà dans une forme communicable'. » (Foucault quotes in Bancroft Folder 13, page 37)
>
> "The words and habits by which new options might be cogently expressed already existed in readily communicable form." (Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, 7)

III.

> Foucault continues on that page without the precise citation: « Ce qu'il a pu y avoir d'innovation est à comparer plus avec 'une construction' qui se produit entre éléments préexistants qu'avec une irruption de thèmes étrangers ( ). » (Bancroft Folder 13, page 37)
>
> "I would suggest that these shocks are better understood as so many cases of spontaneous combustion arising from friction within a system of widely shared ideas and not as the irruption from the outside …" (Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, 8)

IV.

> « Il faut lire l'Antiquité tardive comme une redistribution et une réorchestration des composants qui avaient été présents pendant des siècles dans le monde méditerranéen » (Foucault quotes in Bancroft Folder 13, page 37).
>
> "It follows from this that the changes that come about in Late Antiquity can best be seen as a redistribution and a reorchestration of components that had already existed for centuries in the Mediterranean world." (Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, 8)

Foucault stresses "the *koiné* of Mediterranean religious experience" and Brown's framing of how "widely shared ideas" as well as "words and habits" describe a Mediterranean world of continuities, not irruptions.

While these documents at Berkeley have been long available, there is corroborating drafting in the B.N.F. archives (acquired in 2013), where Foucault cites the same passages from Brown with associated page numbers. Box 52 (*Le Souci de soi*), Folder 4 (Manuscrits et dactylogrammes), includes a typescript with the title « II. La morale et les pratiques de soi ». Analyzing "ce qu'ils appellent l' 'antiquité tardive'," Foucault notes how historians worked against "deux grands thèmes historiographiques": that of a long decline since antiquity, and that of complete opposition between Christianity and paganism. Foucault says that Brown counters Dodds' thesis on the crisis of the third century, instead insisting on the continuities and slow transformations that can be recognized in "the crisis." Foucault appreciates how Brown analyses « la Koiné de l'expérience religieuse méditerranéenne en son ensemble », without denying the transformations taking place, and Foucault cites Brown on how it is necessary to understand that « les mots et les habitudes

dans lesquels les nouvelles options devaient bien s'exprimer, existaient déjà dans une forme communicable ».[76]

As he rewrites "ce premier volume" of his revised *History of Sexuality* series, Foucault incorporates this balance of transformation and continuity from Brown in successive drafts of his genealogical thesis. Instead of an « irruption de thèmes étrangers », the elements already existed for centuries in the Mediterranean world—the question was one of « redistribution et une réorchestration des composants ». He continues: "Ce qui ne tend pas—on le verra bien—à affirmer purement et simplement que le christianisme a repris une morale sexuelle déjà toute formée ; mais à cerner d'aussi près que possible, la nature et les conséquences des transformations effectuées."[77] This is not about a sexual ethics as already formed but an ability to see how the transformations take place and what their consequences were for "our morality."

Foucault builds his genealogy as he navigates a redrafting of the *History of Sexuality* series. The Berkeley draft for the *History of Sexuality, Volume 2* preface and introduction starts with material identifiable also with Box 64 (*La Volonté de savoir et La Croisade des enfants*), which corresponds to Foucault's six-volume version of the *History of Sexuality* series that he comes to replace with the four-volume series published. At this time, Foucault is beginning work on *Le Souci de soi*, which would eventually be split into *Volume 2, The Use of Pleasure*, and *Volume 3, The Care of the Self*. While there is some overlap between the part of *History of Sexuality*, *Volume 2* published in the *Foucault Reader* and the Berkeley draft in Folder 13, they both differ "substantially from published version (1984)."[78] I therefore consider this 1981 document important for evaluating how Foucault shifts his *History of Sexuality* series as he develops his draft of *Les Aveux de la chair*.

In his 1981 Collège de France lectures and his 1982 "Le combat de la chasteté," Foucault attributes to Brown the language of "watershed" and the "parting of waters"—yet only in his citations of *The Making of Late Antiquity* do we see Foucault's readings of the "tide" directly cited from Brown's text. Perhaps reading Brown on "these shocks" even corroborates for Foucault the "seismograph" language he gleans from conversation with Brown and uses for his 1980 NYIH lecture and 1981 "Sexuality and Solitude." Foucault's attention to the "already existing" "words and habits" also clearly builds from his growing appreciation for such continuities through the urging of Veyne.[79]

---

[76] Manuscript in Box 52 (*Le Souci de soi*), Folder 4 (Manuscrits et dactylogrammes), typescript with the title "II. Méthode, La morale et les pratiques de soi," B.N.F. Fonds Foucault.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Foucault, "Préface à l'Histoire de la sexualité," 1397-1403; manuscript in 90/136 Z, Folder 13, University of California, Berkeley, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California. The Bancroft archivists note that this draft of the preface and introduction to the *History of Sexuality, Volume 2*, "differs substantially from published version (1984)."

[79] Notes in Box 28 (Ultimes Papiers), Folder 5 (Pile IV), B.N.F. Fonds Foucault, includes a copy of Paul Veyne's "Le Monde Romain : la famille et l'amour sous le Haut-Empire romain," *Annales Économies Sociétés Civilisations* (1978), 35-63. Veyne inscribes the front page: "Tu connais déjà. – (Cependant, le bas de la page 52 t'amusera peut-être) Amicalement Veyne". Veyne cites Foucault on this page.

ii. From Hale to *Parrhesia*

In the case of Brown, the timing of influence is also striking. Foucault makes significant shifts in the period after his Howison lectures at Berkeley when the two scholars first met. In addition to *The Making of Late Antiquity* and an article by Philip Rousseau on Cassian, Brown gave Foucault a suite of six lectures that he was about to deliver at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary that October 1980. These Hale Lectures offer a final locus for analyzing influence and shared conceptual material.

Through citations by Timothy Sedgwick, I tracked Brown's 1980 Hale lectures at Seabury-Western to the Northwestern University database for Styberg Library, where the joint collection between Seabury-Western and Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary reside. Under the title "Culture, Society, and Renunciation in Late Antiquity" in this archived copy, there are six lectures:

1. Philosophy, paideia and power --
2. The philosopher in late Roman society --
3. Untroubled power --
4. The face of poverty : asceticism in fourth century Egypt --
5. The image of the monk : sexuality and solidarity --
6. Towards a "sociable philosophy" : Basil of Caesarea.

Reading these lectures in a full transcript Brown generously shared with me, I offer a reading of the Hale Lectures that Brown titles *Philosophers and Monks*. Brown's work strongly resonates with how Foucault develops his engagement with late ancient Christianity and the genealogy of desiring subjects; these resonances are worth pursuing even if it is not certain that Foucault read these lectures.

With elements and arguments that would take their fullest form in *The Body and Society* (1988) and *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* (1992), Brown beautifully unfolds in these lectures his central argument on "the pursuit of holiness" and other disciplinary contributions that would shape studies in late antiquity.[80] I note here three sites shared with Foucault's late project as an entrée for further scholarly analysis: (1) the language of the watershed, (2) the construction of *παίδεια* (*paideia*), and (3) the appearance of *παρρησία* (*parrhesia*).

(1) Lecture One, "Philosophy, Paideia and Power," includes another written source for Foucault's attribution of "watershed" to Brown. On page 8 of this unpublished lecture, Brown directly frames the pagan and Christian commonalities and differences:

> If we can gain a clearer and more sharply differentiated picture of what pagan philosophers and Christian monks had in common, and on what they came to be most bitterly divided, then we may know a little bit more about the end of paganism and the rise of

[80] Brown, *The Body and Society* (1988); Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (1992).

> Christianity, and tread with a surer sense of contour the watershed between classical antiquity and the Christian Middle Ages.[81]

Foucault first uses the language of "watershed" publicly on January 14, 1981 for his *Subjectivity & Truth* lectures at the Collège de France:

> It is about this that we should say something now: how to establish this division, how to make the cartography of this 'watershed,' as Peter Brown expressed it (fn8), between what one calls Christianity and what one calls paganism?[82]

As I noted in Section II above, Frédéric Gros as editor of those 1981 lectures associates "watershed" with Brown's *The Making of Late Antiquity* and notes that Brown takes the language from a passage in W. H. C. Frend's *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*.[83] In a footnote for the 1981 lectures, for example, Gros cites an entire paragraph from Brown's *Making*.[84]

In addition to the watershed imagery that Foucault cites from Brown in his unpublished Berkeley Folder 13 draft of the *History of Sexuality, Volume 2* preface and introduction, Foucault most prominently uses the language of the "parting of the waters" in his 1982 publication, "Le combat de la chasteté," closing this piece on Cassian by rejecting any large rupture between "earlier moralities" and Christian sexual ethics:

> As Peter Brown says, in speaking of Christianity as part of our reading of the giant mass of antiquity, the topography of the parting of the waters is hard to pin down.[85]

As I noted above, this line is part of a paragraph that features in the 1982 article but is omitted in the 2018 *Les Aveux de la chair*. And so the watershed language here is always already self-critical, baking into Foucault's engagement with late antiquity and early Christianity a move beyond the crisis model of history.

It seems to me that Foucault's January 1981 description of "watershed" better corresponds to Brown's Hale lectures and their conversations, while Foucault's 1982 description of "parting of the waters" corresponds to Brown's *The Making of Late Antiquity*. We know from "Sexuality and Solitude" that Foucault picked up the seismograph language directly from conversation with Brown in October 1980. From there, the chapter drafts in B.N.F. Box 87 (Folders 15 and 16) featuring "watershed" and "le partage" seem tied to the Hale lectures, while Foucault directly cites *Making of Late Antiquity* in archived drafts from B.N.F. Box 52.3 and Berkeley for the language of "Koiné" and the tides of the Mediterranean.

We have thus gone from marking a division to mapping a dynamic system. Foucault's ethical turn as articulated in his study of late antiquity and early Christianity encodes this genealogical dialectic: of both registering the enormity of a historical change and rejecting

[81] Peter Brown, *Philosophers and Monks* (unpublished 1980 manuscript), Lecture 1, p. 8.
[82] Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth*, 37.
[83] William H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (1965), 389.
[84] Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth*, 44fn8.
[85] Foucault, "The Battle for Chastity," 196.

a search for origins. This is particularly the case when it comes to sexual ethics as Foucault's drafted preface and introduction for the *History of Sexuality*, *Volume 2* at Bancroft affirms. Conceptually, Foucault's developing interest in the progressive potentials of Christian asceticism in the early 1980s and his ultimate suggestion that early Christians radicalize even Cynic renunciation in his final lecture at the Collège de France both affirm such continuities.[86]

(2) Brown's account of the philosopher's *paideia* and their critical role in relation to imperial power from *Philosophers and Monks* also appears in Foucault. There are three references to *paideia* in Foucault's *History of Sexuality* Volumes 2 and 3 as published. The two in Volume 2, *The Use of Pleasure*, relate to the contexts of Xenophon and Plato.[87] *Paideia* as educative practice, as ethical practice, and as care of the self is also present in Volume 3, *The Care of the Self*, with reference to Epictetus.[88] Foucault would have of course gleaned the importance of *paideia* from other scholarship and his own education, but Brown's framing of the ethico-political importance of *paideia* from ancient Greek philosophy to that of Basil render such critical continuities more salient. They even potentially better account for the more progressive readings of early Christians such as Basil and Gregory of Nyssa that Foucault would take up over time.[89]

Foucault's archives at the B.N.F. include a box with his final lecture notes from his desk (Box 28, Ultimes papiers), noted as stacked in piles by Daniel Defert.[90] Here, Foucault has prominent notes from "Jaeger. Paideia. III. Sur le régime" and "Taeber. Paideia III. Sur le médecin" with a brief note on sheet 243:

> Sur la soc. du Bas Empire :
>
> L. Ruggini : Economia e società nell'Italia annonaria (Milan 1962)
>
> S. Mazzarino : La democratizzazione della cultura nel Basso Impero (XI congr. inter. sc historiques Stockholm 1960. T II, pp.35-54)
>
> P. Brown : Religious Dissent in the Later Roman Empire (History, 1961 pp.83-101)

Brown's "Religious Dissent" is noted in relation to *paideia*, and we might even consider an overlap with Foucault's notes surrounding the *Christus medicus* as part of these final papers that also occupy B.N.F. Box 84, Folder 11.[91] Medicine, ethics, and education are all concepts highlighted in Foucault's notes as he works on his last edits.

[86] Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-1984*, trans. Graham Burchell (2011), 181-182. Foucault continues: "But what we should also note is that, through the intermediary of Christian asceticism and monasticism of course, the Cynic mode of life was passed on for a very long time."
[87] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 76.
[88] Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume 3: The Care of the Self* (1988), 55.
[89] Brown, *Philosophers and Monks*, Lecture 1, p. 19.
[90] Notes in Box 28, B.N.F. Fonds Foucault.
[91] Sheet #243 in that stack includes this brief note.

(3) Brown's Hale lectures also offer a direct bridge to Foucault's increasing interest in *παρρησία* (*parrhesia*) between 1980 and 1984.[92] Brown's first Hale lecture brings together *paideia* and *parrhesia*: "Simply by being what he was, the philosopher became a relevant figure in a host of situations that involved the exercise and control of power."[93] Governing others requires the training to recognize the truth when offered by a philosopher who lives such truth in word and deed.

In a final continuity, alongside the materials Foucault worked with at the end of his life, Brown's "Augustine and Sexuality," Box 84, Folder 11 includes "la photocopie sur parrhesia."[94] Through communication with James Bernauer, I learnt that Bernauer gave Foucault the photocopy of Stanley Marrow's article "Parrhesia and the New Testament" in the summer of 1982, while attending Foucault's course at the University of Toronto.[95] I am left wondering if Brown contributed to Foucault's interest in *parrhesia* through his Hale lectures, conversation in October 1980, or even through a reading of "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity."[96]

---

[92] Brown's "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity" also centrally refers to *parrhesia* in the volume Senellart notes Foucault would have known, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (1982), particularly pp. 136-140. Brown also refers to the *θεῖος ανήρ* (*theios anēr*) in this article, and Foucault refers to this concept in Box 74 (*Gouvernment de soi et des autres*, Les Autres).

[93] Brown, *Philosophers and Monks*, Lecture 1, p. 18.

[94] Foucault's earliest references to *παρρησία* that I have been able to track involve the treatise by Philodemus, which he drafts and then cuts from his Howison talks in 1980. Manuscript in Box 62, Folder 4, sheet 57, B.N.F. Fonds Foucault: "Ce thème de l'aveu nécessaire pour le progrès de l'âme, on le trouve chez les épicuriens. Le peri parrhsias de Philodème est très révélateur sur ce point.". "Parresia was the opening of the heart," Foucault notes in an English typescript, framing it as "a question of an ethical and technical rule concerning verbal relationships" (Ibid., 40.1.13). I find it notable that this is one of the earliest constructions of the "ethical" as important in Foucault's work.

Foucault does not publicly discuss *parrhesia* until *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, trans. Graham Burchell (2005), notably March 10, 1982 where he discusses Philodemus, Seneca, and Galen. These are the first Collège lectures where Foucault embraces the language of ethics as an explicit orientation in his work ("ethics of the subject defined by the relationship of self to self" (Ibid., 252)), noting *parrhesia* as "a certain 'ethics of speech'"(Ibid., 137). Foucault's "*La parrêsia*" at the University of Grenoble on 18 May 1982 and "Discours et vérité" series at the University of California, Berkeley in 1983 also present a roadmap of his thinking (Michel Foucault, *Discours et vérité, précédé de La parrêsia*, ed. Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini (2016)).

[95] James Bernauer, personal correspondence, February 18, 2021. Notes in Box 24 (Séminaire « Dire vrai sur soi-même » Notes de lecture Cours à Toronto (mai-jun 82) et Berkeley (circa 1983); reprise de certain cours du Collège de France), Folder 12 (Parrhesia et christianisme), B.N.F. Fonds Foucault. Here, there are two photocopies: one of Gerhard Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament παρρησία* entry (Eerdmans, 1965), 869-884, and one of Stanley B. Marrow, "Parrhesia and the New Testament," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44:3 (1982), 431-446. I believe Foucault used Marrow's article as a bibliographic source, considering his notes on several of the footnoted references.

[96] Brown's account in *Power and Persuasion* of *parrhesia* and the philosopher, also found in "Asceticism: Pagan and Christian," as well as the riveting way in which "the wife" plays this function in *The Body and Society* offer other avenues for considering the philosophical and political necessity of *parrhesia* in Brown's work that might have been planted in 1980 or through early 1981 in Foucault's reading of Brown's Hale lectures or *The Making of Late Antiquity*.

Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 61-62; Peter Brown, "Asceticism: Pagan and Christian," in *The Cambridge Ancient History Volume 13*, ed. Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey (1998), 610; Brown, *The Body and Society*, 15.

Foucault comes to amplify the ethical stakes of *parrhesia* in relation to Socratic and Cynic possibilities for contesting power in word and deed in his final 1984 lectures at the Collège de France. In this context, he cites Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, Book XIX, for the unsurprising yet "noticeable interaction between Cynic practice and Christian asceticism."[97] In his closing lecture on March 28—where Foucault suggests he might continue his exploration into "this history of the arts of living, of philosophy as form of life, of asceticism in its relation to the truth" in Christianity—we are left with a sense of Foucault's interest in the radical challenges *parrhesiasts* might pose to institutions. Formed in the *paideia* more continuous than parted between pagan and Christian forms, the cultivation of their ways of life coincides with the cultivation of a critical attitude.

Brown's Hale Lectures are helpful for working out the disciplinary developments and genealogical innovations that connect Brown and Foucault. Brown also directly refers to Foucault's *History of Sexuality* series in Hale Lecture 5 (pages 19 and 20). Work remains to chart out the careful convergences and divergences in Foucault's readings of Cassian, Augustine, the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Athanasius, John Chrysostom, Basil and others through the rest of Brown's Hale lectures. The "cure of souls" and "care of self" at the intersection of Brown's lectures and Foucault's work requires more robust consideration and continued archival exploration, notably in Foucault's amplified interest in "ethics" alongside the force of "power" and "knowledge." The ancient philosopher and monk are both in the background of much of this rethinking.

CONCLUSION

I began this article with the argument that Foucault publicly considers Augustine more rigorously after his 1980 Howison lectures at Berkeley. Foucault's 1980 meeting with Brown in Berkeley can be seen as part of the shift in his engagement with Augustine—a dedication which results in over one third of the published *Confessions of the Flesh* spent in careful textual analysis of Augustine, while also setting the stakes for "[t]he genealogy of the subject as a subject of ethical actions, or the genealogy of desire as an ethical problem."[98] *Confessions of the Flesh* certainly shows the fruits of that engagement and Foucault's debt to Brown, both in relation to Augustine and in relation to Foucault's broader conceptualization of sexuality and subjectivity.

Aline Rousselle's French translation of Brown's *The Body and Society* has a distinctly Foucault-informed title—*Le renoncement à la chair : Virginité, célibat et continence dans le christianisme primitif* (1995).

[97] Discussing positive and negative forms of *parrhesia*, Foucault notes: "You find it again in the Christians expressed in fairly similar ways, apart, however, from the fact that in the history of their asceticism Christians seem to have taken it infinitely further and, at least for a time, tried to radicalize even Cynic renunciation." (Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 317.)

[98] Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in *Essential Works, 1: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth* (1997), 266. This interview is noted as from working sessions with Paul Rabinow and Hubert Dreyfus at Berkeley in April 1983.

In the slightly modified French edition of "On the Genealogy of the Subject," Foucault maintains his reading of Augustine on the role of the erection and desire (Michel Foucault, "À propos de la généalogie de l'éthique : un aperçu du travail en cours," *Dits et Écrits, Tome 2 : 1976 - 1988* (2001), 1208, 1433, 1213 & 1438).

The genealogy of the influence between Foucault and Brown shows not only that Foucault cites Brown but that his own *tournant antique* took much from the cultural historian deeply enmeshed in discourses of Christianity, ethics, and subjectivity. As evident in Foucault's published and archival references to Brown, Brown clearly influenced Foucault's editing and rethinking of his *History of Sexuality* series. The disciplinary intersection between historical and philosophical methods is thus vital for understanding Foucault's work, notably over the last eight years of his life (1976-1984). We cannot understand Foucault's readings of Augustine nor Foucault's genealogy of subjectivity without appreciating his engagement with Brown and the questions that emerge in his shifting views of "le partage" between classical and late antiquities.

To return to Box 84, Folder 11: Foucault's last engagement with Christianity involves Augustine and sexuality. And the evidence of Foucault's last engagement with Augustine involves Brown. Brown's details of their interactions help to flesh out this influence and, in return, contextualize encounters known in general fact but not in specific content. Brown's work threads through both Foucault's unpublished archival material and his published monographs and lectures. Taken together, this evidence suggests that Brown had a vital influence on Foucault precisely as Foucault was shifting his *History of Sexuality* project, his genealogy of subjectivity, and his archival practices. To contextualize *Confessions of the Flesh* thus requires understanding the influence of Brown on Foucault—and Augustine on Foucault vis-à-vis Brown.

To work through these influences—from direct personal encounters to the distal influences they have had on several fields—is to reckon with larger issues of the disciplinary structure of academic inquiry and the need for critique in academic knowledge production. We can also limit potential textual anachronisms by including archival references to the volumes and sources Foucault engaged, which help us glean how his theoretical developments inform his historical readings, and vice versa. Both Foucault and Brown contributed to the conditions of possibility for each others' critical historical and philosophical knowledge production—and they did so, to some degree, through the same influences. The ramifications of this mutual influence on disciplinary domains and the import of contemporary scholarship on questions of ethics remains to be reckoned with.

The parting of these waters is also difficult to pin down.

References

Behr, John, "Shifting Sands: Foucault, Brown and the Framework of Christian Asceticism," *The Heythrop Journal* 34:1 (1993), 1-21.

Bernauer, James, "Fascinating Flesh: Revealing the Catholic Foucault," *Foucault Studies* 29 (2021), 38-47.

Bernauer, James. *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward an Ethics for Thought*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1990.

Bernauer, James and David Rasmussen, eds., *The Final Foucault*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988.

Boehringer, Sandra, "Paul Veyne, historien de la sexualité antique ?" in *Autour "d'une œuvre en porte-à-faux". Paul Veyne et l'Histoire*, ed. Paul Cournarie and Pascal Montlahuc. Paris: Belles-Lettres, forthcoming 2022.

Brown, Peter, "A Life of Learning," *American Council of Learned Societies Occasional Paper* 55 (2003), 1-20.

Brown, Peter, "Asceticism: Pagan and Christian," in *The Cambridge Ancient History* 13, ed. Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Brown, Peter, *Augustine of Hippo. A biography*. London: Faber and Faber, 1967.

Brown, Peter, *The Body and Society*: *Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Brown, Peter, *The Body and Society*. 20th year edition, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

Brown, Peter, "Foucault's Aveux," *Foucault's Confessions* talk series, Rice University, May 6, 2021. https://foucaultsconfessions.org/peter-brown/

Brown, Peter, "Philosophers and Monks," 1980 Hale Lectures. Unpublished, consulted copy from the author.

Brown, Peter, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.

Brown, Peter, *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine*. London: Faber and Faber, 1972.

Brown, Peter, *Le renoncement à la chair: Virginité, célibat et continence dans le christianisme primitif*, trans. Aline Rouselle. Paris: Gallimard, 1995.

Brown, Peter, "Culture, Society, and Renunciation in Late Antiquity," 1980 Hale Lectures. Archived at Styberg Library at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL.

Büttgen, Philippe, "Aveu et confession," in *Foucault, les Pères, le Sexe : Autour des Aveux de la chair*, ed. Philippe Büttgen, Philippe Chevallier, Agustín Colombo, and Arianna Sforzini. Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2021.

Cameron, Averil, "Redrawing the Map: Early Christian Territory after Foucault." *Journal of Roman Studies* 76 (1986), 266-71.

Cameron, Averil, "Patristics and Late Antiquity: Partners or Rivals?," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 28:2 (2020), 283-302.

Carrette, Jeremy, *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporeality and Political Spirituality*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Castelli, Elizabeth, and Daniel Boyarin, "Introduction: Foucault's "The History of Sexuality": The Fourth Volume, or, A Field Left Fallow for Others to Till," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10:3-4 (2001), 357–374.

Chevallier, Philippe, *Foucault et le christianisme*. Paris: École Normale Supérieure, 2011.

Chevallier, Philippe, "Un christianisme sans la chair ? Les premiers siècles chrétiens selon Foucault, " in *Après Les Aveux de la chair : Généalogie du sujet chez Michel Foucault*, ed. Sandra Boehringer and Laurie Laufer, 31-52. Paris: Epel, 2020.

Chevallier, Philippe, "The Birth of *Confessions of the Flesh*: A Journey through the Archives," trans. Charles Piecyk, *Maynooth Philosophical Papers* 11 (2022), 55-73.

Chevallier, Philippe, "The Genesis of Confessions of the Flesh," *Foucault's Confessions* talk series, Rice University, May 11, 2021. https://foucaultsconfessions.org/philippe-chevallier/

Clark, Elizabeth A., "1990 Presidential Address: Sex, Shame, and Rhetoric: En-Gendering Early Christian Ethics," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59:2 (1991), 221-45.

Clark, Elizabeth A., "L'Augustin de Foucault au risqué d'Augustin," in *Foucault, les Pères, le Sexe : Autour des Aveux de la chair*, ed. Philippe Büttgen, Philippe Chevallier, Agustín Colombo, and Arianna Sforzini. Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2021.

Clark, Elizabeth A., "Foucault, The Fathers, and Sex," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 56:4 (1988), 619-41.

Clark, Elizabeth A., *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Courcelle, Pierre. *Connais-toi toi-même de Socrate à Saint Bernard*. Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1974.

Eribon, Didier, *Michel Foucault*. Paris: Flammarion, 2011.

Eribon, Didier, *Michel Foucault*, trans. Betsy Wing. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Foucault, Michel, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975*, ed. Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni, trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Foucault, Michel, *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self, Lectures at Dartmouth College, 1980*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Foucault, Michel, Archives at University of California, Berkeley, Bancroft Library, 90/136 Z, Berkeley, California.

Foucault, Michel, "The Battle for Chastity," in *Essential Works, 1: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: New Press, 1997.

Foucault, Michel, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Michel Senellart. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Foucault, Michel, "Le combat de la chasteté," in *Dits et Écrits, Tome 2 : 1976 – 1988*. Paris: Gallimard, 2001.

Foucault, Michel, "Le combat de la chasteté," *Communications* 35 (1982), 15-25. https://doi.org/10.3406/comm.1982.1518

Foucault, Michel, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-1984*, trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Foucault, Michel, *Discours et vérité, précédé de La parrêsia*, ed. Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini. Paris: Vrin, 2016.

Foucault, Michel, Fonds Foucault, Bibliothèque nationale de France (B.N.F.), NAF 28730, Paris, France.

Foucault, Michel, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Foucault, Michel, *Histoire de la sexualité IIII : Les aveux de la chair*. Paris: Gallimard, 2018.

Foucault, Michel, *Histoire de la sexualité III: Le Souci de soi*. Paris: Gallimard, 2014.

Foucault, Michel, *Histoire de la sexualité II: L'Usage des plaisirs*. Paris: Gallimard, 2014.

Foucault, Michel, *History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

Foucault, Michel, *History of Sexuality, Volume 3: The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1988.

Foucault, Michel, *History of Sexuality, Volume 4: Confessions of the Flesh*, trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon, 2021.

Foucault, Michel, *Œuvres*, ed. Frédéric Gros, Philippe Chevallier, Daniel Defert, Bernard Harcourt, Martin Rueff and Michel Senellart. Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2015.

Foucault, Michel, "*Omnes et Singulatim*: Towards a Criticism of 'Political Reason,'" in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, ed. Sterling McMurrin, 225-254. Utah: University of Utah Press, 1981.

Foucault, Michel, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in *Essential Works, 1: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: New Press, 1997.

Foucault, Michel, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1979-1980*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Foucault, Michel, "Préface à l'Histoire de la sexualité," in *Dits et Écrits, Tome 2 : 1976 – 1988*, 1397-1403. Paris: Gallimard, 2001.

Foucault, Michel, "Preface to *the History of Sexuality, Volume II*," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, 333-339. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Foucault, Michel, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France 1973-1974*, ed. Jacques Lagrange, trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Foucault, Michel, "Le retour de la morale," in *Dits et Écrits, Tome 2 : 1976 – 1988*, 1515-1526. Paris: Gallimard, 2001.

Foucault, Michel, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Michel Senellart. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Foucault, Michel, "Sexualités occidentales," *Communications* 35 (1982), 15-25. https://doi.org/10.3406/ahess.1978.293904

Foucault, Michel, "Sexuality and Power (1978)," in *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy Carrette. New York: Routledge, 1999. Published as "Sexualité et pouvoir" in *Gendai-shisô* (1978).

Foucault, Michel, "Sexuality and Solitude," in *Essential Works, 1: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: New Press, 1997.

Foucault, Michel, *Speaking the Truth about Oneself: Lectures at Victoria University, Toronto, 1982*, ed. Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini, English ed. established by Daniel Louis Wyche. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021.

Foucault, Michel, *Subjectivity and Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1980-1981*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Frédéric Gros. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Foucault, Michel, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton. Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.

Foucault, Michel, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice*, ed. Fabienne Brion and Bernard E. Harcourt. IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Frend, Willam H. C., *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1965.

Marrow, Stanley B., "Parrhesia and the New Testament," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44:3 (1982), 431-446.

Sedgwick, Timothy, *The Christian Moral Life: Practices of Piety*. Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999.

Senellart, Michel, "Le cours de 1980, Du gouvernement des vivants, dans la perspective de l'Histoire de la sexualité," in *Michel Foucault: éthique et vérité: 1980-1984*, ed. Daniele Lorenzini, Ariane Revel, and Arianna Sforzini, 31-51. Paris: Vrin, 2013.

Tran, Jonathan, *Foucault and Theology*. New York: T & T Clark International, 2011.

Veyne, Paul, "Le Monde Romain : la famille et l'amour sous le haut-empire Romain," *Annales Économies Sociétés Civilisations* 33:1 (1978), 35-63. https://doi.org/10.3406/ahess.1978.293904

Zachubber, Johannes, "Intériorité de la conscience et extériorité des avuex. Le sujet chrétien selon Foucault," in *Foucault, les Pères, le Sexe: Autour des Aveux de la chair*, ed. Philippe Büttgen, Philippe Chevallier, Agustín Colombo, and Arianna Sforzini. Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2021.

Author info

Niki Kasumi Clements

niki.clements@rice.edu

Watt J. and Lilly G. Jackson Associate Professor of Religion

Department of Religion

Rice University

United States of America

Niki Kasumi Clements researches Michel Foucault's fascination with Christianity and ethics through both his published works and the archives at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Clements is an ethicist working at the disciplinary intersection of philosophy of religion and late ancient Christianity, notably on questions of daily practices, agency, and subjectivity. Clements's monograph *Sites of the Ascetic Self: John Cassian and Christian Ethical Formation* (2020), approaches these questions through the practical ethics of John Cassian (c. 360-c. 435), a late ancient ascetic central to Foucault's reworking of his *History of Sexuality* series. Clements is at work on the monograph, *Foucault the Confessor*, as well as a short book, *Foucault's Final Confessions*, contextualizing Foucault's *Les Aveux de la chair* in relation to his last decade.

FOUCAULT
STUDIES

© Ori Rotlevy

ISSN: 1832-5203
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.vi32.6702
Foucault Studies, No. 32, 28-53, October 2022

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

ARTICLE

Askesis and Critique: Foucault and Benjamin

ORI ROTLEVY
Tel Aviv University, Israel

ABSTRACT. While Foucault referred to Benjamin just once in his entire corpus, scholars have long noticed affinities between the two thinkers, mainly between their conceptions of history: their emphasis on discontinuity, their historiographical practices, and the role of archives in their work. This essay focuses, rather, on their practice of critique and, more specifically, on their conception of the relation of this practice to exercise or *askesis.* I examine the role of askesis as a self-transformative exercise in Foucault's late work and how this concept reverberates throughout his idea of critique as the exercise of an ethos demanding arduous work. Against this background, the role of exercise (*Übung*) in Benjamin's *Origin of the German Traeurspiel*, his interest in ascetic kinds of exercise or schooling, and its ties to critique are discerned. This comparison reveals significant similarities in Foucault's and Benjamin's conception of philosophy, as well as different emphases in their inheritance of the Kantian critical project: critique as an exercise of an attitude attentive to possibilities for transformation in the present vs. critique as involving an attitude-transforming exercise; critique as a modern ethos that needs to be reactivated vs. critique as propaedeutic, as a preparation for a modern tradition.

Keywords: Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin, Immanuel Kant, Pierre Hadot, Spiritual Exercise, Critical Theory

INTRODUCTION

Although Foucault referred to Benjamin just once in his entire corpus, and only in a footnote at that,[1] works such as Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* prove quite clearly the potential of juxtaposing these two thinkers, indicating the horizon this endeavor opens for a creative account of power, body and politics.[2] And yet, few scholarly comparisons of the

[1] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality 2: The Use of Pleasure* [1984] (1990), 8.

[2] See Giorgio Agamben's work: *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* [1995] (1998); *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* [1998] (1999); *State of Exception* [2003] (2005); *Sacrament of Language: An Archaeology of the Oath* [2008] (2011). Banu Bargu's *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human*

two have been conducted, and those that have tend to focus on affinities between their conceptions of history: their emphasis on discontinuity, their historiographical practices, and the role of archives in their work.[3] This line of inquiry provides significant insights, bridging the gap between the Marxist messianism of Benjamin and the post-Marxist genealogical project of Foucault. Yet, I would argue that an alternate path of comparison, one that focuses on their practices of critique, is no less compelling. Indeed, it might offer a more nuanced comparison between the two, illuminating surprising affinities in their conception of philosophy as well as significant distinctions in the manners in which they inherit and transform the Kantian critical legacy. In this essay, I engage with this path by attending to the relation of critical practice to exercise, or *askesis,* in the thought of both Benjamin and Foucault.

The role of askesis as a self-transformative exercise in Foucault's late work is well known. It is a central concept in his ethics, owing much to Pierre Hadot's concept of spiritual exercise.[4] Furthermore, this concept reverberates throughout Foucault's idea of critique as the exercise of an ethos demanding arduous work.[5] At the same time, the role of exercise (*Übung*) in Benjamin's work and, more specifically, his interest in ascetic kinds of exercise or schooling are less known, and their relation to critique is disregarded. I do not intend to impose a full-fledged Foucauldian scheme onto Benjamin, which might result in effacing the uniqueness of the latter's thought. Rather, I aim to use a Foucauldian concept—or, more accurately, a relation between two concepts, askesis and critique—as a prism for an attentive and innovative reading of Benjamin, which will then lay the groundwork for a comparison between the two

---

Weapons (2014) is a further contemporary proof of the power of the juxtaposition of Foucault and Benjamin.

[3] For a discussion focusing on the concept of historical discontinuity in Benjamin and Foucault, see: Daniele Lorenzini, "Benjamin/Foucault: Histoire, Discontinuité, Utopie," *Phantasia* 7 (2018), 1-10. For a discussion focusing on the concept of history and historical method, see Martin Rueff, "De Benjamin à Foucault : allumer la mèche," *Critique* 72:835 (2016), 1030-1048. For further comparison between the thinkers regarding their historical attitudes, see Stanley Aronowitz, "History as Disruption: On Benjamin and Foucault," *Humanities and Society* 2:2 (1979), 125-147. For a discussion on the normative accounts of political liberation that are motivated by distinctive theoretical perspectives on history and on the historian's task in both thinkers, see Aaron Greenberg, "Making Way for Tomorrow: Benjamin and Foucault on History and Freedom," *Journal of Political Thought* 2:1 (2016), 22-39. For a comparison that ties their historical thought to the contemporary museum, see Norton Batkin, "Conceptualizing the History of the Contemporary Museum: On Foucault and Benjamin," *Philosophical Topics* 25:1 (1997), 1-10. For a comparison of their approach to history and criticism of historicism that also refers to their reading in Nietzsche, see: Sigrid Weigel, *Body-and Image-Space: Re-Reading Walter Benjamin* (1996). For an "exception to the rule," in an essay that addresses ethics rather than history, see Julian Brigstocke, "Artistic Parrhesia and the Genealogy of Ethics in Foucault and Benjamin," *Theory, Culture & Society* 30:1 (2013), 57–78.

[4] Arnold I. Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, the History of Ethics, and Ancient Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault 1st ed.*, ed. Gary Gutting (1994), 121-129. For a more recent analysis highlighting the relation of this kind of ethics to Foucault's political project, see Daniele Lorenzini, *Éthique et politique de soi : Foucault, Hadot, Cavell et les techniques de l'ordinaire* (2015).

[5] Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" [1984], in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. Vol. 1: Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth,* ed. Paul Rabinow (1997), 319.

thinkers.[6] Taking askesis and its relation to critique as a key to this comparison allows for a nuanced examination of the meaning assigned by both thinkers to exercises of self-transformation in the practice of critique. I begin by surveying Foucault's concept of askesis and the role it plays in the conception of philosophy in his late thought. I go on to trace the less familiar role played by similar transformative exercise in Benjamin. More specifically, I focus on Benjamin's foreword to his *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, where he writes of a particular kind of exercise related to the very form of philosophy and draws an explicit connection between the task of his book—presentation of the form of the baroque plays and the idea of Baroque—and ascetic schooling. This also illuminates the role of well-known Benjaminian practices such as flânerie. The last sections of the paper are dedicated to a comparison between Foucault's and Benjamin's inheritance of the Kantian critical project. The different emphases of the two thinkers in this respect are at times a matter of nuance – critique as an exercise of an attitude attentive to possibilities for transformation (Foucault) vs. critique as involving an attitude-transforming exercise (Benjamin). Yet at times they appear as a schism – critique as a modern ethos that needs to be reactivated without any obligation for doctrine or for teachings (Foucault) vs. critique as propaedeutic, as a preparation for the teachings of modern experience or for a modern tradition (Benjamin). In both cases, I argue, it is worth reflecting on whether the opposing poles are nevertheless implied by the other thinker.

ASKESIS AND THE CONCEPTION OF PHILOSOPHY IN FOUCAULT

What is philosophy today … if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? … the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently … [I]t is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it. The "essay"- which should be understood as the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes … - is the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is still what it was in times past, i.e., an "askesis," an exercise of oneself in thought.[7]

In Foucault's introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, his view of the role of exercise and the significance of the Greek term for it, askesis, is explicit: he claims it is the very substance of ancient philosophy and argues that it ought to be the substance of contemporary philosophy too – at least to the extent that it is critical. I will elaborate on Foucault's concept of critique in the penultimate section; for now, I note only that critical work appears here as a contemporary form of askesis.[8] Significantly, such critical work is tied to exercise in the sense that it designates the mapping of possibilities for thinking differently, for changing thought, and for intervening in the "game of truth" by *practicing* a foreign form of knowledge. Foucault describes his own project in these terms: "It was a philosophical

---

[6] In this sense, methodologically, this essay is closer to Lorenzini, whose article "Benjamin/Foucault" compares them through the relation between concepts such as attitude, history and present rather than to Brigstocke, who in "Artistic Parrhesia" experiments with reading Benjamin through the Foucauldian scheme of ethics.

[7] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 2, 9.

[8] Matthew Sharpe, "'Critique' as Technology of the Self," *Foucault Studies* 2 (2005), 101.

exercise. The object was to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently."[9] The exercise Foucault undertakes is not merely one of exploring the ancient history of subjectivity, of past practices of subjectivation, in order to gain theoretical knowledge of ourselves; it is also one of practicing this knowledge so as to transform the way we think. For instance, in taking the explication of what is silent within us not merely as a form of knowing the self but rather as a form of care for the self, we attend to possibilities for self-transformation.

However, this very concrete example of Foucault's own work does not adequately explain why he sees askesis as so central to philosophy as it had once been and as it should be today. In order to address this question, I would like to outline three themes, mainly following the work of Arnold Davidson's work on Foucault's ethics, but with a significant addition of the political aspect: first, the origin of exercise and its textual embodiment in philosophy; second, the theme of exercise as a form of moral subjectivation and its political role; and third, the relation between exercise and access to truth. I will later demonstrate how some of these themes come into play in Benjamin as well, albeit in a different manner.

Foucault's use of the concept of spiritual exercise to describe his own work is indebted to the work of Pierre Hadot, the historian of ancient philosophy. Hadot offers a revolutionary way to understand ancient philosophy not as theory but as a way of life that requires training and exercise. This thesis was instigated by a philological problem for understanding the significance of well-known ancient texts, which scholars found repetitive, highly rhetorical, and lacking coherence. Among them were Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*, which were written daily, and which the author addressed to himself. Hadot claims this text was not another instance of the personal comments genre that was common at the time but in fact served as a spiritual exercise that aimed at mastering the various powers of the soul. By relinquishing the attempt to read the text as autobiographical or as presenting a philosophical system (theory), one can see it as a document of askesis: arduous work meant to affect the self, to transform one's ways of looking, willing, and judging.[10]

This was not only characteristic of stoics such as Aurelius, with their training in adopting a detached stance in face of worldly changes, evil, death, etc.; according to Hadot, spiritual exercises were fundamental to *all* the central philosophical schools of antiquity. Their texts were not written in order to communicate information but rather to affect the reader; they are not primarily propositional but formative, even transformative.[11] Witnessing the ongoing struggle between the interlocutors in Socratic dialogues, for instance, leads the readers to observe themselves—their beliefs, attitudes, and points of view—in a

---

[9] *The History of Sexuality 2*, 9.

[10] Arnold I. Davidson, "Pierre Hadot and the Spiritual Phenomenon of Ancient Philosophy," in *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* by Pierre Hadot, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (1995), 1-35.

[11] Ibid., 21-26.

manner that can be transformative. Indeed, according to Hadot, the goal of ancient philosophical discourse was the transformation of the lives of individuals, teaching them not a theory but a way of life. Hadot further claimed that while such exercises had been obscured by most modern philosophy, they have reemerged in various modern thinkers, such as Goethe and Nietzsche.[12]

Foucault was deeply influenced by Hadot's approach to ancient philosophy, and the idea of askesis became a pivotal motive in his exploration of the history of ethics in his last years. This leads us to our second theme. The Greco-Roman notion of askesis has to do with "constituting oneself" through certain kinds of exercise or, as Foucault puts it, "a practical training that was indispensable in order for an individual to form himself as a moral subject."[13] This sense of the word does not focus on the common association of askesis with asceticism, namely, progressive practices of renunciation of the self and of reality aimed at gaining access to another level of reality. In Foucault's history of ethics, centering on the self's relation to itself rather than merely on the codes and rules the subject is to obey, the various forms of ancient askesis—including "abstinences, memorizations, self-examinations, meditations, silence… listening to others" and myriad forms of writing to oneself and to others—play a significant role.[14] They exemplify the possibility for self-transformation not by "subjecting the subject to the law" but rather by "binding him to truth"[15] or by transforming "truth into ethos,"[16] a disposition or attitude: a way of being.

Yet, as Davidson suggests, askesis as part of "the self-forming activity or ethical work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself into an ethical subject" plays a major role not only in antiquity but also in Foucault's account of the present.[17] Askesis is part of the "'technologies of the self': the ways in which we relate to ourselves, contribute to the forms in which our subjectivity is constituted and experienced, as well as to the forms in which we govern our thought and conduct."[18] It contributes not only to an account of who we have become but also to the account of "how we might become different."[19] It is thus a fundamental part of Foucault's conception of philosophy with which

[12] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* [1987], ed. Arnold I. Davidson (1995), 147–78, 217-237.

[13] *The History of Sexuality 2*, 77.

[14] Michel Foucault, "Self-writing" in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. Volume 1: Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (1997), 208.

[15] Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. Frédéric Gros (2006), 317.

[16] Foucault, "Self-writing," 209.

[17] Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics," 118. A significant example is Foucault's use of this concept in order to conceive the ethical potential of homosexuality in his days, as one of its goals is "to advance into a homosexual askesis that would make us work on ourselves and invent, I do not say discover, a manner of being that is still improbable." Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life" [1981], in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1966–84)*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (1989), 206, as cited in "Ethics as Ascetics," 125.

[18] "Ethics as Ascetics," 119.

[19] Ibid., 135.

we began: philosophy as "the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently."[20]

Before moving forward with Foucault's appropriation of the idea of askesis, we should note Hadot's critique of Foucault's emphasis on subjectivity after the latter's death. According to Hadot, in several of the major ancient schools (Platonism, Epicureanism and Stoicism), individual transformation is "obtained through a movement by which one passes from individual, passionate subjectivity to the objectivity of a universal perspective."[21] In other words, the issue at hand is not "the fashioning of a self … but on the contrary … a surpassing of the self, or at least … an exercise by which the self is situated within this totality and experiences itself as one part thereof";[22] in other words, as belonging to a "cosmic whole."[23] Likewise, Hadot sees ancient writing practices as liberating "oneself from one's individuality, in order to raise oneself up to universality … [allowing] its practitioner to accede to the universality of reason within the confines of space and time."[24] Hadot thus claims that Foucault's reading of ancient askesis avoids the themes of transcending the self, of universality and objectivity.[25] However, Orazio Irrera, who reconsiders the dialogue between the two thinkers, suggests that "the act that elevates the individual to a perspective that is within him but at the same time transcends him, so important for Hadot, remains for Foucault an act of self-reflection … immanent to … subjectivity itself."[26] In other words, Irrera claims that these themes are not disregarded but are rather situated within the context of the subject's relation to itself.

An additional difference between Foucault and Hadot lies in their distinct ethico-political projects. Hadot is interested in reactivating an ancient kind of ethics in the present that aims to liberate the modern moral person from selfish individuality and open her to universality and objectivity in practice. Foucault's interest in the ancient practices, on the other hand, is part of his conception of ethics as a political practice of resistance in the present. As such, the work of the self on oneself is an element in the dynamics of the practice of subjectivation as counter-conduct in the face of mechanisms of subjugation. Foucault's analysis of ancient techniques of the self thus aims to offer a toolbox to be used in creative manners in order to conduct oneself differently than one had in the past.[27]

Moving on to the third theme pertinent to our question: the role askesis plays in Foucault's account of the history of truth as a condition for accessing it. This comes up in Foucault's distinction between philosophy and spirituality in the opening lecture of his 1982 course on the *Hermeneutics of the Subject*:

---

[20] *The History of Sexuality 2*, 9.

[21] Pierre Hadot, *The Selected Writings of Pierre Hadot: Philosophy as Practice* [2002] (2020), 231.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 208.

[24] Ibid, 210-211.

[25] Ibid.; Hadot, *The Selected Writings of Pierre Hadot*, 230-231.

[26] Orazio Irrera, "Pleasure and transcendence of the self: Notes on 'a dialogue too soon interrupted' between Michel Foucault and Pierre Hadot," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 36:9 (2010), 1013.

[27] Lorenzini, *Éthique et politique de soi*, 11-14; 217-218; 223-241.

> I think the modern age of the history of truth begins when knowledge itself and knowledge alone gives access to the truth. That is to say, it is when the philosopher (or the scientist, or simply someone who seeks the truth) can recognize the truth and have access to it in himself and solely through his activity of knowing, without anything else being demanded of him and without him having to change or alter his being as subject.[28]

Foucault terms this moment, which assumes that knowledge provides the subject with access to truth, the Cartesian moment in the history of truth. In this approach, the sufficient conditions that enable such access include a requirement to follow certain methodological rules and meet certain extrinsic conditions, such as not being insane or not trying to deceive others. Yet none of these address the subject's mode of being. Foucault's history of ancient philosophy, however, reveals how, in that earlier period, access to truth had in fact been intimately involved with the transformation of the subject. If philosophy asks what allows the subject access to truth (e.g., cognitive faculties) and what the conditions and limits of this access are, in antiquity the answer to these questions involved spirituality:

> We will call "spirituality" then the set of these researches, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject's very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth.[29]

This model of spirituality assumes that the subject has no a priori access to truth. Neither a certain form of subjectivity nor cognitive faculties sufficiently provide in themselves such a path; access requires conversion and transformation through arduous work of the self on the self—through askesis. The Cartesian moment, on the other hand, effaces spirituality and, with it, the philosophical need for askesis.[30]

While the distinction between philosophy and spirituality is Foucault's way of characterizing the Hellenistic moment that interests him, it also facilitates thinking about modern philosophical figures who defied the Cartesian moment. In his preface to Foucault's *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Davidson distinguishes Lacan and Wittgenstein, and even

---

[28] Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 17.

[29] Ibid., 15.

[30] It is important to mention that in his critique of Foucault's use of the idea of askesis, Hadot also rejects Foucault's historical delineation of the history of philosophy. According to Hadot, philosophy as spiritual exercise declined already in the Middle Ages, when spiritual exercises became an integral part of Christianity. Descartes' philosophy is thus not a negative turning point; in fact, Hadot claims that Descartes' *Meditations*, as the name of the book hints, should be seen as a spiritual exercise itself and his philosophy as a significant reemergence of that tradition. Hadot supposes that Foucault would contend such an interpretation of Descartes, but as Hadot's translators, Matthew Sharpe and Federico Testa note, Foucault was aware of this dimension in Descartes' philosophy. See: *The Selected Writings of Pierre Hadot*, 231-232, and translators note j in p. 232.

Foucault himself, as such cases.[31] He claims that these thinkers tie together philosophy and spirituality by opening up a space "for exercises, techniques, tests, the transfiguring space of a different attitude, a new ethos."[32] Philosophy, according to Foucault, does not concern a mere acquisition of knowledge but rather a kind of pursuit that results in the "knower's straying afield of himself."[33] With that in mind, I turn to Benjamin in order to discuss the space of straying and transformation he aims to open up through his writing.

TWO MEANINGS OF EXERCISE IN BENJAMIN

Benjamin's *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* is dedicated to the obscure baroque mourning plays, which, if considered at all in the German cultural tradition of his day, were seen as bad tragedies filled with an overabundance of allegories and never-ending drama. For Benjamin, however, affinities between the "spiritual constitution of the Baroque" and the expressionism of his own day, with its "brokenness and inner strife,"[34] turned these plays into an intriguing case—not merely due to their contemporary relevance but also due to the theoretical challenge they posed for the then-dominant Idealist and Neo-Kantian aesthetic approaches.

The mourning plays, like the period in which they were written, are rife with contradictions: religious devotion and sacrilege; absolute sovereignty and its dissolution; linguistic excess and the emptiness of language. If one wishes to recognize their meaning and truth, one cannot adopt what Benjamin terms an "idealist attitude" (*Haltung*), namely one that is disposed towards the whole in advance. This approach is doomed to fail since any attempt to classify these plays as part of an aesthetic system of knowledge by subsuming them under a unifying principle of genre inevitably diffuses the very tensions and contradictions that characterize the plays for the sake of their synthesis into a concept.[35] The problematic tendency towards synthesis exposes a much more general problem regarding truth and the role of philosophy, which Benjamin discusses in the beginning of the book's dense Epistemo-Critical Foreword:

---

[31] Arnold I. Davidson, introduction to *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982* by Michel Foucault, ed. Frédéric Gros (2006), xxv-xxviii.

[32] Ibid. xxviii.

[33] *History of Sexuality 2*, 8. Following the political role of askesis mentioned above, it is worth noting that Foucault also attributes a contemporary political significance to spirituality. This comes up in an interview regarding the Iranian revolution: Michel Foucault and Sabina Vaccarino Bremner, "Political Spirituality as the Will for Alterity: An Interview with the *Nouvel Observateur*" [1979] *Critical Inquiry* 47:1 (2020), 121–34.

[34] Walter Benjamin, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* [1925] (2018), 35, 39.

[35] For further elaboration on this attitude and on the role of the tractatus in Benjamin, see: Ori Rotlevy, "Presentation as indirection, indirection as schooling: The two aspects of Benjamin's scholastic method," *Continental Philosophy Review* 50:4 (2017), 493-516.

> If philosophy is to preserve the law of its form not as mediating guide to knowledge but as presentation of truth, then it is necessary to emphasize the practice [*Übung*] of this form, not however its anticipation within the system.[36]

What Benjamin calls "the idealist attitude" involves a reductive approach to truth and philosophy which conceives truth as the correctness of knowledge, a correct way of looking at the world, of representing it, and conceives of philosophy as a guide for the acquisition of knowledge.[37] This attitude promises in advance that every piece of knowledge will have its place in a system that constitutes the scheme and end of the process of knowledge-acquisition. With such a system in place, nothing can interrupt the continuous progression of knowledge.

Benjamin, on the other hand, identifies with those moments or periods in the history of philosophy that approach truth as something beyond any specific representation, as something *unumschreiblich*, which means not only uncircumscribable but also something that cannot be described, defined, determined or paraphrased. Thus, truth cannot be represented; it can only be presented or exhibited.[38] In Wittgensteinian terms: truth cannot be told, but it can be shown.[39] I will elaborate on this later on, but what I would like to emphasize at this point is the relation Benjamin finds between the uncircumscribable character of truth and *Übung*, practice or exercise:

> In all epochs in which the uncircumscribable [unumschreiblich] essentiality of the true has come into view, this practice [Übung] has imposed itself in the form of a propaedeutic which can be designated by the scholastic term "tractatus," for this term contains a reference, however latent, to those objects of theology without which truth cannot be thought.[40]

Scholasticism epitomizes the constant practice of presentation. The kind of objects it deals with, theological objects, cannot be simply represented; yet this does not lead scholasticism to silence but rather to a repetitious attempt to treat (*tractare*) them from endless directions. Benjamin famously describes the method of the tractatus—which inspires his own digressive form of writing—as *Umweg*: indirection or detour; a form of digression. "Presentation as indirection … is the methodological character of the tractatus."[41]

In scholastic tractates, various authoritative citations of opposing opinions on the theological matter at hand are brought forth and problematized. The point of this method is not to reconcile opposing views and consolidate them into a final resolution but rather to exhibit a truth that lies beyond any opinion and any representation of the matter. The

---

[36] Benjamin, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, 2.

[37] Eli Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin: A Philosophical Portrait* (2012), 12.

[38] *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, 1–2.

[39] For further comparison between Wittgenstein and Benjamin, see: Eli Friedlander, "Wittgenstein, Benjamin, and Pure Realism," in *Wittgenstein and Modernism*, eds. Michael Lemahieu and Karen Zumhagen-Yekplé (2016).

[40] *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, 2.

[41] Ibid.

arabesque, non-linear form of the tractatus is inherently linked to the impossibility of directly addressing truth: its presentation requires the practice of repetitious detours from any single direction in thought, be it that of an authority or that of the author. Thus, our initial understanding of *Übung* is as a repetitious practice of digression; one that is necessary for the presentation of truth; for the textual construction of this presentation.[42]

Similarly, Benjamin describes his task in the book as the presentation of the *idea* of the *Trauerspiel*'s form: presentation, not representation. He aims to exhibit the disparate and opposing phenomena condensed in the plays and related to them in various manners as partaking in one meaningful context, an intellectual whole, a constellation, a panorama; and to do so without effacing the oppositions and without subsuming extremes under one concept. In Benjamin's textual construct, some six hundred citations interrupt the continuous course of thought and are themselves interrupted by excursive remarks. Through this form of writing—which persistently attempts to think that which cannot be subsumed under a unifying principle—myriad levels of meaning, relations, and affinities are manifested. The exercise he undertakes thus lies in realizing the potential laden in linguistic materials: a potential that goes beyond their "correctness," and has to do with realizing a mosaic-like image that comes together "out of the singular and disparate."[43]

This idea of exercise in presentation as realizing or "actualizing" phenomena in the medium of language is worth emphasizing. In "On Language as such and on the Language of Man," Benjamin famously distinguishes between two linguistic spheres: the sphere of signs and that of names. The former commonly serves as means of communication through arbitrary means; the latter expresses essences, taking the Adamic recognition of the animals through the act of naming as its model.[44] This distinction remains intact throughout the substantial metamorphoses of Benjamin's conception of language, from its early and more mystical stage to its later, more materialist one. In the *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin links the act of naming to the task of philosophy as the presentation of truth or of ideas. Yet philosophy realizes its task by using the sphere of signs, designations, or

---

[42] Interestingly, we find a seemingly similar point in Foucault: "There is irony in those efforts one makes to alter one's way of looking at things, to change the boundaries of what one knows and to venture out a ways from there. Did mine actually result in a different way of thinking? Perhaps at most they made it possible to go back through what I was already thinking, to think it differently, and to see what I had done from a new vantage point and in a clearer light. Sure of having traveled far, one finds that one is looking down on oneself from above. The journey rejuvenates things, and ages the relationship with oneself. I seem to have gained a better perspective on the way I worked – gropingly, and by means of different or successive fragments – on this project, whose goal is a history of truth" (*History of Sexuality 2*, 11). The similarity is the figure of going back to the same thing, groping, using fragments. However, the great difference is that, for Foucault, this brings a certain perspective in relation to himself, while in Benjamin, as we shall see, the main issue is a loosening of the self; making the self-less central, less imposing, in the intellectual work. The other difference is that Foucault speaks of the return to things as "rejuvenating" them. In Benjamin, however, this return is more of a mortification. See: *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, 182.

[43] *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, 3.

[44] Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" [1916], in *Selected Writings Vol. I: 1913-1926*, eds. Mark Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (1996), 62-74.

representations. In one of his last texts, he provides a relevant formula: philosophy (of language) seeks to "strike a spark" between "naming and designating."[45] This is an apt depiction of the philosophical exercise: it uses representations of phenomena not as signs or designations for communication but rather for the exhibition of ideas. That is why Benjamin speaks of this act as "the salvation of phenomena."[46] Their meaning is actualized in the presentation of ideas; without this exercise, there is no access to the sphere of ideas or to truth. We should also note that Benjamin refers to this as an "objective interpretation" of phenomena,[47] seeming to suggest a certain affinity to Hadot's emphasis on objectivity and the transcendence of the subject. However, this is not the universal objectivity Hadot has in mind. Rather, resistance to the idealist conception of truth as correct representation, or as the proper synthesis of the subject, allows access here to a sphere of meaning which is otherwise blocked.

So far, I have presented what is by now a rather conventional understanding of Benjamin's method of presentation,[48] and added the link to the exercise performed in the *Trauerspiel*; an exercise through which the image in the text is constructed and phenomena are salvaged and actualized. On its surface, this dimension of an "actualizing" exercise does not seem to share anything with Foucault's transformative exercises. Moving beyond this, I would like to highlight another dimension of exercise in Benjamin's work; one that is much closer to the latter and involves a transformation of the subject required in order to access truth.

As I noted previously, Benjamin criticizes the idealist attitude towards these plays. Yet at the same time he is critical of simply abandoning this attitude in favor of what he calls "an improvised immersion in details,"[49] claiming that this latter approach also fails to "make present" the meaning of the epoch in question. The profusion of contradictions in the plays leads to a sense of disorientation and has no chance of presenting the baroque phenomena as belonging to a single context or to one mentality (*Geistigkeit*).[50] In order to make present the meaning of the epoch, Benjamin claims that an alternative attitude is required—one that is neither idealist nor a mere abandonment of idealism but rather a product of schooling:

> Only a mode of observation coming from afar and, indeed, initially capable of renouncing the prospect of totality can lead the spirit [*Geist*]—through an ascetic schooling, so to speak—to the fortitude that allows it, before the spectacle of that

---

[45] Walter Benjamin, "Review of Honigswald's *Philosophie und Sprache*" [1939], in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938-1940*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Marcus Bullock, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (2003), 141.

[46] *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, 24.

[47] Ibid., 34

[48] See: Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 12; Hans-Jost Frey, "On presentation in Benjamin," in *Walter Benjamin: Theoretical Questions*, ed. David S. Ferris (1996).

[49] *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, 39.

[50] Ibid.

> panorama, to remain master of itself. It is the course of this schooling that had to be described here.[51]

Benjamin calls on us to reread his entire foreword as describing a course of schooling, namely, as presenting a process that develops spiritual habits and dispositions, and the kind of attitude to truth that is different from both the idealist one and its simplistic abandonment. This claim, I would argue, tends to be neglected by Benjamin scholarship. It assumes, against what Foucault terms the Cartesian moment, that the subject of knowledge does not have access to truth a priori. Moreover, a fundamental attitude of the Kantian-Idealist subject—its directionality toward a system, towards the kind of systematicity championed by the natural sciences—is precisely what blocks its access to truth. This attitude is neither adequate for recognizing the truth of the Baroque nor for recognizing the truth of the fragmented and contradictory modern experience of Benjamin's own time. He suggests, instead, that truth can only be accessed if the subject of his day—the modern subject—undergoes a process of spiritual transformation.

Consider again the writing-form of the scholastic tractate. It constitutes a space for the transformation of the subject. Just as in Hadot's account of ancient philosophical texts, the text itself is formative, indeed, even transformative. And, thus, we observe the double meaning of exercise. The digressive exercise is not merely the practice of presentation of truth; it is also an exercise that in itself has an effect on the author and the reader. In Benjamin's words, the tractate forces a form of writing that "with every sentence … stops and starts anew," and, if successful, obliges the reader as well "to pause at stations of reflection."[52] Exercise in Benjamin is found in each and every sentence, and between each and every sentence. Note his explicit emphasis on how the writing generates a certain practice, a very material practice of reading, thus generating certain habits in the reader. More specifically, the constant use of citations, interrupting the progression of thought, effects a "renunciation of the unbroken course of intention."[53]

Like the scholastic tractate, the entire text of the *Trauerspiel*—not just its foreword—should be understood as a space of spiritual exercise in which the reader is able to renounce the continuous structure of intentionality; a structure that is necessarily the foundation for any reading that seeks a unifying principle in what it reads, be it the intention of the author, the principle of a genre, or any other instance of the attitude typical of an idealist subject. In other words, this is a text that not only exhibits truth but that exercises the readers in the transformative practice of moving away from an idealist attitude and towards an alternative one that allows being receptive to truth. The schooling it offers develops new habits countering the idealist ones. This kind of exercise in renouncing a fundamental structure of subjectivity demands self-mastery: an intense struggle against a basic predisposition towards a unifying principle in favor of a different kind of being. Or, as Benjamin describes thought in the tractatus: "In its persevering, thinking constantly

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid., 4.

[53] Ibid.

begins anew; with its sense of the circumstantial, it goes back to the thing itself. This continual breathing in and out is the form of existence most proper to contemplation."[54]

There are further aspects in which exercise in indirection, in methodical erring, opens up the possibility of transforming basic facets of the Kantian or Idealist subject: its directedness; its approach to time; its attentiveness to content. Yet here I limit myself to the following point: Benjamin asks us to read the foreword to the *Trauerspiel* as the description of a course in schooling, the transformation of attitude, disposition, and habits through exercise. Along with the exercise in presentation, this transformative exercise conditions access to truth. In this respect, focused attention to exercise/askesis reveals an affinity between Benjamin and Foucault that has hitherto been unnoticed.

Furthermore, while the *Trauerspiel* has no explicit political context, when inspected through the prism of askesis, it seems that Benjamin is quite close to the political context in which Foucault situates the concept in modernity. The adoption of the form of the scholastic treatise and its digressive method—an exercise in the transformation of the self as essential for access to truth—can be understood as resistance to the neo-Kantian academic regime of Benjamin's time; a practice of subjectivation that resists the mechanisms of subjugation or, maybe more fittingly, the regime of truth.

The comparison to Foucault invites us to further contemplate the political context of exercise in Benjamin. I have discussed just one example of transformative exercise in Benjamin. It is the most philosophically informed one and is valuable in that it is an exercise that inspires a transformation in writing, reading, thinking, and being. But other examples abound in Benjamin's corpus: writing practices he adopted, such as following the rule "Never use the word 'I' except in letters";[55] experiments in drug intoxication and their documentation; and, most notably, the practice of *flânerie*, that modern urban exercise in digression or wandering, which Benjamin practiced not just in his walks through cities but also in his writing about them.[56] Elaborating on each one of these would take us too far afield, but a few brief notes will assist in considering the political context of exercise in Benjamin's thought.

We find reference to the two latter examples, concerning experimentation with intoxication and flânerie, in Benjamin's essay on Surrealism. I consider these two iterations of transformative exercise under the term "the loosening of the self" or of the ego [Das "Lockerung des Ich"], which he himself uses in the essay. [57] Each case, be it the use of hashish or methodically losing oneself in a city, is an exercise in making the self less

---

[54] Ibid.

[55] Walter Benjamin, "Berlin Chronicle" [1931], in *Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2:* 1931-1934, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (1999), 603.

[56] See Walter Benjamin, *On Hashish* [1927-1934], ed. Howard Eiland (2006). See also: Benjamin, "The Return of the *Flâneur*" [1929], in *Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 1: 1927-1930*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (1999), 262–67. A significant philosophical understanding of these practices can be found in Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (1998), 117-148.

[57] Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism" [1929], in *Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 1: 1927-1930*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (1999), 208.

central, less stable, less fundamental in practice or in experience. When Benjamin refers to a "loosening of the self," he describes the surrealist use of dreamy, intoxicating experiences in order "to step outside the charmed space of intoxication."[58] In other words, a deployment of intoxication for the sake of awakening. The development of an awakened collective consciousness to the everyday reality of capitalism is central to this essay and to Benjamin's Marxist thought at large. But what this essay emphasizes more than any other text is that this collective awakening is brought about by exercises in self transformation and pertains not only to the surrealists but to the practices of "the reader, the thinker, the loiterer, the *flâneur*"; to Benjamin's own practices.[59]

The term "loosening of the self" brings us much closer to the Christian renunciation of the self than most of Foucault's examples for self-transformation, yet it is not identical to it; the practice is not one of self-denial, and it is not aimed at entering a divine kingdom. Instead, Benjamin's "Surrealism" suggests that these exercises are instrumental in releasing revolutionary energies from the past, and specifically from outdated objects,[60] and in allowing access to a collective sphere. The first point is close to what we saw in the *Trauerspiel*. Similarly to how the idealist attitude denies access to the meaning of the neglected Baroque plays, in the *Surrealism* essay, bourgeois consciousness maintains the past at a safe distance, as a static object, blocking the dynamic energies laden in it. Exercise in loosening the self conditions the release of these energies. At the same time, this exercise in self-transformation receives an explicitly political context as it allows initiation to a space in which a collective body can be produced.[61] It is thus neither an attempt for self-constitution as in Foucault nor an attempt to reach a universal perspective as in Hadot. The exercise that liberates from the structure of bourgeois subjectivity simultaneously paves the way for the epistemic recognition of energies in the past, the production of a collective, and for collective awakening.

Foucault did not share Benjamin's revolutionary attitude,[62] and he was explicitly against a politics of awakening.[63] Does this mean that he is close to the early Benjamin of the *Trauerspiel* and distant from the late Marxist one? Not exactly. The two Benjamins are actually closer than they might seem. While the theme of awakening is characteristic of late Benjamin, the collective aspect of exercise can be discerned not only in texts with a clear Marxist tone but also, more implicitly, in the *Trauerspiel*. This theme appears not just in the affinity between the renunciation of intentionality, a central structure of subjectivity, and the loosening of the self. Rather, as we shall see, it can also be discerned in the liberation from a subject-object structure, which serves to present the teachings of modern

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid., 216.

[60] Ibid, 210.

[61] Ibid, 217-218.

[62] See Lorenzini's "Benjamin/Foucault," for an opposition between Benjamin's messianic-revolutionary attitude and Foucault's critical-experimental one.

[63] Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, "Intellectuals and Power [1972]" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (1977), 208.

experience as a shared meaningful experience. In order to recognize this, we will need to consider Benjamin's Kantian legacy, the form in which he inherits critique, and its relation to exercise. This inquiry will also allow us a more nuanced comparison between Benjamin and Foucault in the conclusion concerning the place of collectivity in their critical work.

CRITIQUE'S PROPAEDEUTIC ROLE: BENJAMIN'S KANTIAN HERITAGE AND THE TWOFOLD EXERCISE

Kant's influence on Benjamin is a matter of debate in the Benjamin scholarship. In his "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," Benjamin explicitly conceived why and how Kantian philosophy ought to be transformed in his own present. However, the extent to which he realized elements of this program in later stages of his thought, such as the *Trauerspiel* or the *Arcades Project*, is disputed. Howard Caygill suggests that "the 'recasting' of Kant's concept of experience anticipated in 'On the Program of the Coming Philosophy' opened the vista of a philosophizing beyond philosophy."[64] Eli Friedlander, on the other hand, argues for a more direct inheritance that allows the discernment of significant elements of the "Program" in the *Trauerspiel*.[65] I continue this line of thought here with a brief sketch of parts of Benjamin's "Program" and their implications on reading the *Trauerspiel* as part of Benjamin's new form of critical philosophy.

One of the salient features of Benjamin's Kantian inheritance is the preparatory role of critique. Critical philosophy, according to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and to the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, "lays the foundation" or ground for doctrinal (*doktrinale*) philosophy, consisting of a doctrine of nature (*Naturlehre*) and a doctrine of morals (*Sittenlehre*). In this sense, it has a propaedeutic function.[66] The *Critique of Pure Reason* prepares the ground for the doctrinal philosophy of the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, and the later critiques prepare the ground for *The Metaphysics of Morals*. This is how Kant's corpus embodies the aim of critique "to make possible a metaphysics that has finally become a science."[67] It prepares the ground for doctrinal philosophy; in the words of Eli Friedlander, "for Kant, doctrine is that part of philosophy that can be transmitted and forms the basis of a tradition that can be passed from one generation to the next."[68] It is worth noting that this tradition is a progressive one. By examining the boundaries of knowledge and experience, Kantian critique dissolves metaphysics as a battleground between systems and thus enables scientific progress in this field that is based on stable teachings. We find this preparatory function albeit in a different, less scientific articulation

---

[64] Caygill, *The Colour of Experience*, 119.

[65] *Walter Benjamin*, 32. Other discussions focus on Benjamin's significant relation to the Neo-Kantian thought of his time: Peter Fenves, *Messianic Reduction* (2011); Tamara Tagliacozzo, *Experience and Infinite Task: Knowledge, Language and Messianism in the Philosophy of Walter Benjamin* (2017).

[66] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* [1790] (2000), 58, 5:170; and Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals* [1797] (1991), 43-47, 4:387-391.

[67] Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 316.

[68] *Walter Benjamin*, 32.

in Benjamin: critique as propaedeutic to doctrinal philosophy does not entail scientific doctrine but rather more generally the transformation of philosophy to teachings.[69] More specifically, critique, according to Benjamin, enables experience in its totality to be teachable or transmissible. However, Benjamin historicizes this kind of propaedeutic in a manner that detaches it from science and progression.[70]

Indeed, this is the most significant difference between Kant and Benjamin: the latter historicizes experience and correspondingly historicizes critique. For Kant, critique is a one-time project: one that opens up the possibility of doctrinal philosophy by providing well-justified grounds for turning experience in its totality once and for all into something teachable or transmissible. For Benjamin, experience in its very structure is temporal, ephemeral, historical. Kant, according to Benjamin, does not account for experience in general but rather for what was championed as experience in his time, based on the principles of the natural sciences. Yet this is not the only experience possible. The crises around WWI in representation, in politics, in the transmission of experience, and in what one might hope for could not be accounted for by a dull conception of experience such as the Kantian one; a conception that does not include the aspects of language and religion.[71] The same applies to the experience of certain periods before the Enlightenment, such as the Baroque.[72] This calls for thinking of experience historically, beyond its Kantian conception. This historicization of experience in turn calls upon the task of critique anew. The problem of the teachability or transmissibility of experience needs to be tackled yet again, for Kant coped with it only concerning the experience celebrated in his times. Thus, critique needs to be reactivated.

This does not make Kant irrelevant, according to Benjamin. Indeed, the very crisis of experience in Benjamin's times is what turns the Kantian task of making experience teachable, or showing it as transmissible, into such an acute one for Benjamin's generation. It allows the recognition of a collective consciousness sharing modern experience as meaningful. In his "Program," Benjamin claims that realizing this task demands not just a different concept of experience but also a different concept of knowledge; one that is not based on the subject-object relations around which Kantian experience and knowledge revolve. The conceptual work of transforming the central Kantian concepts is the critique required, in this early stage of Benjamin's thought, as a propaedeutic for a doctrine of modern experience.[73]

While Kant is never mentioned by name in the foreword to the *Trauerspiel*, the text has been read as operating with a Kantian typology of philosophy.[74] Indeed, the title of the

---

[69] Walter Benjamin, "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy" [1918], in *Selected Writings Vol. I: 1913-1926*, eds. Mark Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (1996), 100-110.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid. 100-102.

[72] Walter Benjamin, "On Perception" [1917] in *Selected Writings Volume 1: 1913-1926*, eds, Mark Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (1996), 93-96.

[73] Walter Benjamin, "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," 100-110.

[74] *Walter Benjamin,* 32.

foreword ("epistemo-critical"), the reference to doctrine as the ultimate form of philosophy in its first section, and the articulation of a concept of truth as a form of recognition that differs from a Kantian concept of knowledge all support this reading. Similarly, its final section, with its image of the totality of the baroque experience as discussed previously, also suggests this. The promise of a panoramic picture of a totality, in which the contradictory details of a certain period are imbued with meaning, can be read as a promise for a doctrine of a rich modern experience; of making this kind of experience teachable, or transmissible. Yet, in contrast to Benjamin's earlier stage, the presentation of such a panorama demands more than merely conceptual transformation. It requires arduous work both in the exercise of actualizing the past and in transforming the subject. The digressive exercise we observe in every page of the book is part of the construction of the fragmented modern experience as transmissible or, in other words, as being a part of a modern tradition.

It is worth noting that, in spite of Benjamin's familiar later discussions of the crisis of tradition and transmissibility in modernity, tradition still has a constructive and even revolutionary role in his writings.[75] This is not a progressive tradition, as in Kant, but if one thinks of the *Trauerspiel* in light of the central role tradition plays in Benjamin's entire oeuvre, and in relation to his use of the concept of teachings in its foreword, one finds that it provides a transformed image of Western cultural heritage: an image that situates the peripheral, fragmented, antithetical baroque plays as an organizing pattern, or origin, of modern experience with all its contradictory manifestations. This fits well with Benjamin's own practice of critique as presenting such an origin, or idea, in the *Trauerspiel*, or an "Urphenomenon" in his *Arcades Project*.[76] The presentation of modernity's fragmented past is thus the key for transmitting its experience as meaningful in the present.

However, as already implied, there is yet a second, complementary aspect of Benjamin's concept of critique that has to do with the way in which he regards his foreword as describing a course of schooling. In order to prepare the ground for a modern tradition based on the discontinuous fragments of its past, critique needs not just to provide new concepts, or to arrange these fragments (the first dimension of exercise), but also to establish a space for transformation of the subject; for such a transformation (the second dimension of exercise) is required for the reception of this kind of tradition rather than the progressive continuous tradition Kant envisioned for scientific metaphysics. The practice of digression is an example of such an exercise that breaks the continuous structure of the subject's intentionality; a structure that obstructs the possibility of constructing an alternative to the progressive tradition and is based on fragments and their linguistic

[75] There are various works that exemplify the fruitfulness of Benjamin's concept of tradition beyond his discussion of its crisis in modernity. See for example: Vivian Liska, *German-Jewish Thought and Its Afterlife* (2017); John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (1993); Ori Rotlevy, "Critique in a Postsecular Age: Making Room for Tradition as a Medium", *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 19:3 (2020), 436-452; Philippe Simay, "Reconstruire la tradition : l'anthropologie philosophique de Walter Benjamin," in *Walter Benjamin: la tradition des vaincus*, ed. Philippe Simay (2008), 87-98.

[76] On the concept of *Urphenomenon* see: Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* [1982] (1999), 460, 462.

actualization. It is through such multifaceted exercise that critique prepares the ground for the transmission of modern experience as meaningful for a collective in Benjamin's present.

ASKESIS AND CRITIQUE: FOUCAULT'S KANTIAN HERITAGE

We began our discussion of Foucault by noting that he conceives of critical work as a contemporary form of askesis, "an exercise of oneself in thought."[77] We are now in a position to elaborate on this connection between critique and exercise. This will also provide us with an axis for comparing Benjamin's and Foucault's divergent ways of inheriting the Kantian legacy of critique.

Since Foucault's death, his Kantian heritage has been a topic of intense debate.[78] A decade ago, Colin Koopman described the spectrum of the debate as one spanning from a denial of this heritage altogether, through an approach that takes Foucault's archaeology as a form of transcendental critique, to an emphasis on genealogy as a non-transcendental form of critique more akin to Kant's anthropology than to his three Critiques.[79] More recently, we find works that add Foucault's ethics to the discussion of the Kantian heritage.[80] Accessing Foucault's Kantian legacy through the prism of askesis and its connection to critique follows this lead. However, my aim here is not to encompass the entire issue of Foucault's Kantian heritage in the various aspects of his work but only to present this connection as a fruitful way to compare Foucault's and Benjamin's acts of inheritance. I thus focus mainly on the text by Foucault in which this tie is most explicit: "What is Enlightenment?."

Foucault's well-known innovation in "What is Enlightenment?" is his conception of critique as a modern attitude attentive to the present and to the possibilities for self-transformation that this entails. In his interpretation of Kant's "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" Foucault famously highlights the place of *Ausgang*,[81] a "way out," in Kant's definition of Enlightenment: a way out of a state of self-incurred minority

---

[77] *The History of Sexuality 2*, 9.

[78] For examples of early interventions in this debate, see: Colin Gordon, "Question, Ethos, Event: Foucault on Kant and Enlightenment," *Economy and Society* 15:1 (1986), 71–87; Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, "What is Maturity? Habermas and Foucault on 'What is Enlightenment?'," in *Foucault, a Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (1986); Jürgen Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present: On Foucault's Lecture on Kant's 'What is Enlightenment?'" in Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, ed. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (1989); James Schmidt and Thomas E. Wartenberg, "Foucault's Enlightenment: Critique, Revolution, and the Fashioning of the Self," in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, ed. Michael Kelly (1994).

[79] Colin Koopman, "Historical Critique or Transcendental Critique in Foucault: Two Kantian Lineages," *Foucault Studies* 8 (2010), 100-121.

[80] See Sharpe, "'Critique as Technology of the Self," 97-116; *Éthique et politique de soi*, 265-271; Sabina F. Vaccarino Bremner, "Anthropology as Critique: Foucault, Kant and the Metacritical Tradition," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 28:2 (2020), 336-358. Significantly, these studies tie ethics, archaeology, and genealogy together.

[81] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" 305.

in which our thoughts and actions are directed by others, and we are not autonomous free beings. Kant, looking for the difference in his "today," turns his present moment in history into one that offers such a way out; an opportunity for changing that state and an opportunity for human transformation. Moreover, he finds in this reflection a motive for his particular philosophical task.[82] Kantian critique, by defining the conditions of the legitimate use of reason in knowing, acting, and hoping, points out the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking as minors.

Foucault adopts Kant's attitude towards the present as a moment of opportunity and towards ourselves as being apt for transformation in the conditions of the present. Yet he also emphasizes that this attitude needs to be "permanently reactivated," exercised in each and every present anew, as a philosophical ethos to live by.[83] Critique here is related to askesis in two ways: first, explicitly to asceticism, to the challenge of self-transformation, or "self-production," echoing Hadot's reading of ancient philosophy with the Foucauldian emphasis on subjectivity.[84] Second, critique is related to askesis more generally as exercise, for Foucault speaks of a reactivation of the critical attitude, of its practice in the present. Critique as attitude requires exercise for pointing out anew the possibilities for self-transformation. While this idea echoes the askesis of antiquity, it is also the exercise of a modern ethos, one that attends to the subject each time in the specific present in which it is situated, pointing out the historical contingency of its limits as well as the possibility for crossing over; for constituting ourselves anew as subjects.

Whereas Foucault adopts the reflection of the present moment as an opportunity for self-transformation and as a motive for philosophical work from Kant, the emphasis on reactivation highlights what he does not take from Kant: doctrine. "The thread which may connect us with the Enlightenment *is not faithfulness to doctrinal elements but, rather, the permanent reactivation of an attitude* – that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era."[85] Foucault does not accept the ideal of freedom Kant articulates through his Critiques. The transformation of our selves is not, according to Foucault, tethered in advance to a doctrinal element such as that which the Enlightenment conceived of as a free being. Foucauldian critique thus seeks to give new impetus to "the undefined work of freedom"; it seeks to point out, in the present, through genealogical research, "the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think."[86] In this sense, the exercise of critique demands arduous work on ourselves each time anew.

A note on Foucault's "What is Critique?," with its clear political emphasis, is helpful for understanding this resistance to (Kantian) doctrine. In this text, Foucault ties critique to the question "how not to be governed like this,"[87] and the critical attitude to an ethos

---

[82] Ibid., 309.

[83] Ibid., 312.

[84] Ibid., 311-312.

[85] "What is Enlightenment?" 312, my italics.

[86] Ibid., 315.

[87] Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?" in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (2007), 41-81.

"defined by the 'will not to be governed' quite so much."[88] Thus, "the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think" takes a clear political accent, as critique aims at the "desubjugation of the subject in the context of … the politics of truth,"[89] namely, it aims at resistance to different regimes of truth. This ties the well-known aspect of Foucault's genealogical projects, that of an account of "normalising or subjugating power/knowledge mechanisms," to moments of "critical attitudes or 'counter-conducts'" found in these projects, and thus to his interest in practices of self-production.[90] This coupling is apparent in the conclusion of "What is Enlightenment?":

> The critical ontology of ourselves must be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it must be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time *the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.*[91]

Thus, one of the fundamental differences between Foucault and Kant is that, for the latter, critique has a preparatory role, while the former resists this preparatory nature of critique altogether in favor of a characterization of critique as attitude;[92] Foucault emphasizes the perpetual reactivation of an attitude rather than a continuation of doctrine or the production of any new scientific, universal doctrine or theory. And this is precisely where Foucault and Benjamin differ in how they inherit Kant. While in both thinkers critique needs to be reactivated time and time again, in Benjamin this reactivation is in favor of a modern doctrine of experience or tradition.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, in contrast to the common scholarly focus on the conception of history and historical practices in most comparisons between Foucault and Benjamin, I delve into the concept of askesis and its ties to critique. In Foucault, this tie is more central and thematized than in Benjamin. Nevertheless, as a prism for comparison, it leads us to substantial affinities in their conceptions of philosophy. Both attribute a significant role in philosophy to askesis, or exercise, by understanding it as a transformation of the self and of thought as well as a condition for accessing truth. Moreover, the tie between askesis and critique reveals a noteworthy affinity in their conception of critique as practice; not merely because critique needs to be exercised, to be reactivated in the present, but also since it intervenes in the ethico-political realm by transforming the subject rather than by grounding, commanding or recommending what to do.

---

[88] Ibid., 67, as cited in Daniele Lorenzini, "On Possibilising Genealogy," *Inquiry* (2020), 8.

[89] Foucault, "What is Critique?" 48, as cited in Lorenzini, "On Possibilising Genealogy," 8.

[90] "On Possibilising Genealogy," 9.

[91] "What is Enlightenment?" 319, my italics.

[92] Ibid., 309–12.

While Foucault provides us with the main theoretical armature for holding critique and askesis together, the tie we find in Benjamin between exercise and ascetic schooling provides an important key for understanding the practicality of critique. In Benjamin, exercising critique means resisting a dominant attitude (the idealist one) and its habits of thought through the development of alternative habits. In other words, the issue at hand is not just the exercising of an attitude attentive to the possibilities for transformation in the present but also, and perhaps primarily, the exercising of a specific transformation of an attitude in the present. Critique involves both a process of unlearning and of schooling. In Foucault, the attempt to give primacy to care for the self over knowing thyself, against our modern habits, exemplifies this.

This is not to say that their understanding of askesis is identical. Foucault elaborates a history of askesis with a large variety of self-transformations. My reading of Benjamin adds him as a further example of such askesis. Yet, it is an example that is closer to Christian asceticism than most of Foucault's examples, both in its focus on loosening the self and on how exercise in presentation allows access to a higher (linguistic) sphere. Indeed, in Benjamin the transformative exercise conditioning access to truth is no less an exercise in the presentation of truth; in the actualization of past phenomena in the medium of language. In Foucault we find neither this metaphysics of actualization nor, more generally, the meaning of exercise as presentation (even if we noted in the margins a related affinity in their digressive approach to materials).

Additionally, this study discerns a significant difference in the Kantian heritage of the two thinkers, specifically in the propaedeutic role of critique. Foucault is very clear in his resistance to the conception of critique as preparing for doctrine. The teachings of critique are practical; a modern ethos that is sensitive to possibilities for transformation in the present. Benjamin, on the other hand, regards critique as preparing for the teachings of modern experience or, at least, for a modern, fragmented, discontinuous tradition.[93] It does so in a twofold manner: by changing certain structures of subjectivity and thus allowing the reader to enter a collective space and by constructing the modern past as transmitted to a potential collective in that space. The transformation he envisages is both in the form of the subject and in the configuration of historical content.

Hadot raises the problem of the relation between subjectivity and universality in Foucault's discussion of askesis; the comparison with Benjamin raises the problem of the relation to collectivity. Apparently, Foucault's focus is on the self and its relation to power. Yet, Benjamin allows us to ask, with and against Foucault, about the extent to which this focus actually prepares the way for collectivity. Foucault does not share Benjamin's revolutionary-messianic attitude, which turns collective awakening to the telos of critique. Yet, in certain moments, such as his understanding of the Iranian Revolution, he connects

[93] For a more detailed account of Benjamin's concept of a discontinuous tradition and it's relation to critique, see Ori Rotlevy, "Critique in a Postsecular Age", and Ori Rotlevy, "'The Enormous Freedom of the Breaking Wave': Benjamin's Experience of Tradition Critique between Kant and the Talmud," *New German Critique* 140:2 (2020), 191-216.

spirituality (and thus, askesis) and collectivity.[94] Indeed, if critique is a form of askesis, we might ask whether the Foucauldian experiment of "going beyond the limits imposed on us" includes certain forms of collectivity. We might go a step further, following our comparison with Benjamin, and attempt to tie askesis, critique and tradition together in Foucault. Then, the problem of collectivity would not concern merely the possibilities opened up by "renouncing [one's] subject position"[95] but also by the critical transformation of history. It might be considered as a problem of thinking of "our critical ontology" as including discontinuous traditions both for resisting individuals and for possible 'we's of resistance.[96] [97]

References

Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* [1995]. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

Agamben, Giorgio, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* [1998]. New York: Zone Books, 1999.

Agamben, Giorgio, *State of Exception* [2003]. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005.

Agamben, Giorgio, *Sacrament of Language: An Archaeology of the Oath* [2008]. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.

---

[94] Laura Cremonesi, Orazio Irrera, Daniele Lorenzini and Martina Tazzioli, "Foucault, the Iranian Uprising and the Constitution of a Collective Subjectivity," in *Foucault and the Making of Subjects*, ed. Laura Cremonesi, Orazio Irrera, Daniele Lorenzini and Martina Tazzioli (2016).

[95] Foucault and Vaccarino Bremner, "Political Spirituality", 124.

[96] I take the term 'we's of resistance from Lorenzini, "On Possibilising Genealogy", where we find a line of thought similar to my own. For him, the question is whether we understand genealogy as merely "problematizing" our present, or as "possibilising" various 'we's of resistance in the present and normatively binding them to resisting certain forms of power/knowledge: "Foucauldian genealogy is 'normatively significant': by recounting a history that is still ours (a history not only of subjection, but also of contestation and resistance), it situates each of us within a (multiplicity of) 'we'(s), each carrying with it…a political commitment to fight against a specific power/knowledge apparatus. This is the (sui generis) normative force that possibilising genealogy possesses.…thanks to its possibilising dimension, it possesses the normative force that derives from the constitution of a concrete framework for action (a political 'we') that allows genealogy itself to answer the question 'Why resist?' by generating a sense of political commitment in its readers." (p. 16) The comparison with Benjamin suggests thinking about this "possibilising" function in terms of the propaedeutic role of critique. The concept of tradition adds a more general idea of normative obligation for transmitting a certain past. I believe the use of tradition is helpful, for instance, in reading Foucault's "Enlightenment" essay and "What is Critique?", where there is a contemporary obligation for explicating and thus transmitting the critical ethos. But following Benjamin, we might think more generally of late Foucault as handing down a tradition encompassing the various fragments he ties together, including the history of subjugation and of subjectification, which includes not only modern critical practices but also ancient practices of care for self and contemporary sexual practices to which he refers in his interviews (e.g., Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life").

[97] The author wishes to thank the participants of the colloquium of The Program in Critical Theory at UC Berkeley, Gilad Sharvit and Naveh Frumer for their comments on a previous version of this paper, the anonymous reviewers and the editors of Foucault Studies for insightful suggestions, and Omri Shlomov Milson, Jenia Litovchik and Tali Friedman for their assistance in preparing the essay for publication.

Aronowitz, Stanley, "History as Disruption: On Benjamin and Foucault," *Humanities and Society* 2:2 (1979), 125-147.

Bargu, Banu, *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Batkin, Norton, "Conceptualizing the History of the Contemporary Museum: On Foucault and Benjamin," *Philosophical Topics* 25:1 (1997), 1-10.

Benjamin, Walter, *The Arcades Project* [1982]. Cambridge, MA & London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.

Benjamin, Walter, "Berlin Chronicle" [1932], in *Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2:* 1931-1934, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, 595-637. Cambridge, MA & London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.

Benjamin, Walter, *On Hashish* [1927-1934], ed. Howard Eiland. Cambridge, MA & London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006.

Benjamin, Walter, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" [1916], in *Selected Writings Vol. I: 1913-1926*, ed. Mark Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 62-74. Cambridge, MA & London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996.

Benjamin, Walter, "On Perception" [1917], in *Selected Writings Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. Mark Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 93-96. Cambridge, MA & London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996.

Benjamin, Walter, "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy" [1918], in *Selected Writings Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. Mark Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 100-110. Cambridge, MA & London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996.

Benjamin, Walter, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* [1925]. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018.

Benjamin, Walter, "The Return of the *Flâneur*" [1929], in *Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 1: 1927-1930*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smitt, 262-267. Cambridge, MA & London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.

Benjamin, Walter, "Review of Honigswald's *Philosophie und Sprache*" [1939], in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938-1940*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Marcus Bullock, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, 139-144. Cambridge, MA & London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003.

Benjamin, Walter, "Surrealism" [1929], in *Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 1: 1927-1930*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, 207-221. Cambridge, MA & London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.

Brigstocke, Julian, "Artistic Parrhesia and the Genealogy of Ethics in Foucault and Benjamin," *Theory, Culture & Society* 30:1 (2013), 57–78. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276412450467.

Caygill, Howard, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*. London & New York: Routledge, 1998.

Cremonesi, Laura, Orazio Irrera, Daniele Lorenzini and Martina Tazzioli, "Foucault, the Iranian Uprising and the Constitution of a Collective Subjectivity," in *Foucault and the Making*

of Subjects, ed. Laura Cremonesi, Orazio Irrera, Daniele Lorenzini and Martina Tazzioli. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.

Davidson, Arnold I., "Pierre Hadot and the Spiritual Phenomenon of Ancient Philosophy," in *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* by Pierre Hadot, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, 1-46. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.

Davidson, Arnold I., "Introduction," in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982* by Michel Foucault, ed. Frédéric Gros, xix-xxx. New York: Picador, 2006.

Davidson, Arnold I., "Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, the History of Ethics, and Ancient Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault 1st edition*, ed. Gary Gutting, 115-140. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Dreyfus, Hubert L. and Paul Rabinow, "What is Maturity? Habermas and Foucault on 'What is Enlightenment?'," in *Foucault, a Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy, 109-122. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986.

Fenves, Peter, *Messianic Reduction*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011.

Foucault, Michel, "Friendship as a Way of Life" [1981], in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1966–84)*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Lysa Hochroth and John Johnston, 308-312. New York: Semiotext(e), 1989.

Foucault, Michel, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Picador, 2006.

Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality 2: The Use of Pleasure* [1984]. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

Foucault, Michel, "Self-writing," in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. Volume 1: Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley et. al., 207-222. New York: New Press, 1997.

Foucault, Michel, "What is Critique?" [1978], in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Lysa Hochroth, 41-81. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007.

Foucault, Michel, "What is Enlightenment?" [1984], in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. Vol. 1: Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley et. al., 303-320. New York: New Press, 1997.

Foucault, Michel, and Gilles Deleuze, "Intellectuals and Power" [1972], in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, 205-217. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

Foucault, Michel, and Sabina Vaccarino Bremner, "Political Spirituality as the Will for Alterity: An Interview with the *Nouvel Observateur*" [1979], *Critical Inquiry* 47:1 (2020), 121–134.

Frey, Hans-Jost, "On presentation in Benjamin," in *Walter Benjamin: Theoretical Questions*, ed. David S. Ferris, 139-164. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Friedlander, Eli, *Walter Benjamin: A Philosophical Portrait*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012.

Friedlander, Eli, "Wittgenstein, Benjamin, and Pure Realism," in *Wittgenstein and Modernism*, ed. Michael Lemahieu and Karen Zumhagen-Yekplé, 114-129. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Gordon, Colin, "Question, Ethos, Event: Foucault on Kant and Enlightenment," *Economy and Society* 15:1 (1986), 71–87. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085148600000015.

Greenberg, Aaron, "Making Way for Tomorrow: Benjamin and Foucault on History and Freedom," *Journal of Political Thought* 2:1 (2016), 22-39.

Habermas, Jürgen, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present: On Foucault's Lecture on Kant's 'What is Enlightenment?'" in *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, ed. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, 173-181. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989.

Hadot, Pierre, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* [1987], ed. Arnold I. Davidson. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.

Hadot, Pierre, *The Selected Writings of Pierre Hadot: Philosophy as Practice* [2002]. London & New York: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2020.

Irrera, Orazio, "Pleasure and transcendence of the self: Notes on 'a dialogue too soon interrupted' between Michel Foucault and Pierre Hadot," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 36:9 (2010), 995-1017. https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453710379026.

Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* [1790]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Kant, Immanuel, *The Metaphysics of Morals* [1797]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Koopman, Colin, "Historical Critique or Transcendental Critique in Foucault: Two Kantian Lineages," *Foucault Studies* 8 (2010), 100-121. https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v0i8.2934.

Liska, Vivian, *German-Jewish Thought and Its Afterlife*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017.

Lorenzini, Daniele, "Benjamin/Foucault : Histoire, Discontinuité, Utopie," *Phantasia* 7 (2018), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.25518/0774-7136.903.

Lorenzini, Daniele, *Éthique et politique de soi : Foucault, Hadot, Cavell et les techniques de l'ordinaire*. Paris: Vrin, 2015.

Lorenzini, Daniele, "On Possibilising Genealogy," *Inquiry* (2020), 1-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2020.1712227.

McCole, John, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Rotlevy, Ori, "Presentation as indirection, indirection as schooling: The two aspects of Benjamin's scholastic method," *Continental Philosophy Review* 50:4 (2017), 493-516. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-016-9404-2.

Rotlevy, Ori, "Critique in a Postsecular Age: Making Room for Tradition as a Medium," *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 19:3 (2020), 436-452

Rotlevy, Ori, "'The Enormous Freedom of the Breaking Wave': Benjamin's Experience of Tradition Critique between the Talmud and Kant," *New German Critique* 140:2 (2020), 191-216. https://doi.org/10.1215/0094033X-8288195.

Rueff, Martin, "De Benjamin à Foucault : allumer la mèche," *Critique* 835:12 (2016), 1030-1048. https://doi.org/10.3917/criti.835.1030.

Schmidt, James and Thomas E. Wartenberg, "Foucault's Enlightenment: Critique, Revolution, and the Fashioning of the Self," in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, ed. Michael Kelly, 283-314. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994.

Sharpe, Matthew, "'Critique' as Technology of the Self," *Foucault Studies* 2 (2005), 97-116. https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v0i2.862.

Simay, Philippe, "Reconstruire la tradition : l'anthropologie philosophique de Walter Benjamin," in *Walter Benjamin, La tradition des vaincus*, ed. Philippe Simay, 87-98. Paris: L'Herne, 2008.

Tagliacozzo, Tamara, *Experience and Infinite Task: Knowledge, Language and Messianism in the Philosophy of Walter Benjamin*. London & New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.

Vaccarino Bremner, Sabina F., "Anthropology as Critique: Foucault, Kant and the Metacritical Tradition," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 28:2 (2020), 336-358. https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2019.1650250.

Weigel, Sigrid, *Body-and Image-Space: Re-Reading Walter Benjamin*. London, New York: Routledge, 1996.

Author info
Dr. Ori Rotlevy
orotlevy@gmail.com
Teaching Fellow
The Cohn Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Ideas and The Multidisciplinary Program in the Humanities
Tel Aviv University
Israel

Ori Rotlevy teaches at Tel Aviv University and at Reichman University. He is a scholar of Continental philosophy specializing in ethics, political philosophy and critical theory. He published extensively on Walter Benjamin in venues such as *Continental Philosophy Review*, *New German Critique* and *Critical Horizons*. His current research concerns the problem of freedom in political-collective contexts such as resistance and revolution on the one hand, and tradition (religious, cultural, and philosophical) on the other hand. The book he is currently writing is titled *Tradition and Critique: Habermas, Mahmood and Benjamin*.

FOUCAULT
STUDIES

© Seb Sander
ISSN: 1832-5203
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.vi32.6703
Foucault Studies, No. 32, 54-81, October 2022

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

ARTICLE

UK Lockdown Governmentalities: What Does It Mean to Govern in 2020?

SEB SANDER
University of Warwick, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT. Focusing on the United Kingdom, this paper examines the mechanisms of 2020's 'lockdown' strategy from a governmental perspective, with 'governmentality' being defined as the art of, or rationale behind, governing populations at a given time. By investigating a series of recent imperatives given to the population by the UK government, and comparing these with the previously dominant form of governmentality (neoliberalism), I hope to shed light on some new features of the current art of government. Indeed, the paper argues that neoliberalism is no longer the dominant form of governmentality in the UK, although some important legacies remain. I therefore argue that new forms of governmentality have risen to prominence. In particular, I use the concept of 'algorithmic governmentality' to address features of lockdown subjectivity and economy, such as the 'doppelgänger logic' of consumption and production, as well as the government's attempts to continuously manage and re-manage the population based on biometric data. However, I also show that this concept does not adequately encompass contemporary realities of surveillance, exposition and coercion. As such, I introduce 'instrumentarian governmentality' to denote the use of digital surveillance instruments to control the behaviour of the population. Additionally, the term is intended to denote an 'authoritarian' turn in the ways in which people are governed. Overall, what it means to govern in 2020 is posited as a fluctuating composite of three key forms of governmentality: *neoliberal*, *algorithmic*, and *instrumentarian*.

Keywords: Governmentality, Foucault, Lockdown, Neoliberalism, Surveillance

INTRODUCTION

'Lockdown,' a governmental strategy introduced by many countries around the world in 2020, could have massive implications for future society. Specifically, this paper examines the implications for the art of government itself. Indeed, 'governmentality' is defined as

the specific art of, or rationale behind, governing populations at a given time. Governmentality, however, also "implies the relationship of the self to itself,"[1] and in fact these two spheres, governing the self and governing others, are connected through the term 'governmentality' - a connection which bears obvious relevance to the various social conducts produced by lockdown.

By comparing the dominant governmentality in the UK as of 2019 (neoliberalism) with various contemporary government imperatives and their impacts, I hope to address the question of what it currently means to govern in the UK. A growing digital industrial complex[2] is what renders many features of lockdown governmentality logistically possible, so this recurs as a theme throughout. In order to initially identify *neoliberal governmentality*'s key characteristics, the paper opens with a 'genealogy' of the term. Genealogy here is seen as an historical investigation of "that which we feel is without history."[3] As highlighted by Mark Fisher in *Capitalist Realism*, neoliberalism had indeed become naturalised as the only legitimate governmental rationale in early 21st century Britain.[4] However, it is worth questioning whether neoliberalism is now undergoing a transition towards being primarily an object of historical inquiry rather than being an umbrella term for various theories which clamour to describe our present. I suggest that, instead of continually extending the definition of neoliberalism further and further away from its original tenets, we should accept that it is no longer the *dominant* form of governmentality in the UK as of 2020.

Drawing primarily on Foucault's *Birth of Biopolitics* lectures, the key characteristics of neo-liberal governmentality are separated from liberal governmentality as follows: firstly, 'the market' as a site of truth and justice production, and the extension of its economic logic to *all* realms of social life; secondly, within this framework of economic logic, a transition from *exchange* to *competition* as the primary governmental force; thirdly, 'the rule of law' (*l'État de droit*) as a means of cultivating an *Enterprise Society*; fourthly, as a result of these initial three phenomena, the production of the self-assessing entrepreneurial subject, or *homo oeconomicus* ('economic man').

The extent to which these neoliberal characteristics have persisted, contracted, expanded or ceased is then tested in relation to various imperatives of current UK government policy. Novel aspects of lockdown governmentality are thereby located. Firstly, 'Stay Home. Save Lives.' The economic implications of the at-home lifestyle are explored, with emphasis on the damaging of independent businesses and livelihoods as a result of lockdown; 'furlough' payments, injection provision and unlock deadlines as evidence of economic planning; widespread economic digitisation and its production of monopolies; and the overall lack of competition, especially within digital platform markets. I then

[1] Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984* (2020), 305-6.

[2] Kim McKechney, "The Perils of the Growing Digital Industrial Complex," *University Affairs*, February 14, 2017. https://www.universityaffairs.ca/opinion/in-my-opinion/growing-digital-industrial-complex/

[3] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rainbow (1984), 76.

[4] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2009), 1-12.

highlight the 'behavioural surplus' data generated from digital activity; the emergent *algorithmic governmentality* which results from such an abundance of information; the subsequent exercise of 'instrumentarian power' by corporations and governments; and finally, what I call *instrumentarian governmentality*: the use of digital surveillance instruments to produce affective responses, individually and within the population, for engineering predetermined political outcomes. Secondly, 'Maintain Social Distancing. Avoid Large Gatherings.' Positioned within this digitised economy, lockdown subjectivity is explored, with an emphasis on the transition from neoliberal self-entrepreneur to consumption connoisseur; the role of 'doppelgänger logic' and desire in this process; the algorithmic interrogation of desire to produce incisive data for future instrumentarian use; and the targeting of individuals as 'dangerous.' Various difficulties in pursuing a 'self-entrepreneurial subjectivity' are identified, such as apathy and mental health issues produced by isolation; theories of human capital - consumption not as self-production but as behavioural surplus production-for-others; mediated knowledge, 'epistemic precarity,' and the diminishing quality of digital knowledge production. Subsequently, I question the apparent alignment of corporate and government interests; the selective application of illiberal policing; and the individuation and regulation of truth. Finally, 'Control the Virus. Save Lives.' Continuing the examination of the role of truth, specifically the proliferation of biometric data; 'information flooding' as a strategy for controlling and managing the virus; the productive but dangerous possibilities of a digital health passport; the ongoing integration of biometric data into the existing surveillance network; and instrumentarian control as the binary modulation of reward and punishment in relation to socially desirable behaviour.

I conclude that, while a number of its legacies still persist, neoliberal governmentality is no longer the dominant form of governmentality in the UK, as of 2020. In terms of answering the question of what it therefore means to govern, 'algorithmic governmentality' is explored as a key feature but is considered too benign a term since it does not adequately address contemporary realities of surveillance, exposition and coercion. As a result, the word *instrumentarian* is borrowed from Shoshana Zuboff to develop a notion of governmentality that implies both the use of digital surveillance instruments to control the behaviour of the population, as well as an 'authoritarian' mentality. In sum, 'lockdown governmentality' is posited as being a 'provisional,' fluctuating composite of three key forms of governmentality: *neoliberal*, *algorithmic* and *instrumentarian*.

A BRIEF GENEALOGY OF NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY

Before examining what has changed so drastically in 2020, we need to highlight the key aspects of the previously dominant governmental rationale: neoliberalism. While many of its core ideals can be traced back to eighteenth century liberalism, there are some important distinctions which need to be made. Notably, the focus on *competition* rather than *exchange* as the guiding principle for market activity; *enterprise* as the dominant organisational and behavioural form ('The Enterprise Society') - cultivated through *The Rule of Law*

(L'État de Droit); and the subsequent formation of the *homo oeconomicus* as the ideal neoliberal subject.

Liberal Governmentality

According to Foucault, the genesis of liberalism can be associated with the genesis of governmentality itself - since the former embodies a perpetual suspicion of the 'risk of governing too much.' Hence, there emerged a continuous need for self-reflection upon governmental practice, which was concerned not merely with the question of how best to govern – but more fundamentally – the question of the very necessity of government itself.[5] In the second and third lectures of *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault identifies the defining characteristics of the 'liberal' art of government. He argues that the style of 'frugal government,' associated with liberalism and neo-liberalism, had originally been inspired by a set of historically established economic truths. He emphasises that, from the eighteenth century onward, a *regime of truth* had been built up around the activities of the marketplace. Crucially, the market became seen as a site of justice. Its rules, after all, governed the *right* price, the *fair* distribution of goods, and the elimination of *fraud*. Its integration of supply, demand, value, growth etc. into a single system made it a fitting "site of verification-falsification for governmental practice."[6] Hence the rationale for governing became increasingly aligned with the 'common sense' logic of the marketplace.

An anecdote from UK neoliberalism, which exemplifies a continuation of this rationale, was Margaret Thatcher's use of her background, as a grocer's daughter, to illustrate both her suitability for government and the moral superiority of liberal capitalism.[7] The market, therefore, has become increasingly seen as a neutral site of truth and justice. As shown by the Thatcher example, the individual qualities of productivity, industriousness and honest participation in the marketplace began to attract a moral value. Historically, this had also been a feature of liberalism, with the almost religious cultivation of a liberal capitalist *spirit* having famously been explored by Weber.[8] Overall, the emphasis on a rationale, morality, or regime of truth surrounding market activity demonstrates a degree of continuity between liberal and neoliberal governmentality.

Foucault on Neo-Liberal Governmentality

However, as Foucault demonstrates, neo-liberalism should not simply be seen as a revival of classical liberalism. Theoretical schools such as the German 'ordoliberals' and the Chicago neo-liberals made a series of key modifications to the original liberal rationale. Notably, neoliberalism sees competition, rather than exchange, as the primary governmental or structuring force behind market activity. While classical liberals such as Adam Smith

---

[5] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-79* (2008), 319.

[6] Ibid., 29-32.

[7] John Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher: Volume One: The Grocer's Daughter* (2007), 1-30, 377.

[8] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2005).

focused on theorising situations of *equal* exchange between two parties,[9] Foucault claims that ordoliberalism sought to analyse and maximise the key benefits arising from *inequality* in the market, i.e., competition. As such, ordoliberal thinkers saw 'pure competition' as the primary objective for governmental practice. Rather than seeing competition as a 'natural' quality inherent within the marketplace, ordoliberalism encouraged a more *active* governmentality which sought to cultivate competition while avoiding or strictly regulating monopolies.[10] According to Foucault, the neo-liberal state's legal interventions in the economy should only take the form of designing principles, frameworks, or 'rules of a game,' rather than pursuing definitive ends or goals (i.e., a planned economy). Citing Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty*, he notes the relationship of *l'État de droit*, or *The Rule of Law*, to the 'Enterprise Society.' The rule of law, Foucault argues, was developed to limit centralised state decision-making, to oppose the police state, and to enable enterprising behaviour.[11] In the ordoliberal context, it was developed as a response to the abuses of the supra-legal Nazi state,[12] aiming to reconstitute the state as a legal subject by providing an impartial arbiter between the state and the people (rather than courts just acting as another arm of public authority).

More generally, this would correspond with the notion of a neoliberal *nomos*, or 'normative order,' presented by Lemm and Vater. This is posited as somewhere between rigidly imposed laws and a more nebulous socio-cultural order. Specifically, Thomas Lemke notes that this order operates through (or cultivates and encourages) freedom rather than obedience.[13] We should contrast this with the lockdown tendency to enforce laws which restrict minute individual behaviours and rely on large scale obedience. It is also worth highlighting his argument that immanent to liberalism's production of freedom is its production of danger (of precarity, unemployment, poverty, etc.).[14] Conversely, in lockdown's attempts to totally avoid danger, it ends up obliterating freedom.

---

[9] While he has retrospectively been named the 'father' of liberal economics, Adam Smith would have referred to himself as a 'moral philosopher', and a lesser-known work of his, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments: Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith Vol. I* (Indianapolis: The Liberty Fund, 1982), concerns itself largely with an exploration of social relations (i.e., various *exchanges* between people). In particular, his concept of 'Sympathy,' exemplified by the chapter: 'Of the Pleasure of mutual Sympathy' (pages 55-57), emphasises the centrality of mutual understanding to human relationships, and could be seen to directly contravene the notion, now often associated with neo-liberalism and free market economics, that people act inherently out of self-interest or are selfish beings by nature. [Thank you to my former history lecturer Claudia Stein for this more specialised piece of information.] This reflects the shift in emphasis from 'equality' to 'inequality,' or from 'exchange' to 'competition,' as the primary tool for modeling market interaction, that Foucault identifies as a key transition from liberal to neo-liberal governmentality.

[10] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), 118-121, 166.

[11] Ibid., 172-175.

[12] Ibid., 116.

[13] Vanessa Lemm and Miguel Vatter, eds., *The Government of Life: Foucault, Biopolitics and Neoliberalism* (2014), 5-7.

[14] Ibid., 65.

Late UK Neoliberalism

Foucault's 'neo-liberal governmentality' is not exactly the same as the 'neoliberal governmentality' which has been widely analysed since his death. Michael Behrent notes that, since Foucault died in 1984, he was not alive to witness neoliberalism's development into a system of domination.[15] Structural inequality and precarity – core characteristics of post-Fordist labour relations – are perhaps only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the abuses of the neoliberal regime. Naturally, they are experiences associated with the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus*, which is a crucial area of development between Foucault's early appreciation of neo-liberalism and our more familiar, recent realities. As Lorenzini highlights, the figure of the *homo oeconomicus* is critical for distinguishing neoliberal from classical liberal governmentality.[16] Foucault defines the *homo oeconomicus* through the uniquely neoliberal tendency to analyse all social actors, rather than just marketplace actors, through an economic lens.[17] Rather than 'leave the market to itself,' it has come to dominate all spheres of social life. Mark Fisher, for example, laments the 'business ontology' of late UK neoliberalism, "in which it is *simply obvious* that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be run as a business."[18] This assessment was foreshadowed by Foucault's analyses of the 'Enterprise society', in which the ideal organisational form – including for governments – was the model of the enterprise.[19]

Lorenzini applies this governmental logic to individual subjects. Instead of the *laissez-faire* mentality advertised by both systems, neoliberalism actively transforms people into subjects who are eminently manageable, governable and modifiable.[20] Indeed, the ideal neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* is identified by Foucault not as the avid consumer but as "the man of enterprise and production."[21] De Beistegui highlights a similar process in which one's everyday skills and attributes are made sense of as forms of capital for marketing oneself as a unit of labour. As such, the traditional conceptual boundary between labour and capital has been erased,[22] creating a situation of economic precarity in which work time and leisure time become increasingly confused.[23] Bröckling investigates this figure of the 'self-entrepreneur' further, arguing that it does not actually exist but is a 'real fiction:' something that *ought* to exist. Neoliberal subjects are thereby governed through a process of continuous self-evaluation and modification in relation to this ideal.[24] The over-

---

[15] Michael C. Behrent and Daniel Zamora, eds., *Foucault and Neoliberalism* (2016), 191-199.

[16] Daniele Lorenzini, "Governmentality, Subjectivity and the Neoliberal Form of Life," *Journal for Cultural Research* 22:2 (2018), 154-166.

[17] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 267-268.

[18] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* (2009), 17.

[19] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 241.

[20] Lorenzini, ''Governmentality, Subjectivity, and the Neoliberal Form of Life,'' 154-166.

[21] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 147.

[22] Miguel de Beistegui, *The Government of Desire: A Genealogy of the Liberal Subject* (2018), 77-78.

[23] Ulrich Bröckling, *The Entrepreneurial Self: Fabricating a New Type of Subject* (2016), 20-21.

[24] Ibid.

all atmosphere of cut-throat competition, constant self-appraisal, precarious flux, and resultant economic inequality is undoubtedly characteristic of late neoliberalism. Fisher argues that "in many ways, the left has never recovered from being wrong-footed by Capital's mobilization and metabolization of the desire for emancipation from Fordist routine."[25] This coincides with Deleuze's definitions of control society - a move away from the disciplinary enclosures and routines described by Foucault towards permanent retraining and more generalised market participation.[26] Likely a knock-on effect of this gradual dissolution of job security, Fisher also emphasises neoliberalism's interest in the "chemico-biologization" of widespread mental illness (rather than its *politicisation* – consciously linking it to systemic causes).[27] Lockdown has offered a resounding final note on this debate, clearly in favour of the latter explanation, albeit for largely different reasons.

Most notable for our inquiry are Fisher's insights regarding the 'market Stalinism' and 'bureaucratic anti-production' emergent within late UK neoliberalism. Obviously, these phenomena do not fall under any traditional definition of neoliberalism, and certainly were not among the characteristics explored by Foucault. As Fisher highlights, the 2008 financial crisis might have signaled the collapse of neoliberalism, but the propping up of banking corporations by the state only served to reinforce the notion that 'there is no alternative.'[28] Harvey notes that the involvement of the state in neoliberal society has always been somewhat ambiguous, giving examples of natural monopoly and market failure as cases for necessary intervention.[29] This reminds us of the ordoliberal ideal, which promoted active state involvement to cultivate competition and avoid monopoly. A divergence can be seen here between neo-liberal theory and 'neoliberal' practice, both of which encourage state involvement, but the latter, especially since 2008, has done so to protect monopoly and stymie competition. Some things, as the late neoliberal rationale would have it, are 'too big to fail.'.

Since Foucault's lectures, neoliberalism itself has undoubtedly undergone many changes. Especially since 2008, various theories have proliferated, expanding neoliberalism's definition ever further, to match those changes.[30] However, with the benefit of 2020 hindsight, should we consider the state-corporate nexus that has been developing since 2008 (and perhaps even earlier) as neoliberalism per se? As May & McWhorter emphasise, in their exploration of changing power structures, "the new does not replace but rather develops alongside the old."[31] What, therefore, has been quietly developing alongside neoliberal governmentality, while the latter has predominantly stolen the spotlight, until

---

[25] *Capitalist Realism*, 34.

[26] Gilles Deleuze, ''Postscript on the Societies of Control,'' *October* 59 (1992), 3-7.

[27] *Capitalist Realism*, 37.

[28] Ibid., 2.

[29] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), 64-68.

[30] Dieter Plehwe, Quinn Slobodian and Philip Mirowski, eds., *Nine Lives of Neoliberalism* (2020).

[31] Todd May and Ladelle McWhorter, ''Who's Being Disciplined Now? Operations of Power in a Neoliberal World,'' in *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond*, ed. Vernon W. Cisney and Nicolae Morar (2016), 246.

now? Part of the task of this article is to offer an answer to that question. Of course, neoliberalism has not disappeared altogether - far from it. Yet I will argue that under lockdown it ceases to be the *dominant* form of governmentality in the UK, largely due to unprecedented levels of state involvement in everyday life, the subsequent reduction in (self-)entrepreneurial possibility, evidence of economic planning, and an overall lack of market competition.

STAY HOME. SAVE LIVES.

Foucault notes that during a plague outbreak in a seventeenth century town, it was forbidden to leave "on pain of death."[32] Insofar as he highlights the difference between premodern societies and disciplinary societies, today we are not threatened with a death penalty. Rather, we are implored to search our own conscience and to conclude that we risk being a danger to ourselves, our loved ones, and other members of society, should we choose to venture outside. The threat of death still exists, but in a more subtle way. It is used to induce docility into the population as a whole, instead of targeting specific individuals for punishment. In this sense, the strategy could be seen as a persistence of neoliberal biopower since it encourages self-examination as a means of population management.[33] However, while directives are given to the population *en masse*, the specific strategies for governing noticeably comprise efforts to reshape the minutae of social interaction - techniques for regimenting individual behaviour that are typical of disciplinary power. The abundance of information, concerning both individual behaviour and trends within the population at large, allows for this sense in which disciplinary power and biopower have been digitally fused to produce a totalising effect. To make use of this refined, yet expansive information, *algorithmic governmentality* has become increasingly prevalent, with the decision to lock down itself being exemplary of this rationale. In conjunction with this, a number of policies linked to lockdown's *stay at home* directive have created an economic situation that can no longer be described as merely 'neoliberal.' Almost entirely digitised, the resultant lockdown economy stifles entrepreneurial possibility, centralises decision-making, and fosters an overall lack of competition – embodied by so-called 'data-opolies.'

One of the characteristics of liberal governmentality emphasised by Foucault was governing with maximum growth or economic activity as a guiding principle, i.e., "the internal rule of maximum economy."[34] Neo-liberalism arguably strengthened this mentality even further within its notion that the market economy should inform and regulate state practices (rather than the other way around).[35] By this standard, the originally proposed

---

[32] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995), 195.

[33] Although, it must be said that since the initial writing of this essay, the approach has moved even further towards outright imposition and enforcement, with self-examination being relegated to a supplementary role.

[34] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 318.

[35] Ibid., 118.

policy of 'herd immunity' could be considered a far more 'neoliberal' option than the shutting down of physical society, since the prospect of such widespread economic desolation would likely have been considered too heinous by a market-driven rationale. In the case of lockdown, the digital infrastructure that enabled an algorithmic governmentality of 'suppression' presented a scope and scale for population management so paradigm shattering that woolly and unscientific 'ethical implications'[36] were considered superfluous to the immutable march of progress - and so were left behind - presumably somewhere alongside institutions such as freedom of movement, choice and speech.

The Lockdown Economy

The UK government's instruction to *stay at home* has consolidated the primacy of data as the most valuable commodity, a trend which began under neoliberalism. Since most transactions take place from home, and those which do not have turned cashless, the marketplace has essentially been digitised. As Harcourt describes, even activities which are not ostensibly transactions, such as searching the web, watching a video, or swiping the door to work (logging in equals clocking in) all leave a permanent digital trace. Taken together, this constitutes a vast web of highly specific information recorded about each individual, hence the emergent concept of the 'digital self.'[37] This is perfectly captured by a 2017 advertisement for Experian UK, in which an individual is permanently followed by "a physical manifestation of [their] financial history," or 'data self.' The ad hints at the attempted infiltration of this figure into extremely private spheres such as the bedroom, which suggests the extensive and personal nature of data now held about us.[38] Harcourt even supposes that this composite digital footprint has become more tangible than our analog selves, with all of our aggregated data producing a "sketch of what we like, whom we love, what we read, how we vote and where we protest."[39] Further to being more 'tangible' and 'provable,' it is also worth noting the sense in which our digital selves are now seen as 'safer,' and thus more appropriate for market participation, than the 'riskier,' chaotic and supposedly hazardous 'self' as biological organism or human animal. Indeed, it is estimated that 62% of the UK workforce are currently *working from home*.[40]

The notorious 'furlough' programme further encapsulates this rationale. Its official title, 'The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme,'[41] carries with it a certain twisted irony. Many

---

[36] Neil M. Ferguson, Daniel Laydon, Gemma Nedjati-Gilani et. al., ''Impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) to reduce COVID-19 mortality and healthcare demand,'' *Imperial College COVID-19 Response Team* (2020).

[37] Bernard E. Harcourt, *Exposed: Desire and Disobedience in the Digital Age* (2015), 1-3.

[38] Experian UK, "Experian TV Ad 2017 - Meet Your Data Self," YouTube video, 1:00, December 26, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lNAiokZ20PU

[39] Harcourt, *Exposed* (2015), 1.

[40] "Lockdown loneliness & the collapse of social life at work," totaljobs.com, August 17, 2020. https://www.totaljobs.com/advice/lockdown-loneliness-the-collapse-of-social-life-at-work (accessed February 8, 2021).

[41] HM Revenue & Customs, "Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme," gov.uk, May 15, 2020. https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme (accessed June 3, 2020).

traditional, 'physical' industries have been obliterated by lockdown, and with them, 7.6 million jobs (24% of the UK workforce) are under threat.[42] Specific to lockdown is the severe economic pressure on any firm, organisation or individual who cannot at least partially digitise or find a role within the digital marketplace. Far from encouraging enterprising behaviour, or cultivating an 'Enterprise Society,' the current *Rule of Law* attempts to restrict physical transactions deemed 'non-essential.' McKinsey & Co.'s report, concerning lockdown's effect on jobs, notes that "the impact across sectors is highly uneven" - emphasising that 73% of workers in accommodation and food services have been furloughed, compared with 13% in information and communication.[43] Ease of incorporation into the digital economy seems to be the common factor shared by those industries which have thrived during, or at least emerged unscathed from, lockdown. Unsurprisingly, it seems that larger firms have adapted better to furlough-induced digitisation, whether this be due to: prior ability to invest in technology; larger cash reserves to weather such an unprecedented storm; or greater ease in adopting the explosion of regulations regarding 'workplace safety.'[44] These restrictions significantly impair the ability of those unable to *work from home* to produce wealth, and therefore, for many people, self-entrepreneurial subjectivity is a much more difficult state of being to pursue. Any remaining traces of neoliberal (self-)entrepreneurship can be found within the digital economy. Yet, even before lockdown, the state of competition in digital platform markets was subject to intense scrutiny. Such markets are prone to upward concentration due to the ease of integrating acquisitions into existing networks and benefits subsequently gained by accumulating large databases. Ducci even compares digital platforms to natural monopolies since many share the common attribute of higher fixed costs versus lower variable costs.[45] With greater returns as scale increases, smaller firms struggle to compete, and hence there is a 'natural' inclination towards monopoly. Crucially, Ezrachi & Stucke warn: "The potential harms from data-opolies can exceed those of earlier monopolies. They can affect not only our wallets but our privacy, autonomy, democracy and well-being."[46] Their statement draws attention to key issues raised by this paper, but in the context of this section, most important perhaps is an emphasis on the *centralisation of decision-making* (which is an implicit feature of monopoly).

---

[42] Tera Allas, Mark Canal and Vivian Hunt, "COVID-19 in the United Kingdom: Assessing jobs at risk and the impact on people and places," *McKinsey & Company,* May 11, 2020. https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Industries/Public%20and%20Social%20Sector/Our%20Insights/COVID%2019%20in%20the%20United%20Kingdom%20Assessing%20jobs%20at%20risk%20and%20the%20impact%20on%20people%20and%20places%20new/COVID-19-in-the-United-Kingdom-VF.pdf?shouldIndex=false

[43] Ibid., 3-4.

[44] UK Health Security Agency, "Reducing the spread of respiratory infections, including COVID-19, in the workplace," gov.uk, April 10, 2022. https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19

[45] Francesco Ducci, *Natural Monopolies in Digital Platform Markets* (2020).

[46] Ariel Ezrachi and Maurice E. Stucke, "eDistortions: How Data-opolies are Dissipating the Internet's Potential," in *Digital Platforms and Concentration*, ed. Guy Rolnik (2018), 6.

So the government's *stay at home* policy, aimed at 'saving lives,' when viewed from another angle, could be seen as producing the opposite effect - through widespread damage to independent businesses and livelihoods. Importantly, McKinsey highlight that individuals and areas with lower income have been disproportionately affected – nearly 50% of all at-risk jobs are those which earn less than £10 per hour.[47] Widespread automation and digitisation, now vastly accelerated by furlough, will likely lead to an increased dependence on state income, especially within this demographic.

This ultimately amounts to a further centralisation of decision-making, which, while more 'algorithmic' than the bureaucracies of the past, is nonetheless analogous to economic planning. Hayek's comments about the misguiding assurances from economic planners, namely that the state will dictate 'only economic matters,'[48] resonates with the terms and conditions being attached to state-controlled incomes today. The contemporary phrase "No jab. No job."[49] is all that is needed to illustrate this point. Once the state controls your income, it controls the conditions attached to receiving it, and from here the question of 'merely economic' control has quickly transfigured itself to threaten equally fundamental concerns such as body sovereignty, autonomy and privacy. 'Economic planning' can also be seen in the specific ultimatums and dates given to the public for coming out of lockdown. While these might not conform to our preconceived images of economic planning, they nonetheless represent centralised management of the entire economy by state authority. Indeed, Hayek sees the pursuit of definitive goals or targets as characteristic of a planned economy. Of interest to us, too, is his inclusion of 'the encouragement of specific consumptive forms' under this definition.[50] Could lockdown's goal, plan or target be seen as an encouragement of digitised consumption?

Algorithmic governmentality,[51] a rationale which seeks to utilise the overwhelming abundance of information, generated through digital activity, has been consolidated by lockdown. The term is also employed by Erb and Ganahl, who emphasise that vast information collections can now be used to predict and modify user-consumers' future behaviour. They highlight in particular the ability to instantly create individualised, interactive interfaces for each user.[52] So, in this sense, rather than govern according to the rules of the market per se, lockdown economics is characterised by the bespoke flexibility of post-Fordism taken to its digital extreme. Abundant information extends Foucault's notion that the market produces justice - by further revealing, exposing and regulating the behaviour of consumers and producers. In theory, with symmetrical information, this could foster

---

[47] Allas, Canal, and Hunt, "COVID-19 in the United Kingdom," 2.

[48] Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (2001), 91-95.

[49] BBC News, "Coronavirus: 'No jab, no job' policies may be legal for new staff," February 18, 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/business-56113366

[50] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 172.

[51] Antoinette Rouvroy, "Algorithmic Governmentality and the Death of Politics," *Green European Journal* (2020).

[52] Richard Weiskopf, "Algorithmic Decision-Making, Spectrogenic Profiling and Hyper-Facticity in the Age of Post-Truth," *Le foucaldien,* 6:1 (2020), 1-37.

just economic relations - an idealised extension of post-Fordism - in which producers possess sufficient information to fully cater for demand, while consumers enjoy bespoke products at a reasonable price. 'Perfect Information' has been a utopian market condition long sought after by economists. Harcourt argues that this configuration contributes to *doppelgänger logic*, a constantly evolving process which attempts to match the subject with their 'perfect' digital partner (be this an actual partner, or a book, film, experience, etc.);[53] or, to follow the antecedent market logic, a perfect match between consumer and producer. Through this doppelgänger logic, digitisation can lead to 'disintermediation' or 'cutting out the middleman,' which can circumvent the role of traditional suppliers. Amazon is a prime example of this: consumers can buy a variety of products directly through Amazon's digital platform, thereby bypassing many of the former stages within the supply chain.

However, the outcome we have reached is far from utopian. *Asymmetrical information*, a possible explanatory factor for *some* of the issues now firmly entrenched within lockdown's economy of digital surveillance, was incubated through late neoliberalism's ever-expanding contradictions. Harvey highlights this discrepancy between neoliberal theory and practice: "all agents acting in the market are generally presumed to have access to the same information."[54] Shoshana Zuboff's 2019 work on *Surveillance Capitalism* is emblematic of the naïvety of this statement. It offers a starkly unequal, in fact asymmetrical, account of productive relations – which suggests that 'algorithmic' may be too neutral a term for describing contemporary governmentality. In the current asymmetrical configuration, "our personal experiences are scraped and packaged as the means to others' ends:" each digital interaction creates huge amounts of surplus data, which is sold on markets for future behaviour. According to Zuboff, the companies buying information about our future decisions are the market's consumers, while the analytics firms/tech platforms are the producers, which leaves us playing the role of 'raw material.'[55] Data points, gathered through our various online behaviours, are continuously being amassed to form predictive pictures of what individuals are going to do next. The typical example used is that of targeted advertising, where data *produced* by a platform (e.g., Facebook) is used to pinpoint a user's imminent need for a certain product (e.g., headphones). This information service can be bought (*consumed*) from Facebook by the headphone manufacturer and an ad delivered to the user at an opportune time. We would be equally naïve to think that the horizon of these processes is limited to material products. As shown in the 2019 documentary, *The Great Hack*, referendum outcomes can be targeted and modified in a similar way.[56] In this case, the producer was Cambridge Analytica/Facebook, the consumer was the Vote Leave 'Brexit' campaign, and the raw material was people's ability to exercise

[53] *Exposed*, 145-7.

[54] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), 68.

[55] Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (2019), 17-18.

[56] *The Great Hack*, directed by Karim Amer and Jehane Noujaim (Netflix, 2019). https://www.netflix.com/watch/80117542.

democratic power, or voting booth experience. While the point of value extraction for the Leave campaign may have been the precise moment their box was crossed, Facebook's end of the deal was played out over a number of months leading up to the referendum. 'Sponsored' political ads were filtered through the news feeds of key ('swing') voters, often geographically and demographically targeted in an attempt to infiltrate the mind of the user and to gradually modify their voting outcome.[57] This is one better documented example of countless transactions taking place on the digital surveillance market. As such, it has become increasingly difficult for the user to locate when, how, and between whom, transactions are taking place.

While Harcourt's doppelgänger logic emphasises the 'interactive' relationship between user and algorithm,[58] Zuboff widens the scope of this relationship through her concept of *instrumentarian power*. This new form of power shares similarities with biopower since it seeks to conduct the population on a large scale; however, it is far more coercive and insidious.[59] It refers to the process of continuously modifying consumer behaviour, such as in the Brexit campaign example used earlier. As Zuboff reminds us throughout her text, this form of power involves the use of our experiences for others' ends, and once capital is involved, these ends are invariably those of the highest bidder. This has resulted in what she calls a 'Coup from Above,' in which the digital industrial complex is free to produce vast swathes of knowledge about us, for its own ends, while we have little knowledge of its inner-workings and who benefits from the backroom deals. A contemporary UK example to illustrate this is the outsourcing of 'test and trace' contracts, often worth hundreds of millions, to corporations usually known to have links with senior government officials.[60] Zuboff questions whether such operations even fall under the definition of capitalism as we know it,[61] opting to name the entire surveillance apparatus *Big Other*[62] - further evidence of a departure from neoliberalism as the dominant form of governmentality in the UK.

However, in 2020, instrumentarian power is being wielded increasingly by governments, not just the private sector, to modify behaviour on a large scale. For example, 'SPI-B,' an advisory group to the government which specialises in behavioural psychology, recommended that "the perceived level of personal threat needs to be increased...using hard-hitting emotional messaging.". It also encouraged the tailoring of messaging to produce exaggerated behavioural responses in specific groups,[63] and observed that "social

[57] Ibid.

[58] *Exposed*, 145-147.

[59] Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), 351-353.

[60] Juliette Garside and Joseph Smith, "Tory-linked firm involved in testing failure given new £347m Covid contract," *The Guardian*, November 2, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/04/tory-linked-firm-involved-in-testing-failure-awarded-new-347m-covid-contract

[61] *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 495.

[62] Ibid., 275.

[63] Independent Scientific Pandemic Insights Group on Behaviours (SPI-B), "Options for increasing adherence to social distancing measures," service.gov.uk, March 22, 2020, 1-2. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/887

approval can be a powerful source of reward,"[64] demonstrating government attempts to cultivate similar mentalities. With this in mind, I suggest defining *instrumentarian governmentality* as the use of digital surveillance instruments to produce affective responses, individually and within the population, for engineering predetermined political outcomes. The associated rationale is authoritarian in that instrumentarian governmentality seeks to erode autonomy (or manufacture consent) by using digital media to continuously filter emotionally charged material through to large, but targeted, swathes of the population over extended periods of time. With a view to the generation of politically relevant personal data, we should now consider the algorithmic 'interrogation' of desire as being concomitant with this instrumentarian ability to manipulate fear.

MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING.
AVOID LARGE GATHERINGS. (DO NOT PROTEST)

Lockdown Subjectivity

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault concludes that the plague-stricken town is the perfectly governed town. His seventeenth century example enforces a strict spatial segregation of individuals,[65] which is comparable to the infamous contemporary notion of 'social distancing.' Although this could be seen as an extension of neoliberal individualisation in an absolute sense, or a Deleuzian 'dividual,' the lifestyle of the locked-down subject differs significantly from the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus*. Instead of the industrious, self-made entrepreneur, the subject is being encouraged to become a *consumption connoisseur*. Indeed, *connaître* could be a particularly useful word to highlight here: isolation from other people means that more time is generally spent interacting with the digital marketplace. As such, it has become increasingly important to *know* which of the practically infinite digital media you would like to consume next (an intensified version of *The Attention Economy*). The term 'self-knowing,' as employed by Foucault in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*,[66] could be misleading in the contemporary context though. This is because, in some senses, algorithms 'know' far more about you, or at least they possess far more data about you than you are able to consider at any given moment. The 'self' that is confronted and conversed with, then, is Harcourt's digital doppelgänger. This seeks to aid the locked-down subject on an interactive quest to continuously locate and relocate their desire. It is your digital footprint reflected back at you, but a footprint which changes in response to your online conduct in order to further stimulate desire and consumption.[67] Lockdown governmentality can therefore be seen as encouraging a cultivation of an intimate self-

467/25-options-for-increasing-adherence-to-social-distancing-measures-22032020.pdf (accessed May 1, 2020).

[64] Ibid., 2.

[65] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 195-200.

[66] Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-2*, trans. Graham Burchill (2005), 3.

[67] *Exposed*, 145-147.

knowing of one's desires. Instrumentarian governmentality's specific stake in this process is that the more detailed, individualised and extensive the information generated from digital activity is, the more effectively it can be utilised to bring about future political goals.

A possible problem is how exactly to characterise the power exercised through lockdown governmentality. Is it more accurate to highlight "the seizure of power over the body in an individualising mode" (disciplinary power) or the seizure of the population in a "massifying" mode (biopower)?[68] The answer is both: instrumentarian governmentality can be posited as the digital *fusion* of disciplinary and biopower to produce a 'totalising effect.' While data companies' and government's dual attempts to manage and modify the population's behaviour on a mass scale is no doubt important (and will be returned to later), this process begins on an individual level since, above all, lockdown subjectivity is epitomised by isolation.

Social distancing comprises the targeting of individual bodies (and minds) as dangerous[69] in two key ways. Firstly, through the idea that the individual body is a possible biohazard, or somehow a threat to public safety, and so needs to be suppressed. Secondly, reducing person-to-person contact encourages digital consumption and communication so that more behavioural surplus data can be collected. Additionally, this stifles the spread of unsanctioned information and the possibility of a non-digital collective agency. A combination can be seen here between Foucault's analysis of the 'dangerous individual' and disciplinary power's obsession with reducing *risk*.[70] His term "anatomo-politics"'[71] allows us to explore the problem further as it can be used to identify the various sensory sites for digital desire stimulation and interrogation. Lockdown's *stay at home* and *maintain social distancing* imperatives combine to consolidate the seizure of each bodily orifice by digital oligopolies. While our limbs may previously have been disciplined to *produce*, Apple and Samsung's hardware (smartphones) offer the physical bridge to access this world of digital consumption. Our contemporary docility[72] is instead enacted through *passive* scrolling, swiping and clicking. This process becomes more ambiguous when we are *active*, but if Zuboff is to be believed, then the difference between the two may already be difficult to distinguish. Google is an even more elusive figure, and its role is perhaps best characterised by Zuboff's assessment of *Surveillance Capitalism* in general: "it operates through unprecedented asymmetries in knowledge and the power that accrues to knowledge."[73] This is a remarkably Foucauldian sentence, although Zuboff does not cite Foucault.

---

[68] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 242.

[69] Michel Foucault, "About the Concept of the 'Dangerous Individual' in 19th-Century Legal Psychiatry," *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 1:1 (1978), 1-18.

[70] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 55-61.

[71] *Discipline and Punish*, 242.

[72] Ibid., 135-138.

[73] *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 18.

Moreover, the body can be seen not only as a site for the intimate cultivation of *connaître* - and the resultant scraping of surplus *savoir* produced through this doppelgänger process - but also as a site for the digital invasion of sensory information channels so that instrumentarian messages can be broadcast. This corresponds with Norbert Wiener's arguments concerning the positive relationship between ownership of the means of communication and societal control, an effect which he sees as being directly proportional to the size of the society[74] (the internet is perhaps the largest society to date). Combined with the instruction to *avoid large gatherings* and keep a distance from people, this serves to minimise the risk of any possible insurgent activity.

My depiction is by no means an exhaustive account of contemporary economic relations but is intended as a warning about the subjective implications of lockdown governmentality. Indeed, a teleology based on lockdown and social distancing would likely share similarities with the state of humanity depicted aboard the 'Axiom' in Pixar's *WALL-E*.[75] In this scenario, humans have evolved to lose significant skeletal function due to lack of physical exercise.[76] Awash with various forms of electronic communication and constant adverts, they are physically attended to by an entourage of artificially intelligent robots. Interestingly, they are spatially partitioned and automatically transported along paths of least resistance, similar to the system of arrows that we see in UK supermarkets today. They are certainly *consumption connoisseurs*.

Under neoliberal theories of 'human capital,' many forms of consumption had become viewed primarily as acts of 'self-production,' the most notable example being education. However, in lockdown, the behavioural surplus knowledge produced through digital consumption is arguably of greater importance than any supposed benefit to us. Overall, the hegemony of the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* becomes doubtful. Schultz argues that "much of what we call consumption constitutes investment in human capital" (i.e., investment in oneself), concluding that people are understandably inclined to spend a lot of time and money on this. He complained, in 1961, that little of this activity – "the use of leisure time to improve skills and knowledge" - is recorded but likely makes up a large

[74] Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics, Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (2019), 221-224.

[75] *WALL-E*, directed by Andrew Stanton (2008; Emeryville, California: Pixar Animation Studios), DVD.

[76] Of course, it could be contended that lockdown has, on the contrary, produced an explosion of physical exercise and self-care, with upticks in at-home-yoga, Zoom fitness classes, and jogging. However, we should be cautious in drawing the conclusion that physical exercise has increased across the whole population. With the eradication of team sports and the general encouragement of indoor living, it is very difficult to gain an overall picture of 'health' within the population. This picture might be obscured even further by the fact that the above phenomena represent an increase in physical activities which are digitally recorded; either through their very online nature or through the various digital health devices and applications such as 'Fitbits.' Rather than reading the motivations for this activity through a lens of American neoliberalism - self-improvement, image cultivation and the refinement of one's mental and physical attributes to become more effective 'human capital' - the lockdown lens would read that the subject is merely trying to maintain a baseline of physical health to mitigate mental health risks and issues.

proportion of unexplained economic development.[77] Nowadays, much of this activity *is* recorded.

Instead of knowledge for self-production, the object of focus in lockdown should be the 'behavioural surplus' data/knowledge/*savoir* produced about you, for others, by digital consumption. Now that the neoliberal veil of self-improvement has been lifted, there seems to be very little benefit (other than analgesia) to you from consuming digital media. I am not talking about the bare-bones communicative functions provided by instant messaging services, e.g., for staying in touch with loved ones (although these also generate similar data). I am talking partly about films and documentaries but also, most importantly, endless scrolling through videos, memes etc. What is the point of them all, if we ourselves have no life to compare them with? Surprisingly, post-nineteenth century criminal psychology may shed some light on this question. Foucault argues that since then, penal systems have developed to concern themselves, above all, with leveling the following question at the defendant: 'who are you?'[78] The industrial complex of digital surveillance is interested in producing multi-layered, context and time sensitive answers to this question – for every digitally connected person. De Beistegui's study, *The Government of Desire*, makes a crucial point that the neoliberal subject is the producer of their own satisfaction or utility.[79] A lockdown scenario actually exacerbates this since the ostensible lack of economic activity and abundant 'leisure time' force an agony-of-choice upon the subject about how best to optimise, or 'make *use* of,' their lockdown experience. After a day or so of painting, the scope of choice becomes overwhelmingly digital. As explored though, when it comes to digital media, we should no longer necessarily see 'self-production,' with a view to entrepreneurship, as the most important implication of consumption. The neoliberal rationality, especially prevalent in American neoliberalism, that "utility maximisation is a comprehensive way of life"[80] carries an important legacy in revealing how we have been trained to pursue optimised consumption. Within our digitally saturated context, the neoliberal notion of 'optimisation' has begun to take on a noticeably 'algorithmic' identity. Here we can glimpse elements of the historical transition from neoliberal to algorithmic governmentality. Certainly, they are intimately connected: neoliberalism is a fundamentally economic rationale which carries forward into our attempts to optimally gratify ourselves as *consumption connoisseurs*. However, with a view to one's longer term self-production and formation as *homo oeconomicus*, the current algorithmic rationale does not seem primarily concerned with the user's prosperity. Rather, in lockdown, the doppelgänger consumption process acts to generate increasingly incisive information, concerning the question, as Cheney-Lippold puts it, of: 'Who do they think you are?' His emphasis on security-driven attempts to collect 'the entire haystack' of data, just

[77] Theodore W. Schultz, "Investment in Human Capital," *The American Economic Review* 51:1 (1961), 1-17.

[78] Foucault, ''About the Concept of the 'Dangerous Individual' in 19th-Century Legal Psychiatry," 1-18.

[79] De Beistegui, *The Government of Desire*, 78.

[80] May and McWhorter, "Who's Being Disciplined Now?," 251.

in case 'a needle' may need finding, corroborates Foucault's notion that power targets individuals as potentially dangerous and produces a situation of panoptic surveillance.[81]

Foucault describes (neo)liberal governmentality in the simplest possible terms as "the art of least possible government."[82] However, this is noticeably out of step with the UK government's future plan to become more involved, as encapsulated by section 5.13 of their rebuild strategy. They plan to implement "more subtle restrictions" on an ongoing basis while coupling this with more "robust enforcement measures."[83] Perhaps, instead, a renewed 'suspicion of the risk of governing too much' (Foucault's definition of liberalism)[84] is precisely what the UK needs. At the same time, 'gentler' disciplinary measures still remain. This begins to invoke the Orwellian notion of 'doublethink,' a situation in which the simultaneous existence of two opposing realities becomes normalised.[85] Are we living in a police state? Or is it business as usual? The overall fixation on reducing *risk*, typical of disciplinary societies,[86] still persists. Indeed, the instructions to socially distance and to avoid large gatherings are aimed precisely at reducing risk: of both infection and protest. These encapsulate the two primary ways in which individuals are being constituted as 'dangerous.' The strategy is especially effective when considering that the government has attached moral and social judgement to *counter-conduct*: "Please. For the safety of your loved ones, do not attend large gatherings, including demonstrations."[87] While the invocations of this instruction are alarming, they are at least reassuringly neoliberal. The moral governance of self-conduct is outsourced to the individual, rather than being outright imposed. This is reminiscent of the continual re-examination and reconstitution of oneself in relation to a central text (narrative) explored in *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*.[88] Winston undergoes a more extreme version of this process in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in which he constantly evaluates his memories relative to what he is told by the party, until his own memory is reconfigured altogether.[89]

CONTROL THE VIRUS. SAVE LIVES.

Foucault argues that in disciplinary societies, the disorder of the plague is met by order. The uncertainty of the plague is met by a proliferation of 'truths' in order to make *sense* of

---

[81] John Cheney-Lippold, *We Are Data: Algorithms and the Making of Our Digital Selves* (2017), 151, 43-44.

[82] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 28.

[83] "Our Plan to Rebuild: The UK Government's COVID-19 Recovery Strategy," gov.uk, May 11, 2020. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy#fourteen-supporting-programmes (accessed June 21, 2020).

[84] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 319.

[85] George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (2008), 16.

[86] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 55-61.

[87] "UK government urges people not to protest due to COVID-19," YouTube video, 0:39-1:00, posted by Sky News, June 6, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juelHb0P_Vk.

[88] Foucault, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*, 166-167.

[89] Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 44.

and keep *control* of events. Crucially, the regulation of "even the smallest details of everyday life" allows for the production of a series of truths about individuals: their true name, place, body, disease etc.[90] The digital age allows for the same process to be extended to include more information, with constant updates about the population as a whole being broadcast.

'Information flooding'

During lockdown, we have become accustomed to over-abundant information. Daily updates on numbers of tests, cases and above all deaths have become part of our digital diet. 'Event 201,' a global pandemic planning exercise, attended by various representatives from governments, corporations and international organisations was, strangely enough, conducted on 18 October 2019. It recommended "the ability to flood media with fast, accurate, and consistent information" to combat the spread of 'false information.'[91] Lo and behold, 3 months later, daily updates delivered automatically to all smartphones became the new routine of 2020. This contemporary infatuation with data serves a dual purpose. In addition to registering a database of individuals, algorithmic governmentality seeks verification through the persistent illusion that the government is constantly administering the country in the most efficient way possible. As Weiskopf highlights, 'post-facticity' has been trumped by *hyper-facticity*. The incessant generation of apparent objectivity through data purports to transcend the realm of human error, thereby giving a reassuring sense that 'things' are doing the governing rather than people, and thereby also diminishing human accountability for decision-making.[92] This is exemplified by the UK government's daily Downing Street briefings, which seek management of 'The Curve' (of infections and deaths) down to the finest detail. In this way, a 'perfect' algorithmic balance between the incursion of private freedoms and overall public safety can be continuously re-defined. The approach retains a certain managerial quality familiar to neoliberalism, but it entails such detailed and specific micro-management of everyday behaviour that it smacks of a data-driven rationale. For example, you were newly able to attend places of worship for individual prayer from 13 June 2020, and face coverings were made compulsory on public transport from 15 June (although they were not during 'the peak') - ensuring an environment of continual algorithmic flux. These, and other countless detailed regimentations are conditional upon the rate of infection ('*R*') at a given time[93] - further evidence of governmentality based on data.

---

[90] *Discipline and Punish*, 198.

[91] The John Hopkins Center for Health Security, "Public-private Cooperation for Pandemic Preparedness and Response - A Call to Action," centerforhealthsecurity.org, 2019. https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/event201/event201-resources/200117-PublicPrivatePandemicCalltoAction.pdf (accessed June 19, 2020).

[92] Weiskopf, "Algorithmic Decision-Making, Spectrogenic Profiling and Hyper-Facticity in the Age of Post-Truth," 1-37.

[93] UK Health Security Agency, "Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19," gov.uk, April 1, 2022. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-

While neoliberalism fostered a degree of economic precarity, the locked-down subject is additionally faced with constant legal precarity: a significant barrier to self-entrepreneurial subjectivity and non-digital wealth creation. Should restrictions continue to fluctuate, one could easily find oneself being unwittingly arrested from one day to the next, even while behaving in the same way, with the law having changed overnight. Similar to the ideal neoliberal *homo oeconomicus*, the mould of the perfect lockdown citizen is another 'real fiction' - no citizen could possibly comply absolutely with such a complex and ever-changing set of demands. And increasingly, as Harcourt argues, the data certainly exists to catch anyone out at a moment's notice.[94] All of this is reminiscent of Foucault's claims regarding the unlimited internal objectives of the police state - to further its power over the population endlessly.[95] An "emphatic, accentuated, fine and subtle governmentality of regimentation with no predetermined limits."[96] Foucault notes that if it weren't for external competition, states would be much more inclined to invade and control the daily lives of their citizens.[97] By this logic, we can see the recently increased regimentation of the population by the police state as an additional indicator of reduced international competition, the latter having been a beacon of the global neoliberal order. Foucault theorises that, in a (neo-)liberal setting, due to external competition between states, it is within the interest of individual nations to cultivate productive subjects internally. This is perhaps the most fundamental point of intersection between neoliberalism and biopolitics. Laws which encourage health and well-being within the population go hand in hand with laws which encourage economic prosperity. Foucault defines (liberal) policing as the art of managing life and well-being within the population, with its objective being a population that is as large, sufficiently provided for, healthy and active as possible. His use of the term 'circulation' offers a lucid example of his vision for the crossover between biology and economy. Promoting the free flow of goods, labour (through transport networks) and information becomes analogous with maintaining a human body which is in good working order.[98] Now it seems that we have drifted some distance from these aims. Instead, our current economic body is constipated by frequent blood clots, hamstrung by restrictions which do not appear to be holistically promoting 'health,' while our antibodies (or police), which are usually tasked with protection, are frequently tasked with attacking their own cells (citizens). What seems to be going on, collectively, is the suppression of the ecological economic body and its replacement with an artificial, digital economic body.

distancing/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing (accessed April 15, 2020).

[94] *Exposed*, 141-145.

[95] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 7-9.

[96] Ibid., 52.

[97] Ibid., 7-9.

[98] *Security, Territory, Population*, 323-326.

The Digital Health Passport

With a view to these altered mentalities, 'population control' becomes the central term in need of emphasis. As Lawrence Dunegan highlights, this notion should not only be conceived of as control over population numbers but also more generally as denoting increased control over the daily lives and endeavours of the population.[99] It is important to stress, though, as Lorenzini does, that contemporary forms of biopower should not just be viewed as inherently good or bad but always as dangerous.[100] This reminds us of 'On the Genealogy of Ethics,' an interview with Foucault in which he explains: "My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad."[101] Indeed, collaboration between the pharmaceutical and digital industrial complexes, a global phenomenon unique to this time, affords the possibility of vastly extending the domain of biopower. The digital health passport 'COVI-PASS' promises "a safe return to work and life" through the continuous assessment of virus test results, general health, and immune response of the user.[102] In theory, this could provide a roadmap for improvements in disease prevention, population health and other security measures. What subsequently manifests is Foucault's notion of *permanent registration* in a completely literal sense: "each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings."[103] We return to the economy of perfect information: this could offer precise data on who needs what treatment when, and which facilities are available to carry this out.

In terms of security, neoliberal governmentality employed market principles to produce justice. The proliferation of information, emphasised by Harcourt's 'expository society' (even understated if biometric data is to be added to the tally), renders fraud practically *impossible*. What Harcourt means by 'exposition' is that many of our actions, public and private, through the digital footprint they produce, are permanently put on record and thereby possess the possibility of being *exposed* at a moment's notice. In this sense, he argues that our digital self is far more "provable" than our analog self.[104] He reimagines the famous Martin Guerre example to illustrate this. This case of identity theft warranted a complex judicial procedure by early 1560s rural French standards. However, as Harcourt explains, the whole process would instantly be made redundant by any number of today's permanent registration mechanisms, be that location tracking, CCTV, fingerprints, face recognition, ad infinitum...[105] Whether or not this "compulsory extraction of truth" to create "networks of obedience"[106] is desirable is another debate altogether, but the implications for governmentality are significant.

---

[99] Lawrence Dunegan, "The New Order of Barbarians," transcript of speech (1988), 2.

[100] Daniele Lorenzini, "Biopolitics in the Time of Coronavirus," *Critical Inquiry* 47:S2 (2021), 40-45.

[101] Foucault, *Ethics*, 266.

[102] VST Enterprises, "Covi-pass," covi-pass.com (accessed 29 May 2020).

[103] *Discipline and Punish*, 195-200, 197.

[104] *Exposed*, 1.

[105] Ibid., 141-145.

[106] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 184.

As such, it is important to examine the health passport from another angle: COVI-PASS also represents the integration of increasingly refined data - now biometric - into the pre-established surveillance network. This is evidenced by the delivery of the pass through supporting technology 'VCODE,' which boasts its ability to "revolutionise electronic transactions."[107] Some of its functions, as listed on the government's digital marketplace, include: "Full Scan Analytics - track who, what, when and where;" "Analyse user behaviour patterns, traffic and workflows;" "Real Time Tracking" and "Bespoke end user content delivery," to name a few.[108] Should all of this data for continuous assessment be brought together, as potentially facilitated by COVI-PASS, we could reach an (instrumentarian) governmentality which embodies absolutely, and likely exceeds, Foucault's analysis of the disciplinary mechanism:

> It lays down for each individual his place, his body, his disease and his death, his well-being, by means of an omnipresent and omniscient power that subdivides itself in a regular, uninterrupted way even to the ultimate determination of the individual, of what characterizes him, of what belongs to him, of what happens to him.[109]

Deleuze notes, in his explanation of emergent *control societies*, that the enclosures (schools, hospitals, prisons) which characterise Foucault's *disciplinary societies* act as behavioural *moulds* for subjects. Whereas control operates through *modulation* – incentives and punitive measures are made to fluctuate based on behaviour (Deleuze uses the example of corporate bonuses).[110] This echoes recent governmental tendencies to alternate between dangling 'the carrot' of ending lockdown - a return to 'normality' - and brandishing 'the stick' of further, invasive, rigorously enforced, dehumanising restrictions. Indeed, Deleuze's analysis of the *limitless postponement* associated with control societies is excruciatingly accurate when it comes to lockdown.

Deleuze goes on to argue that control's numerical modulation needn't be binary;[111] however, this is not the case with instrumentarian governmentality. Instead, it uses digital (in the strictest sense of the term, think: 1/0, on/off, true/false) surveillance instruments to ensure continuous modulation between permitted and forbidden, 'safe' and 'unsafe' bodies, 'opening up' and 'locking down' – subliminally reinforced by the patronising 'big green tick' or 'big red cross' symbols scattered throughout public spaces and visual domains. With a precedent that freedoms can be bestowed or revoked, in relation to the continual need to demonstrate one's 'COVID-19 status,' a considerable danger of the passport scheme emerges. The idea of *status* here, in practice, extends itself to denote 'citizen' or 'sub-citizen,' leading to a two-tiered society of instrumentarian binarisation. May and McWhorter predict, following a fragmentation of neoliberalism, "a resurgence of some

---

[107] https://vstenterprises.com/ (accessed May 29, 2020).

[108] "VPlatform & VCode by VST Enterprises Limited," gov.uk, https://www.digitalmarketplace.service.gov.uk/g-cloud/services/588890073077344 (accessed May 29, 2020).

[109] *Discipline and Punish*, 197.

[110] Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," (1992), 3-7.

[111] Ibid., 4-5.

modified forms of sovereign power,"[112] which they characterise as "the old binary power of rule:" an absolute, rigidly enforced, distinction between realms of permitted and forbidden activity.[113] Guattari's imaginary city explains the possible long term effect of a digital health passport: "one would be able to leave one's apartment, one's street, one's neighborhood, thanks to one's (dividual) electronic card that raises a given barrier; but the card could just as easily be rejected on a given day or between certain hours; what counts is not the barrier but the computer that tracks each person's position - licit or illicit - and effects a universal modulation."[114]

In its current formulation, the digital health passport represents a formidable control mechanism, threatening the very foundations of autonomy and privacy (certainly very 'dangerous'). In order for any such system to be worthwhile, it should not represent a centralised database, with its modulation linked to socially desirable behaviour (i.e., a social credit system); the data sovereignty of the user should be protected, and those who opt out of the scheme should not be discriminated against in any way. The priority should be to improve the health of the user, *not* ulterior political and economic motives, which are emblematic of an instrumentarian mentality. Understandably, many countries (including the UK) have since wisely moved away from the digital health passport as a legitimate strategy of liberal governance.

Instrumentarian governmentality is so expansive that it considers its domains of jurisdiction to be the quantity air molecules between strangers, the bloodstream of the global population, and numbers of people permitted to socialise at a given time, to name just a few examples. This problematic form of government encapsulates the fusion of large scale population management with individualised disciplinary regimentation. While Foucault's insights regarding power/knowledge mechanisms remain timeless in their relevance, the limits of their application must expand to meet new challenges posed by dangerous digital landscapes - comprising such sticky terrain as QR codes and echo chambers. In view of lockdown's recent impact on such realms, it would seem that we are now in need of a renewed 'suspicion of the risk of governing too much.'[115]

CONCLUSION

Lockdown could therefore represent significant changes to society at large, notably through the digital fusion of disciplinary power and biopower. This 'omniscience' afforded to governments and corporations by data, now increasingly biometric, creates a web of surveillance and hidden transactions. Indeed, the rationale for governing now hinges significantly on available data, and the lockdown subject faces economic and legal precarity should they fail to keep pace with algorithmic decision-making. Indeed, 'algorithmic governmentality' is presented as a key feature of lockdown governmentality, but

[112] "Who's Being Disciplined Now?,", 257.

[113] Ibid., 247.

[114] "Postscript on the Societies of Control," 7.

[115] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 319.

this is by no means a complete account of what we are living through. The former is perhaps too benign a term since it neglects current realities of exposition, surveillance and coercion. As such, I introduced the concept of 'instrumentarian governmentality' to address the use of digital surveillance instruments by corporations and governments to manipulate the fears and desires of the population. This concept additionally denotes the binary modulation of control mechanisms in response to socially desirable behaviour. And although the extent of the current connections between nation-states, multinational data platforms and global organisations needs further investigation, I hope to have shown in this paper that lockdown governmentality operates through three main guises: neoliberal, algorithmic and instrumentarian. The propensity to modulate between these three is rather appropriate, given lockdown's provisional and ever-changing nature. As such, in the past two years, neoliberalism was no longer the only, nor the dominant form of governmentality in the UK. But with lockdowns lifting worldwide, and new forms of liberalism being propagated as a result, it remains to be seen whether neoliberalism will make a significant reappearance.

In the preface to *Anti-Oedipus*, Foucault famously asks: "How does one keep from being fascist, even (especially) when one believes oneself to be a revolutionary militant?" With a view to governmentality, we should maintain that "the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us" is inextricably linked to "the historical fascism […] of Hitler and Mussolini - which was able to mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively." Hence, it is our individual responsibility to "ferret out the fascism that is ingrained in our behavior,"[116] by instead cultivating a governmentality which does not fall victim to the instrumentarian impulses currently coded into our desiring machines, nor does it rely, for differentiation and decision-making, on the algorithmic application of face-value, superficial *savoir*. A governmentality which finally emerges from its oedipal echo chamber, ready to reflect on, and exchange, competing ideas, to be an entrepreneur of liberated behaviours, organisational forms and futures, and to produce a rationale, rule of law, and economic order that promotes equality in exchange, symmetry of information, and mutual social understanding.

References

Allas, Tera, Mark Canal and Vivian Hunt, "COVID-19 in the United Kingdom: Assessing jobs at risk and the impact on people and places," *McKinsey & Company,* May 11, 2020. https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Industries/Public%20and%20Social%20Sector/Our%20Insights/COVID%2019%20in%20the%20United%20Kingdom%20Assessing%20jobs%20at%20risk%20and%20the%20impact%20on%20people%20and%20places%20new/COVID-19-in-the-United-Kingdom-VF.pdf?shouldIndex=false

[116] Michel Foucault, "Preface," in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, ed. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (1983), xiii.

Amer, Karim and Jehane Noujaim, dir. *The Great Hack*. Los Gatos, California: Netflix, 2019. https://www.netflix.com/watch/80117542

BBC News, "Coronavirus: 'No jab, no job' policies may be legal for new staff," *BBC News*, February 18, 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/business-56113366

Behrent, Michael C. and Daniel Zamora, eds. *Foucault and Neoliberalism.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016.

De Beistegui, Miguel, *The Government of Desire: A Genealogy of the Liberal Subject.* Chicago; London: Chicago University Press, 2018.

Bröckling, Ulrich, *The Entrepreneurial Self: Fabricating a New Type of Subject*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2016.

Campbell, John, *Margaret Thatcher: Volume One: The Grocer's Daughter.* London: Vintage, 2007.

Deleuze, Gilles, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (1992), 3-7. http://www.jstor.org/stable/778828

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* Translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.

Ducci, Francesco, *Natural Monopolies in Digital Platform Markets.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Dunegan, Lawrence, "The New Order of Barbarians. Tape No. 1," Transcript of tape. http://www.jrbooksonline.com/PDF_Books/New_Order_Barbarians-1988-24pg-POL.pdf

Experian UK, "Experian TV Ad 2017 - Meet Your Data Self," YouTube video, 1:00. December 26, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lNAiokZ20PU

Ezrachi, Ariel and Maurice E. Stucke, "eDistortions: How Data-opolies are Dissipating the Internet's Potential," in *Digital Platforms and Concentration*, ed. Guy Rolnik, 5-8. Chicago: ProMarket, 2018. https://promarket.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Digital-Platforms-and-Concentration.pdf

Fisher, Mark, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009.

Foucault, Michel, "About the Concept of the 'Dangerous Individual' in 19th-Century Legal Psychiatry," *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 1 (1978), 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-2527(78)90020-1

Foucault, Michel, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-79,* ed. Michel Senellart. Great Britain: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008.

Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1995.

Foucault, Michel, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth (Essential Works of Foucault 1954-84, Volume I),* ed. Paul Rainbow. UK: Penguin Classics, 2020.

Foucault, Michel, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-2*, trans. Graham Burchill. Great Britain, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Foucault, Michel, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" [1971], in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rainbow, 76-100. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Foucault, Michel, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-78,* ed. Michel Senellart. Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Foucault, Michel, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-6*, trans. David Macey. New York: Picador, 2003.

Foucault, Michel, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice*, ed. Fabienne Brion and Bernard E. Harcourt, trans. Stephen W. Sawyer. London: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Garside, Juliette, and Joseph Smith, "Tory-linked firm involved in testing failure given new £347m Covid contract," *The Guardian,* November 4, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/04/tory-linked-firm-involved-in-testing-failure-awarded-new-347m-covid-contract.

Harcourt, Bernard, *Exposed: Desire and Disobedience in the Digital Age.* Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015. http://doi.org/10.4159/9780674915077

Harvey, David, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Hayek, Friedrich, *The Road to Serfdom.* London & New York: Routledge, 2001.

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. "Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme," Ended September 30, 2021. https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme (accessed June 3, 2020).

Imperial College COVID-19 Response Team, *Report 2020-2021*, March 22, 2021, https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/medicine/mrc-gida/Imperial-College-COVID-19-Response-Team-2020-2021-Report-(22-03-2021).pdf (accessed April 27, 2021).

Independent Scientific Pandemic Insights Group on Behaviours (SPI-B), *Options for increasing adherence to social distancing measures*, 22 March 2020, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/887467/25-options-for-increasing-adherence-to-social-distancing-measures-22032020.pdf (accessed May 1, 2020).

Johns Hopkins University, World Economic Forum, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, *Event 201 Recommendations*, October 18, 2019, https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/event201/event201-resources/200117-PublicPrivatePandemicCalltoAction.pdf (accessed June 19, 2020).

Lemm, Vanessa and Miguel Vatter, eds. *The Government of Life: Foucault, Biopolitics and Neoliberalism.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2014.

Lorenzini, Daniele, Biopolitics in the Time of Coronavirus," *Critical Inquiry* 47:S2 (2020), 40-45. https://doi.org/10.1086/711432

Lorenzini, Daniele, "Governmentality, Subjectivity and the Neoliberal Form of Life," *Journal for Cultural Research* 22:2 (2018), 154-166.

May, Todd, and Ladelle McWhorter, "Who's Being Disciplined Now? Operations of Power in a Neoliberal World," in *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond,* ed. Vernon W. Cisney and Nicolae Morar, 245-259. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

McKechney, Kim, "The Perils of the Growing Digital Industrial Complex," *University Affairs,* February 14, 2017. https://www.universityaffairs.ca/opinion/in-my-opinion/growing-digital-industrial-complex/.

Stanton, Andrew, dir. *WALL-E*. Emeryville, California: Pixar Animation Studios, 2008. Blu-ray Disc, 1080p HD.

Plehwe, Dieter, Quinn Slobodian and Philip Mirowski, eds. *Nine Lives of Neoliberalism.* London & New York: Verso, 2020.

Orwell, George, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. London: Viking, 2008.

Rouvroy, Antoinette, "Algorithmic Governmentality and the Death of Politics," *Green European Journal* (2020). https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/algorithmic-governmentality-and-the-death-of-politics.pdf.

Schultz, Theodore W., "Investment in Human Capital," *The American Economic Review* 51:1 (1961), 1-17.

Sky News, "UK government urges people not to protest due to COVID-19," YouTube video, 2:28. June 6, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juelHb0P_Vk.

Smith, Adam, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments: Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith Vol. I.* Indianapolis: The Liberty Fund, 1982.

Totaljobs, "Lockdown Loneliness & the Collapse of Social Life at Work," totaljobs.com. August 17, 2020. https://www.totaljobs.com/advice/lockdown-loneliness-the-collapse-of-social-life-at-work (accessed February 8, 2021).

UK Government Cabinet Office, "Our Plan to Rebuild: The UK Government's COVID-19 Recovery Strategy," gov.uk. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy (accessed June 21, 2020).

UK Government Cabinet Office, "Coronavirus: How to Stay Safe and Help Prevent the Spread," gov.uk. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing (accessed April 15, 2020).

UK Government Digital Marketplace, "VPlatform & VCode by VST Enterprises Limited," service.gov.uk. https://www.digitalmarketplace.service.gov.uk/g-cloud/services/588890073077344 (accessed June 21, 2020).

VST Enterprises, https://vstenterprises.com/ (accessed May 29, 2020).

Weber, Max, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* trans. Talcott Parsons. New York & London: Routledge, 2005.

Weiskopf, Richard, "Algorithmic Decision-Making, Spectrogenic Profiling and Hyper-Facticity in the Age of Post-Truth," *Le Foucaldien* 6:1 (2020), 1-37. http://doi.org/10.16995/lefou.62

Wiener, Norbert, *Cybernetics, Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine.* Cambridge, Mass and London: The MIT Press, 2019.

Zuboff, Shoshana, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. London: Profile Books, 2019.

Author info
Seb Sander
seb.sander@warwickgrad.net
Department of Philosophy
University of Warwick
United Kingdom

Seb Sander graduated with Distinction from the University of Warwick in 2020, having completed a BA in History and an MA in Continental Philosophy.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the co-editors of *Foucault Studies* for their careful consideration of my article.
In particular, I'd like to thank Daniele Lorenzini, Signe Macholm Müller, Sverre Raffnsøe and the two anonymous peer reviewers for their academic contributions to this process.
Most of all though, I would like to thank the founding members of The Brunswick Academy: Tom, Tommy, Eve, Inés, Jamie, Amy and Rhiannon, for their undying support, inspiration and love.

FOUCAULT
STUDIES

© Kurt Borg
ISSN: 1832-5203
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.vi32.6704
Foucault Studies, No. 32, 82-88, October 2022

Article reuse guidelines:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

REVIEW

Chloë Taylor, *Foucault, Feminism and Sex Crimes: An Anti-Carceral Analysis*. New York, and London: Routledge, 2019. Pp. 272. ISBN: 9781138367319 (hardback).

Chloë Taylor's latest monograph sets itself a wide-ranging and ambitious set of tasks, which it accomplishes in a convincing and edifying way. *Foucault, Feminism and Sex Crimes: An Anti-Carceral Analysis* consists of nine chapters arranged in three parts, book-ended by an instructive introduction that lays down the Foucauldian and feminist methodological principles that underpin the study, and a conclusion. The book also contains an appendix of the 'medical legal report on the mental state of Charles-Joseph Jouy accused of indecent assaults', including the report in the original French as well as an English translation by Taylor and James Merleau.

Part I engages with Foucault's expression 'bucolic pleasures', first in Chapter 1, through a critical examination of Foucault's discussion (and feminist analyses of this discussion) of Charles Jouy, the farmhand who in 1867 was accused of sexually abusing eleven-year old Sophie Adam in the presence of a girl friend of hers. In Chapter 2, Taylor evaluates Foucault's controversial remarks on sex crime legislation reform and engages with feminist criticisms that, perhaps too quickly, dismissed Foucault's points on this topic. Chapter 3 discusses Foucault's reflections on 'infamous men' and 'dangerous individuals' in the context of the entanglements between disciplinary power, biopower and medico-legal apparata.

The focus of Part II is sex crime and the question of punishing sex offenders. Chapter 4 engages with the political history of sexual trauma, conducting a genealogical inquiry into some transhistorical claims and assumptions made (including by some feminist approaches) on sexual trauma. Chapter 5 makes the case for Foucault as a prison abolitionist, showing how the scope of *Discipline and Punish* was updated by the work of contemporary critical prison and race scholars and activists such as Angela Davis and Michelle Alexander. In Chapter 6, Taylor draws on the notions of 'grotesque power' and 'vile sovereignty', perhaps understudied notions in Foucault studies, to examine practices and behaviours of correctional officers concerning the sexual abuse that happens and is sometimes allowed to happen within the prison walls, whereby such abuse discriminately targets sexual and gender minorities.

Part III builds further on this Foucauldian and prison abolitionist framework to reflect critically on what Taylor, following Foucault, calls 'perverse implantations'. The

'implantations' discussed in Chapter 7 include that of the 'pervert', the 'pedophile', and the commercial sex user, leading a discussion of sex work from a Foucauldian point of view. What this problematization of sex work entails for Taylor is that, rather than focusing on the sex lives and sexualities of sex workers, we should instead listen more closely to what sex workers demand, such as affordable housing and access to bank loans since, after all, it is these social and structural issues that lead marginalized populations into sex work (p. 173). Chapter 8 turns to the 'perverse implantation' related to bestiality, later historically transformed into 'zoosexuality'. Taylor considers how, and critiques the fact that, in contemporary times this topic finds proponents of arguments for the recognition of zoophilia as an identity and sexual orientation, and for the recognition of 'species dysphoria'. Chapter 9 then considers the 'implantation' and social construction of the serial sex killer, adopting a critical genealogical perspective to how the serial killer was 'invented' through discourses of psychiatry, criminology and cultural representations.

There is not much scope in fleshing out in further detail the main arguments and theses presented in Taylor's book – readers interested in these topics would do well to go straight to Taylor's clear, persuasive and elegant prose. Before going on to reflect on what I considered as key highlights and main takeaways of the book, what I would like to mention here is a virtue of Taylor's thinking and writing. While her own theoretical and ideological positions are clear throughout – Taylor is resolutely a feminist and a Foucauldian – this is never done in a prohibitive or preachy way. Taylor's tone manifests affect as deemed necessary: indignation and critical ruthlessness when it is called for, but, especially and even more admirably, a sense of empathy and imagination particularly towards positions which are clearly not hers. Taylor does not simply defend Foucault at all costs; where his remarks are either insensitive or partial, she unambiguously states that some of his remarks on Jouy, sex crime legislative reform and domestic violence against women "are philosophically undermined by Foucault's failure to attend to gender and the experiences of victims, and indeed to any form of social oppression other than the psychiatric-penal system" (p. 20). Taylor opens up debates rather than closes them with a rushed certainty, follows arguments through and respectfully constructs the internal logic of various views that she is ultimately opposing or not fully agreeing with. And she does so from an unambiguous feminist and Foucauldian perspective. Her stated aim, in fact, is to take Foucault's arguments seriously without trivialising feminist insights on sexual violence (p. 16).

I am calling this attitude a virtue perhaps in the spirit of Foucault's own suggestion that "[t]here is something in critique which is akin to virtue."[1] I consider this ethos of critique a virtue particularly in an age when many take 'courageous truth-telling' to mean license to say whatever one wants irrespective of possibly hurtful consequences of those utterances or, conversely, when 'practices of critique' manifest themselves in calls for censorious gestures or other punitive techniques. In some sense, when Taylor recounts Foucault's own remarks on, say, consent laws, rape or the possible abuse of Sophie Adam, it is not difficult to imagine calls for Foucault to be 'cancelled' had these remarks been made

[1] Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?," in *The Politics of Truth* (1997), 43.

today. The result of Taylor's considerate and balanced critique (which I definitely do not mean as 'fence-sitting') ultimately enriches the reader's mind and the debates being pursued.

There is much to pick out from this book. It provides suitable introductions to readers unfamiliar with feminist debates of Foucault's works, or with Foucault's own arguments and aims in his work on the prison, sexuality and modern medico-legal power, or even with prison abolitionist ideas and concerns. For the more 'advanced' reader on these topics, Taylor's book also provides a contribution to these debates that is strongly inspired by a feminist Foucauldian analytical perspective.

The thesis that guides Taylor's book is that "[p]risons are not merely ineffective at preventing crime, but counterproductive, to the extent that it would be better for crime prevention to have no criminal legal system at all than to perpetuate the system we have" (p. 1). This thesis is coupled with a claim on what can be called the performativity of discourse insofar that "[t]he production of "objective" knowledge about criminals objectifies these human beings, producing the very objects and realities that are then known and acted upon" (p. 2). Throughout her book, Taylor insightfully frames her prison abolitionist position through interdisciplinary and analytically diverse works, carefully outlining their central critical angles. This strategy ensures that her abolitionist outlook is informed by a plurality of critical strands that reinforce each other, making her analysis ever more rich, profound and sophisticated while never losing touch of the far-reaching social transformations that her work ultimately implies. Drawing on postcolonial outlooks, Taylor argues that ample work has "documented different ways in which the prison serves the interests of eugenic, white supremacist and settler colonial states" (p. 4). From a critical disability perspective, Taylor draws the insight that "[p]rison is a disability issue because so many imprisoned individuals are intellectually disabled or mentally ill" (p. 4). Migration studies highlight that "prisons increasingly function as tools for controlling migration and immigration," (p. 4) while "critical queer and trans prison scholars have analyzed how the prison functions to punish and regulate sexual and gender deviance" (p. 4). Importantly too, Taylor draws on analyses that highlight that "the prison system serves as a capitalist response to surplus labor," (p. 4) and that there are financial interests in keeping prisons full and well-staffed, which goes to show that the perpetuation of delinquency serves a vested economic interest.

Another point worth mentioning is that throughout the book, Taylor makes important remarks on social constructionism. She corrects simplistic interpretations by insisting that to say that something is socially constructed is absolutely not to say that therefore it does not really exist or is opposed to reality (p. 206). To the contrary, it is very much real and determines the realm of the real. Taylor's references to the work of Ian Hacking on 'human kinds' (p. 206) and the 'looping effect' (pp. 37, 212) are instructive in this regard. Moreover, when making statements such as prisons *produce* crime, Taylor clarifies the multiple senses of this production, that is, the type of causation that is being referred to. The prison apparata produce criminals insofar as medico-legal and criminological discourses and practices construct the subject of sexuality and its objects. But the prison produces

criminals in a further sense that evokes a type of social causation, in the sense that delinquency is in part produced by the effects of imprisonment, such as social abandonment, lack of access to housing and employment, and the impossibility of social reintegration which, thus, lead a person to crime and the probability of former prisoners ending up in prison once again.

An important and highly interesting analysis is presented by Taylor in Chapter 4, where she critically reflects on the history and politics of sexual trauma and sex crimes. In this chapter, she inquires genealogically into discourses of psychological trauma, particularly those that, in her view, make transhistorical claims about sexual crime without supporting these claims with anthropological evidence. Contra the important work of, for example, Linda Alcoff, Taylor maintains that she wants to argue that phenomena such as adult-child sex and sexual assault are morally wrong "without arguing that such acts have always been or are always experienced as psychologically harmful and sexually traumatizing by their victims" (p. 78). Taylor conducts this analysis by comparing and contrasting the discursive constructions, practices and social attitudes surrounding sex acts from different historical periods and contexts, such as descriptions of such acts in court reports from early modern Europe, accounts of acts of rape on wedding nights in early modernity, the case of the sexual abuse of Artemisia Gentileschi by her teacher Agostino Tassi, the case of the Marquis de Sade and his sexual violence, and Susan Brison's account of her violent sexual assault. In this same chapter, Taylor also carefully unpacks the argument of psychologist Susan Clancy, who, in her book *The Trauma Myth*, argues that "[t]he view that sexual abuse is always traumatizing for children when it happens is also hard to reconcile with a great deal of clinical evidence," (p. 87) particularly if that abuse does not entail physical force or pain, or if the child does not realize that what is happening to them is, in fact, abuse. The point of Taylor's argument here is, of course, not to deny the trauma of sexual abuse but to show that insisting on or imposing certain expectations on how victim experiences or narratives ought to be may actually harm victims in the same way that the courts and state apparata may harm victims when they discredit or fail to act upon their claims. In other words, Taylor maintains that the assumptions that all cases of what may be regarded as sexual abuse must be traumatizing, or must be traumatizing in the same way, or that they must be traumatizing in order for it to be real should be open to critical scrutiny.

In this rich chapter too, Taylor turns to consider 'carceral feminism', which is the view that certain strands of feminism and women's rights movements, including victims' rights movements, have facilitated the carceral state (p. 94). Taylor notes that while "Foucault was deeply critical of institutions of confinement … feminists have tended to implicitly or explicitly support incarceration as a solution to sex crimes, while rarely considering the fact that the prison raises serious social justice concerns of its own" (p. 12). These concerns also include the sexual abuse that structures of incarceration perpetuate ("about half of the rapes in U.S. prisons and jails are perpetrated by staff" (p. 13)), sanction, or ignore. An interesting argument made by Taylor against carceral feminism is that the fact that incarceration (and legal reform that would make it easier to incarcerate) has become a focal

point of a lot of feminism, especially of the liberal kind, is a sign of either a marked depoliticization of crime (that is, its social causation and embeddedness is overlooked) or a sign of lost hope (that is, feminism has given up on hopes of radical social transformation and thus 'settles' for incarcerating the perpetrator). To such feminist currents, Taylor's book presents a Foucauldian feminist prison abolitionist response and, what's more, one that is informed by critical race, queer and disability perspectives that further illuminate her analysis. After all, she claims, "[p]risons are violent, degrading, racist, ableist, classist, transphobic, homophobic and misogynist institutions, and they are not institutions that any social justice scholar or activist should endorse" (p. 21).

The three chapters in Part II all set out to demonstrate how and why the criminal punishment system is not a solution to sexual crime or social justice. While Chapter 4 makes this point with emphasis on feminist anti-violence movements, Chapter 5 does this with reference to the question of race in abolitionist debates, and Chapter 6 with reference to how the criminal punishment system "is a site of grotesque power in the forms of gender regulation, sexual normalization and punishment for queerness" (p. 152).

A particularly powerful and poignant moment described by Taylor is found in her discussion of whether Foucault's arguments on disciplinary normalization in prisons have 'aged well'. Taylor recounts an experience recounted to her by Lisa Guenther (whose own work on prisons and solitary confinement is worth making reference to here), who "reports that maximum security prisoners in Tennessee with whom she read *Discipline and Punish* found that it described what they *would like* prisons to be like (more mental health care, more individual attention, gentler forms of control), but that Foucault's descriptions were far removed from their actual experiences of top-down corporeal violence and complete disregard for the soul" (p. 132).

The chapter on zoosexuality (Chapter 8) is insightful in that it presents arguments about zoophilia and its history but also brings into the equation queer, posthumanist, and environmental feminist critiques of the human/animal divide and of human relations to other animals and the natural world. Taylor's conclusion on this topic is to shift the debate away from the pathologization of bestiality and the creation of new identity categories (such as zoophile) and – extending Marilyn Frye's notions of arrogant and loving perception – move toward "using the term 'interspecies sexual assault' in order to discuss zoosex" (p. 197). Moreover, Taylor calls for the removal of the threats of imprisonment and criminalization of such cases since these would "simply contribute to the constitution of zoophiles and make zoophiles go underground, while doing little or nothing in the long term to protect nonhuman animals from sexual abuse" (p. 198).

In the final chapter, Chapter 9, Taylor foregrounds the tension that exists between the glorified authoritative role ascribed to criminological knowledge and its relative failure in catching serial killers on the run. Taylor highlights that, rather than due to successful criminological profiling or forensic science, most serial killers have actually been caught due to their vanity, mistakes they commit, or because of traffic violations that incidentally lead to the discovery of glaring evidence (p. 210). On the other hand, Taylor argues, "psychiatric profiles of killers used by police have, in real life, been notoriously inaccurate" (p.

210). In view of this, Taylor argues that abolishing criminology would actually be a step towards abolishing crime, which reminds us of Foucault's characterization of these discourses as "the chatter of criminology".[2]

The conclusion summarises possible 'solutions' or alternatives to the carceral archipelago and the prison–industrial complex that were systematically deconstructed throughout the book. This is done by considering alternatives to the retributivist paradigm of punishment and crime, in the form of what measures of preventative, redistributive, restorative and transformative justice look like, and how they can be further imagined and mobilized in the present. In this book, Taylor did not have the space to develop these alternative paradigms in the depth that they deserve; however, neither was this the main scope of the book – readers interested in extended treatments of these alternatives and, especially, what such measures could look like in practice, need to look beyond this book. However, the conclusion serves an important genealogical purpose, if only to foreground the point that alternatives do exist and that the contemporary is less fixed than sometimes is presented to be. The Prison and Punishment are not timeless universals.

Ultimately, an important overarching theme in this wonderful book by Taylor is that the authority, power and material effects of systems of punishment and institutions and knowledges that touch with the prison-industrial complex is disproportionate to its success at preventing crime or ensuring justice to its victims. To the contrary, this complex is actually contributing to the creation and perpetuating of systems and structures of oppression and marginalization. Moreover, the abolitionist perspective propounded by Taylor helps to identify some of the root causes of crime so that at least we are on the right track in our analyses. This may explain Taylor's suggestion that "[s]erial killers are exceedingly rare, whereas the military and capitalism cause infinitely more mass deaths; these are the true serial killers" (p. 213).

References

Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Penguin Books, 1991.

Foucault, Michel, "What is Critique?" in *The Politics of Truth*, eds. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter, 23-82. New York: Semiotext(e), 1997.

[2] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1991), 304.

Author info
Kurt Borg
kurt.borg@um.edu.mt
Lecturer in Philosophy of Education
Department of Education Studies
University of Malta
Malta

Kurt Borg is Lecturer in Philosophy of Education within the Department of Education Studies at the University of Malta. He completed a PhD in Philosophy at Staffordshire University, with a thesis on the ethics and politics of narrating trauma in institutional contexts. He has published articles and book chapters on Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, trauma theory, and disability studies. An interview he co-conducted with Judith Butler was published in *CounterText* (2017).

FOUCAULT
STUDIES

© Andrea Colombo
ISSN: 1832-5203
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.vi32.6706
Foucault Studies, No. 32, 89-91, October 2022

Article reuse guidelines:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

REVIEW

Aliraza Javaid, *Masculinities, Sexualities and Love*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2019. Pp. 189. ISBN: 978-0-8153-8065-8 (hardback).

Masculinities, Sexualities, and Love begins with a seemingly simple question: why is the concept of love so sparingly addressed – specifically in sociology and in general across the disciplines – in a way that would allow us to understand the reality we inhabit? The bulk of Javaid's seven chapters are an attempt to find just such an answer. The text begins from two important premises, first an examination of historical-philosophical order and secondly reflecting on method. Following Foucault's thought, Javaid does not believe that love means something natural or possessing its own essence. Therefore, there is no human love and there is no idea of an absolute love; consequently, there is no "correct" love or radically "wrong" form of love. The nature of love and love bonds is that they are always and perpetually the result of a power network. It is the elements of a society, the history of a country, legal systems and social organizations that determine what possibilities, what spaces and what practices fall into the category of "love." With this in mind, one should not expect to receive a "definitive" or eternally valid answer to the question "what is love?", but rather, consistent with the first premise, one will find an analysis of how concrete contemporary factors, in the society in which the author lives, determine what is socially considered as belonging to the realm of relationships and love.

Having elucidated this framework with which to understand "love," his second premise, on method, logically follows. If love is nothing definable once and for all, and if love is produced in its forms and practices by the concrete symbols with which each society realizes it, then the experience of individuals living in specific societies becomes more fundamental than a general theory of what love is. Recognizing the impossibility of defining the essence of love, Javaid finds it more useful and necessary to analyze the societal practices of power which define love. The book can be positioned in the genre of autoethnography, which Javaid defines citing the description given by one of its major scholars (Ellis, et. al, 2011): "Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze [...] personal experience [...] in order to understand cultural experience". This sociological description is also consistent with Michel Foucault's or Gilles Deleuze's approach to the study of power and society, namely perspectivism. This mode of thought, by emphasizing the hermeneutics of the subject rather than simple

relativism, demonstrates the ways in which a part of the world tells the truth about itself, that is, the ways in which it self-produces (Deleuze, 1988). Getting the individual to speak, then, may prove to be one of the best approaches to understanding, even beyond the official sciences or theories already known, of how power actually reproduces itself and constructs its own symbols. In an act of courage, Javaid defines himself as homosexual, a resident of England and member of a minority religious community. What we have expected from this text, namely a theory of love, begins precisely from his point of view, within a multitude of details carving out a precise space within the network of power, to move us closer to a definition and conceptualization of the amorous topic.

Inevitably, given the author's biographical details, at the center of the book is the theme of masculinity. Power, especially in modern and contemporary times, has built much of its stability on the male gender. The man as the head of the family, the holder of political and military power, and the one capable of creating culture and cultivating thought, lies at the center of Western society. Although some power structures have been shifting in recent decades, this legacy still weighs on males growing up in European countries (Javaid focuses, especially, on England). Homosexuality could be studied as a mechanism that challenges this image of Western heterosexual men, critiquing it and offering a possible alternative. In fact, Javaid's book is interesting precisely because it does not fall into such simplistic positions: homosexuality is not simply the "negative" of heterosexuality, since sexual and amorous practice is always the result of different concrete interweavings of power, determined by individual practices. Heterosexuality and homosexuality do not correspond to the only two possible poles defining sexual and romantic relationships between men, but both are more intertwined, intimate and mixed than at first glance, leaving room for different types of sexuality still unearthed. Male sexuality, and therefore a man's affectivity, is the result of much more layered relationships of power imbued with the symbols that society brings with it. Javaid comes to trace six different types of masculinity: hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, marginalized and protest. Five different ways of being "male" that trace equally different and possible ways of understanding love relationships, one's sexuality and one's role in society.

What emerges clearly from the book is how today, however, the Western male is still burdened by the stigma of a society that imagines him as its center of production par excellence. A man is required to hide his affectivity, to live secretly or with fear for every sexual desire that does not conform to the imposed standard, and to pay with a sense of shame for every escape from the "imposed" role. Only with much effort is an attempt being made today to dismantle this idea of Western man, and Javaid shows very well how far we are from this result. In fact, the book also offers interesting interviews with men from all walks of life and backgrounds, who are questioned on their relationship with sexuality, with affectivity, with the tools with which they seek relationships today (dating apps), and on their expectations for the future. What emerges is the image of a male who is more uncertain, compared to the past, about himself, his role and his desires; and if this means that there is an ongoing questioning of the male about himself, it is also an important symptom of the fact that our society is marked by a deep sense of unease mixed

with anxiety, depression and uncertainty. Feelings perhaps also linked to the economic situation in which we all find ourselves immersed, and which is therefore also coming to influence our way of loving.

Ultimately, *Masculinities, Sexualities and Love* offers an accurate and acute analysis of what sociology has said so far about love and male relationships and proposes a method to go even more profoundly into a still largely amorphous field. Javaid, moreover, precisely because of his sociological approach, also investigates what emerges from films, books and the most common products of society, believing that these are also fundamental in order to understand how power is currently structuring the organization of what we call "love". For its approach, method, style and content, Javaid's text is certainly an interesting work to which one hopes other "voices" and points of view will be added, so that a more complete picture of how our society allows us to love will be revealed. Indeed, only by understanding the actual lines of power in which we are immersed can we hope to change them for a better society and a better world.

References

Deleuze, Gilles, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* [1988]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.

Ellis, Carolyn, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography: An overview," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12:1 (2011). https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-12.1.1589

Author info
Andrea Colombo
andrea.colombo@unipd.it
Adjunct Professor
Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology (FISPPA)
University of Padua
Italy

Andrea Colombo is an adjunct professor at the University of Padua in the Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Pedagogy and Applied Psychology (FISPPA). He teaches history of contemporary philosophy and is an expert on Gilles Deleuze and the relationship between philosophy and mathematics. He graduated with a PhD in philosophy in 2020 from the University of Padua.

FOUCAULT
STUDIES

© Fabio Cescon
ISSN: 1832-5203
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.vi32.6707
Foucault Studies, No. 32, 92-95, October 2022

Article reuse guidelines:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

REVIEW

Cory Wimberly, *How Propaganda Became Public Relations: Foucault and the Corporate Government of the Public.* Routledge: New York, 2020. Pp. 214. ISBN: 978-0-367-26314-0 (hardback).

Many political theorists have been addressing the workings of propaganda, detailing the dangers it bears for democratic rule. Cory Wimberly's *How Propaganda Became Public Relations* does not merely position itself within this literature; rather, it significantly contributes to it through a provocation: to analyze propaganda *immanently*, as taking part in the creation – not the obfuscation – of reality. In contrast with traditional critiques of propaganda as a mechanism which corrupts human nature, the author invites the reader to consider the latter as a contingent assemblage of forces, producing subjects on the level of conducts. Building from Foucault's genealogical approach, Wimberly explores propaganda as an apparatus of government which governs through subjectification, lying on the assumption that there is no "essential self" to be corrupted by propaganda. As such, the author critically questions both the epistemologically focused (Stanley) and critical (Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer) understanding of propaganda to put forward an empirical analysis of corporate governmentality. If propaganda's goal is to change subjects' conducts, then its main outcome is to produce subjectivities and not "papering over reality with false beliefs" (p. 5). This epistemological commitment is further expressed by the author: "I will not shelter the hope most critics have that the world they want lives just below the surface waiting to spring forth once the right critical philosophical incantation is uttered to clear away the lies and ideological distortions" (p. 6).

The book will surprise the reader for the meticulous archival work presented therein. Wimberly's precise account of the genealogy of propaganda as a historical discipline mobilizes newly available archives on early 20th century's public relations in the US. This original data allows the author to empirically ground their work and convincingly argue against the traditional epistemological, ideological and ontological critiques of propaganda in favor of a Foucauldian analysis of public relations as a governmental apparatus working on subjects' conducts. The author integrates major theorists of the field of Public Relations, including, but not limited to, Edward Bernays, George Creel, and Ivy L. Lee, as well as an astonishing amount of sources ranging from strategy papers to textbooks. As such, the book is a claim on the propagandists' archives, delineating public

relations as a particular manifestation of the conduct of conduct, governing through mass subjectification.

As outlined by Wimberly, propaganda emerged to deal with the perceived social chaos witnessed in the US between the 19th and 20th centuries. The newly established urban working masses needed to be managed by developing ad hoc behaviors and subjectivities. The analysis of these techniques of power is the *fil rouge* that goes throughout this book. Notably, the author delves into the ties linking public relations and corporations, highlighting how the intervention of the former shaped several subjectivities and sensitivities, which in turn influenced each other. Wimberly is successful in showing how the effect of PR did not simply mold consumers; on the contrary, it molded managers, corporations, and voters as well. The author explains this technique by showing how behavioral change is the most successful when novelty is introduced in multiple social spheres. As such, Wimberly reiterates his central theoretical position: propaganda "is about subjectification" (p. 59), and this can be evidenced through empirical analysis. Propaganda, Wimberly shows us, is a new government technique directed at the control of publics (collective subjects) for the benefit of corporations.

The genealogical analysis put forward by the author brings forward the theoretical efforts and lineages that characterize propaganda. As previously stated, propaganda was aimed at the management of the rising influence of the urban working class. The social chaos brought about by these emerging "irrational masses" of the 20th century needed to be managed by rational elites. Borrowing from crowd psychology, PR criticized political liberalism in failing to acknowledge the radical irrationality of the modern urban subject. Crowds are posited as working only through irrational chains of images, unable to self-govern, suggestible, dependent and imbecilic. As such, the role of propaganda was clearly delineated: guiding the more irrational sides of the social fabric, as the latter were too impressionable to know their best interests. It is one of this book's merits to aptly show how crowd psychology and the conservative elitism of Orléanists were integrated in the development of Public Relations; the author provides detailed explanations and a plethora of credible sources to corroborate their thesis, while making the theoretical explanations rather accessible.

However, the creation of a discipline and the delineation of the role of its acolytes does not imply its success. Wimberly illustrates how propagandists sold their roles of mediators able to identify and solve social problems in the interests of corporations. The emerging publics in the US context needed the intercession of propagandists to solve the problems of the era. The latter were framed by transposing the diagnoses of crowd psychology to the US context, notably in the transformation from autarchic peasantry to cooperative urban wage laborers. Propagandists, thus, presented themselves as scientific experts whose knowledge was universally applicable. They could sell their "knowledge of the public" for any situation that needed intervention in the psychology of the masses, whose conduct could be directed by addressing their unconscious, impulsive desires.

Wimberly addresses the techniques mobilized to accomplish these tasks by focusing on Bernays' *Crystallizing public opinion*, a seminal work in the field. In it, public opinion

is understood as a *mapping practice* relying on the assumptions inherited by crowd psychology and aimed at the creation of conducts. Crucial for Bernays' theorization is not the *belief* of people in propaganda but rather the *conduct* it creates; in other words, it is insignificant if people do not *believe* propagandistic messages as long as they *act* according to them. These conducts are, then, organized on the basis of unconscious desires, which are influenceable through PR techniques. Wimberly uses the book as definitive evidence that propaganda should be treated as government aimed at the creation of new desires, new conducts and new subjectivities. Central for this process of subjectification is the internalization and naturalization of such desires, so much so that they will constitute people's sentiments of authentic selves.

In the concluding chapter, the author takes the reader beyond the genealogical study of early propaganda to assess its contemporary status. According to Wimberly, the methodological developments of PR solidified its role and dominant status as an instrument of government (ranging from digital and technical tools, like statistical surveys or Big Data) thanks to its enhanced precision and professionalization. Further, the impact of PR on democracy is highlighted, precisely in its dominant, unacknowledged presence in daily life. As such, the need for counter strategies of resistance becomes salient, although the author warns us against traditional liberation narratives in favor of a Foucauldian approach. Only by taking seriously propaganda's theoretical body can its governmental effects be counter-acted; hence, the author invites their readers to engage in the creation of counter-subjectivities and counter-publics.

This concluding chapter and its attempt to sketch a theory of resistance to propagandistic modes of government is the least convincing part of the book. If Wimberly is successful in showing the contemporary influence of novel data-gathering techniques for propaganda, the ways in which we might counter-act these techniques fall short. Notably, the focus on a dichotomic opposition between the *demos* and corporations leaves the reader with a Hegelian aftertaste that leaves untouched the specificities of contemporary democratic rules. As the explicit goal of such counter practices is the increase of democracy – put in danger by contemporary PR – a more thorough critical engagement with the relationship between the State and PR would have strengthened the proposal. Moreover, a more thorough justification for the effects of propaganda outside of the US context might have contributed to address possible intriguing variations.

Nonetheless, Wimberly proposes an invaluable intervention in the debate on PR, providing incredibly rich material and original data. Thanks to this methodological innovation in the topic, the book is able to describe in detail the theoretical underpinning of propaganda, allowing a solid engagement with its parameters. Moreover, their Foucauldian intervention has the merit of enriching the theoretical debate on the topic by providing nuanced critiques and very interesting contributions on the possibilities of resistance.

Author info
Fabio Cescon
f.cescon@uva.nl
Junior Lecturer
Department of Sociology
University of Amsterdam
Netherlands

FOUCAULT
STUDIES

© William Tilleczek

ISSN: 1832-5203
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.vi32.6708
Foucault Studies, No. 32, 96-99, October 2022

Article reuse guidelines:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

REVIEW

Niki Kasumi Clements, ***Sites of the Ascetic Self: John Cassian and Christian Ethical Formation*****. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020. Pp. 280. ISBN: 978-0-268-10785-7 (hardback).**

This is a book about Cassian, but it is also a book about Foucault. Imbued with Foucault's late theoretical concerns about the production of subjectivity, asceticism, care of the self, and techniques of self-transformation, Clements' text skillfully turns to an important figure in the Christian ascetic tradition to produce a case study that can help us better think not only John Cassian but also various questions of subject formation today.

Clements' goal is clear: "To read Cassian with Foucault's ethical emphasis on asceticism [...] without assuming the institutionalist and interiorizing reading to which Foucault reduces Cassian" (p. 13). In other words, she undertakes to read Cassian both with and against Foucault.

If she is reading Cassian *with* Foucault, it is because she employs his late theoretical apparatus of 'asceticism' in order to make sense of the late antique Christian thinker and indeed because she follows Foucault in interrupting a long-standing commonplace about the very meaning of this term 'asceticism.' Asceticism is not – or not only – the practice of self-denial and world-denial by now so familiar from the popular use of the term but is rather the name of a self-transformative *praxis*.

If Clements is reading Cassian *against* Foucault, it is because, as she argues, Cassian remained something of a blind spot in Foucault's ongoing explorations of ancient asceticism and/as a *praxis* of self-shaping and social transformation. While Foucault possessed the requisite theoretical tools to see in Cassian a thinker of "ethical agency," he persisted – perhaps his untimely death prevented a later breakthrough on this point – in seeing in Cassian an ascetic in the traditional sense: self-depriving, obedient, submissive, and also – as Foucault would later say of psychoanalytic ethics – excessively focused on the hermeneutics of self-excavation and self-expression.

To read Cassian as though his 'ascesis' were merely submissive and renunciatory, Clements argues, is to remain unaware of a vast wealth of resources that Cassian can offer to those interested in thinking self-transformation, whether as specialists of late antiquity or thinkers of the modern socio-political problems of identity formation and contestation. In a word, then, Clements' project is to accept the general late Foucauldian theory of ethics

but to refuse the particular Foucauldian reading of Cassian. This allows Clements both to provide a novel reading of Cassian *and* to use Cassian to "engage and extend Foucault's final philosophical task: to frame critical possibilities for ethical transformation" (p. 17).

Once we re-read Cassian with-and-against Foucault in this way, Clements argues, we reveal in him a theorist of what she calls "ethical agency." By "ethical agency," Clements refers to a capacity to act which is neither entirely free nor entirely determined, a capacity cultivated by practices of the self but always existing within a formational context that is, of course, formed in turn by the agent. Such a dialectical response to the "structure-agency" problem is certainly not novel in itself, but Clements' approach is interesting in that she shows how Cassian's theory of agency is one in which the self is only ever one agent amongst others – divine and demonic, environmental and social – in negotiation with which Cassian undertakes his efforts of self-transformation.

In sketching out this general argument, Clements' book is divided into two sections, with an introduction and conclusion. The introduction situates Clements' intervention amongst classical studies of asceticism – most notably Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* and Weber's *Protestant Ethic* – as well as among the contemporary literature on asceticism in religious studies. It also overviews her project as laid out above, including, importantly, her insistence that the 'self' under consideration is not a unified object but a composite entity which has various 'sites' to be explored: the body, affects, and the community in which the self is situated.

The first half of the book explores the theory of asceticism as a contribution to theories of *ethos* and agency, informed by queer and feminist theory. Chapter 1 introduces theories of agency and recapitulates parts of the theoretical introduction that begins the book. Chapter 2 then places Cassian in historical context, situating him as a bilingual, culturally multiple and liminal figure who finds himself (among other contexts) stuck between extremes in the Pelagian Controversy—a location which can help to explain his measured and dialectical understanding of grace and human effort. Chapter 3 closes the first half of the book by providing a reconstruction of Cassian's philosophical and theological anthropology and his theory of human effort, freedom, and agency.

The second half of the book explores the eponymous sites of the ascetic self. Clements undertakes the laudable – indeed *necessary* if one is to take asceticism seriously – task of examining the concrete, daily practices that make up the ascetic life as professed by Cassian. Here she explores the practices – "the force and sweat of ethics" (p. 24) – that constitute his projects of self-transformation, divided across three 'sites': the body and bodily practices (Chapter 4); affects and emotions as cultivated by practices of reading and exemplarity (Chapter 5); and the social self as shaped through interactions with others, that is, via practices of friendship and spiritual direction, for example (Chapter 6). Two arguments that stand out here are, first, that prayer should be situated alongside eating and drinking (or, indeed, not-drinking and not-eating) as a properly *bodily* practice and, second, that inter-subjective interactions are an integral part of the ascetic *praxis*, a *praxis* which must not, therefore, be read as monadic, isolating, solipsistic.

In offering her new reading of the ascetic animal, Clements draws up a table of distinctions and oppositions that I think could helpfully be complicated without necessarily refusing her general theses. In the first place, there is the distinction between, on the one hand, vitiating practices (that is, self-denial, refusal of pleasures or, in a word, 'asceticism' as typically understood in non-specialist conversation today), which Nietzsche (according to Clements) considers to be the defining feature of ascesis; and, on the other hand, practices of self-transformation and self-cultivation which, as Clements wishes to emphasize, form the real kernel of asceticism in Foucault, in Cassian, and in other early Christian thinkers. Given the importance of this distinction for Clements' project, and given that many of the practices that she analyses as 'transformative' do indeed seem extreme and renunciatory (e.g., long fasts, severe sleep restriction), the *transformative vs. renunciatory* schema did not seem to me sufficiently thoroughly theorized in this text.

The logical move, as I see it, is not so much to accept a dichotomy between vitiating and transformative practises and then to insist that the term *asceticism* is better understood as comprehending the latter than the former but rather to adopt a perspective that allows one to see 1) that *both* self-abnegating *and* self-transformative (or even self-maximizing) practices are ascetic in the proper definition of the term and 2) that even self-abnegating practices are also necessarily practices of self-transformation. To take Nietzsche, for example, he surely thought that self-abnegation was also a transformative exercise (transformative of both subjects and values), even if he disagreed with the ethical teleology by which this transformation was oriented in Christianity. Indeed, he insisted that Christian asceticism, for all of its self-denying, was a will to power, that it was precisely the mechanism by which the priest makes his message convincing. (Importantly, Nietzsche also allows that the philosopher and the artist are ascetics, albeit of quite a different orientation).

Another schema worth revisiting is the equation that Clements draws between "power," vitiation, and social reproduction, on the one hand, and "freedom," self-transformation, and social transformation, on the other, setting then these two sets of equivalences against one another as opposites. This schema could be complicated in a number of theoretically helpful ways. In the first place, I would argue, renunciation can be freely undertaken precisely as a means not only to refuse oneself but to maximize one's capacities for personal and political action. In this sense, what Clements calls "vitiation" can be designed as an ascetic practice of personal liberation and social transformation (an obvious example would be Gandhi's ascetic politics). Moreover, although Foucault was not entirely consistent in his vocabulary (as Clements herself cites, Foucault once "lament[ed]: 'Perhaps I've insisted too much on the technology of power and domination'" [21]), he did distinguish domination from power and insisted that power and freedom were not opposed to one another but rather co-constitutive. That power is productive and enabling is perhaps clearest precisely in the domain of asceticism, in which yielding to a set of rules (such as the rules of a Vipassana meditation retreat) can yield new abilities – new capacities for acting, thinking, and doing – in the practitioner that would not have been gained had they stubbornly resisted these rules (and been expelled from the retreat). And even

in its 'free' (that is, its most spontaneous and its minimally coerced) forms, ascesis is always necessarily imbued with power, the application of a better over a worse self, of a will to change that must 'whip into shape' a series of habits, emotions, bodily dispositions, etc., that are not yet what the practitioner would like them to be.

These theoretical questions and suggestions are not meant to deny the overall value of Clements' analysis of the ascetic phenomenon and of Cassian's' work as fundamentally oriented towards the production of new ways of being. Clements' text is not only a valuable contribution to the studies of religion – which it certainly is – but promises a broad and interdisciplinary impact. Those interested in Michel Foucault, and above all in his works of the late 1970s and early 1980s, will find in the introductory pages of this book a compelling reconstruction of a Foucauldian theory of asceticism, and in the text as a whole a revealing case study in the domain that Foucault once referred to as the "ethnology of the ascetic."[1] *Sites of the Ascetic Self* will surely, for this reason, also be an important text for those in the field of the anthropology of ethics who wish to learn more about a key figure in the history of systems of self-creation and self-transformation. Finally, this book will be of importance for all of those students of self-creation – in particular in queer and feminist theory – who wish to learn more about a pre-modern example of the transformative power of the application of self to self.

References

Foucault, Michel, *L'herméneutique Du Sujet: Cours Au Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. François Ewald, Alessandro Fontana, and Frédéric Gros. Paris: Seuil / Gallimard, 2001.

Author info
William Tilleczek
tilleczek@g.harvard.edu
PhD Candidate
Department of Government
Harvard University
USA

William Tilleczek is a political theorist with broad research interests in politics and ethics. His dissertation, *Powers of Practice: Michel Foucault and the Politics of Asceticism,* offers a re-reading of Foucault's oeuvre centered on the notion of *askesis.* Forthcoming articles will explore the role of 'training' in producing and resisting inequality, in both ancient Greek and contemporary neoliberal contexts.

[1] Michel Foucault, *L'herméneutique Du Sujet: Cours Au Collège de France, 1981-1982* (2001), 399.

FOUCAULT
STUDIES

© Conor Bean
ISSN: 1832-5203
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.vi32.6709
Foucault Studies, No. 32, 100-104, October 2022

Article reuse guidelines:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

REVIEW

Thomas Lemke, *The Government of Things: Foucault and the New Materialisms*. New York: NYU Press, 2021. Pp. 312. ISBN: 9781479829934 (paperback).

Thomas Lemke's *The Government of Things* offers an important set of reflections on the continuing pertinence of Foucault's concept of government in light of the increasing visibility of problems of materiality, the ecological, and the nonhuman. Lemke has rightfully earned a position as one of the foremost interpreters of Foucault's writings on power in the 1970s, and he is well placed to stage the series of critical encounters in this text. The reader is immediately struck by the breadth of citations and the depth of engagement with various strains of contemporary debates over the amorphous category of "new materialism" that have arisen over the past two decades. He proceeds in three main parts: first, a critical review of three major strands of new materialism, second, a creative reworking of Foucauldian concepts, and third, an articulation of Lemke's concept of the 'government of things 'as a new analytic frame for grappling with contemporary political problems broached by new materialists.

In Part I, Lemke addresses three currents in a loosely associated philosophical movement now known collectively as new materialism. Lemke first approaches "object-oriented ontology" (OOO) with a focus on the most famous proponent of OOO, Graham Harman. As he does throughout this book, Lemke marshals an impressive array of recent secondary literature, and in the case of OOO to facilitate a withering critique. Lemke has some sympathy for OOO's central criticism of subject-centered philosophies 'tendency to overstate the knowledge of objects available to human subjects (p. 33). His diagnosis of OOO's potential contribution to social sciences is quite grim, and he portrays a predilection for a kind of mystifying attachment to the unknowability of objects as they withdraw from what is disclosed in their relations to human beings and a fascination with the irreducible "strangeness" of objects (p. 27). The ironic result is a subjectivism at the heart of OOO that reifies the subject-object distinction to define this relation by an aesthetic experience of "surprising weirdness" while avoiding adequate discussion of hierarchical relations established among various objects and human beings (p. 36).

Lemke is more optimistic regarding the second variant of new materialism under consideration, which he labels "vital materialism" and associates closely with the work of Jane Bennett. The basic approach of vital materialism, in Lemke's telling, is to prioritize analysis of the myriad relations between human and nonhuman entities in assemblages

with emergent properties that are irreducible to the purposive agency of humans. In comparison with OOO, Lemke argues that vital materialism is "helpful in displacing liberal accounts of individual self-determination on the one hand and OOO's focus on the autonomy of isolated objects on the other" (p. 47). Lemke harbors concern, however, that Bennett's focus on "thing-power" risks an essentializing move that posits an ineradicable vital force possessed by things before any relation, which both flattens the differences between variously hierarchized entities and conflicts with Bennett's otherwise relation-centric account of assemblages (p. 50, p. 54-55). Beyond these ontological problems, Lemke argues that vital materialism in Bennett evacuates transformative political possibilities, and instead calls only for developing ethical sensibilities more disposed to altered practices of consumption. Lemke goes so far as to argue that Bennett ultimately winds up providing "an alternative to politics" (p. 56) entirely, a point that I will return to shortly.

Lemke then pivots to what he terms "diffractive materialism" represented by the work of Karen Barad. This strand of new materialism emphasizes the performative and relational "intra-activity" of matter before any stable difference between human and nonhuman can be established (p. 60-61). Lemke lauds this approach for enabling a more direct theorization of power than the other strands of new materialism, specifically in providing a view of power as practically cohering in concrete apparatuses "as part and product of processes of differential materializations" (p. 71). Concerns with this approach soon follow, however, and Lemke argues that diffractive materialism in the work of Karen Barad risks too quickly embracing quantum mechanics as a quasi-scientific foundation for new materialism (p. 73). As with Bennett's work, Lemke also finds the notion of "ethical responsibility" in Barad's work to be a faulty way of access to political considerations, leaving it unclear how struggle over entrenched power structures can be adequately theorized in a nebulous, "never-ending flow of agentic possibilities" (p. 77). Lemke thus ends his review of new materialism with a serious concern for a deficit in political analysis in this burgeoning movement, and he turns to Foucault to recenter "ontological politics" (p. 78).

Part II provides Lemke a platform to review three concepts in Foucault to probe their relevance for contemporary social concerns raised in his review of new materialist literature. In dedicating a chapter each to Foucault's concepts of "dispositive", "technology", and "milieu", Lemke draws out "elements of new materialist thought" (p. 80) in Foucault that lead to unexpected resonances with contemporary materialisms. Lemke's discussion of the concept of "dispositives" in chapter four fruitfully reintroduces nonhuman materiality into a central technical term of Foucault's work on governmentality. In Lemke's telling, the notion of dispositive can be shown to stress the ontological heterogeneity of human/nonhuman components included in dispositives, the "technological" capacity of dispositives to engender effects greater than the sum of their parts, and the strategic orientation of dispositives to respond to given problems of government and recalibrate in the wake of contingencies (p. 92-95). Lemke takes a similar approach to the concept of "technology" in chapter five, interpreting the term as designating for Foucault a mode of calculating and enmeshing networks of persons and things (p. 107-110). Lemke makes clear that these coordinated networks are not tools for foreclosing or forcing certain actions to

happen; instead, they are best understood as calculated strategies for letting a range of things happen which allow for and take up dynamic processes of self-organization in a given sphere of human/nonhuman interaction (p. 115-116). Lemke rounds out his reappraisal of Foucauldian concepts with a discussion of the notion of "milieu" in chapter six. The idea of "milieu" takes on a prominent role in articulating "the link between a naturally given space and an artificially constructed space," and conceiving of the generative ground of circulations (of people, money, air, water, etc.) that become targets for government activity to affect populations (p. 130, p. 136). A particular strength of this chapter lies in Lemke's emphasis on the concept of milieu for breaking biopolitical analyses out of a strictly anthropocentric framing and moving toward a "more-than-human biopolitics" that accounts for both historical practices of biopolitical control and the emergence of various configurations of the human conditioned by "nonhuman doings" (p. 136-137). Arguing against both Foucault scholars championing an account of biopolitics explicitly tethered to humans alone (Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose) and critics of Foucault who see no room for the nonhuman in biopolitical analyses (Donna Haraway), Lemke charts an alternative approach to biopolitics rooted in human material dependence on milieux that they can never transcend. Taken together with his examination of "dispositives" and "technologies", Lemke presents a prism-like constellation of related concepts that furnish resources for elaborating central themes in Foucault's work in surprising directions.

In Part III, Lemke shifts his focus in order to advance an analytic of "the government of things" that takes the reader beyond both Foucault and new materialism. To make this move, Lemke first takes inspiration from theorists in science and technology studies (STS) to develop practice-oriented relational ontologies of things (including humans) to be governed, putting forward "an alternative view of agency" and emphasizing the co-emergence of the entities in a regime of government (p. 148). Lemke's focus in chapter seven is to draw out the ramifications of Foucault's brief mention[1] of the idea of a "government of things" (p. 84) into a more fully fledged analytic of power strengthened by ontological insights from STS, while avoiding the political shortcomings of new materialist projects. Chapter eight advances the concept of "environmentality" as a particular variant of governmental rationality made legible via the analytic of a government of things. Lemke argues that contemporary governance is marked by an increasing focus on intervening at the level of environmental conditions and the corresponding "rise of a new set of technologies that seek to measure and control environmental forces" (p. 177). In light of some severe dangers posed by this mode of government, Lemke hopes that the political value of his analytic can show itself in rendering environmentality intelligible and contestable in practical experiments of "counter conduct" (p. 190, see also p. 164-166).

Particular difficulties also arise, however, in Lemke's explanation of his novel analytic. While the reader should bear in mind that the "analytic grid of a government of things is a conceptual construction site, not a fully fledged proposal but something provisional" (p. 199), the scope of this analytic is still unclear. For instance, Lemke argues that his analytic is capable of making human beings accountable for the "domination, deterioration,

[1] See Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* (2007), 96-97 for the original reference.

and suffering they inflict on both human and nonhuman bodies" (p. 158). The notion of domination sits uneasily within the category of government, however, and as Lemke has noted in an earlier analysis, Foucault argues that governmental strategies may lead to domination but mostly take place in conditions where subjects retain some degree of freedom from determination.[2] Bearing this distinction between domination and government in mind, should the reader understand the analytic of the government of things as stretching itself beyond the original bounds of the concept of government to ultimately account for various forms of domination as well? Considering an example like livestock in factory farms, the notion of even liminally free animals seems extremely difficult to defend, and as Lemke's project proceeds, it may help to clarify the bounds of this analytic, noting where it definitely *does not* extend.

Furthermore, it may benefit Lemke's analytic to revisit the relationship between ethics and politics in Foucault, which is possibly closer to new materialist ideas than he credits. For instance, Lemke is concerned that Jane Bennett's focus on ethical practices leads her in the end to avoid politics altogether (p. 56). Indeed, Bennett is clearly committed to making ethical attachments to nonhuman agencies possible and desirable as a starting point for her research.[3] Such an ethical attunement is not foreign to Foucault, and such experiences may be valued as cultivating a "philosophical ethos" spurring modern subjects to test their political limits critically.[4] Lemke himself has recognized the importance of this ethical self-cultivation as a resource for Foucault's notion of critique,[5] and it does not seem implausible that new materialist experiments in pushing the limits of ethical relation may generate impetus for transgressive critique in Foucault's sense. Lemke has good reason to push new materialists on their political outlook, but it may serve the burgeoning analytic of a government of things to not write off new materialist ethical positions as avoiding politics altogether and instead relate their insights to Foucault's ethos.

In sum, *The Government of Things* allows for a very fruitful encounter between Foucault and new materialist concerns. While the ultimate trajectory of Lemke's analytic of the government of things is still a bit unclear, it should not be doubted that he has produced a remarkable piece of scholarship that will continue to generate innovative readings of Foucault.

---

[2] Thomas Lemke, "Foucault, Governmentality, Critique," *Rethinking Marxism* 14:3 (2002), 54, see also Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," in *The Final Foucault*, ed. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (1988), 19. A similar concern can be raised regarding the relationship between the government of things and two other technologies of power Lemke identifies: sovereignty and disciplinary power. How might the government of things be articulated in the triangle of sovereignty- discipline- government Lemke expounds to great effect in previous work? See Lemke, Thomas, *Foucault's Analysis of Modern Governmentality* (2019), 192-197.

[3] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (2010), xii.

[4] Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment," in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (1997), 113.

[5] Thomas Lemke, "Critique and Experience in Foucault," *Theory, Culture & Society* 28:4 (2011), 37.

References

Bennett, Jane, *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke Press, 2010.

Foucault, Michel, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-78*. New York: Palgrave, 2007.

Foucault, Michel, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom" [1984], in *The Final Foucault*, ed. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen, 1-20. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988.

Foucault, Michel, "What is Enlightenment?" [1984], in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, 97-120. South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2007.

Lemke, Thomas, "Critique and Experience in Foucault," *Theory, Culture & Society* 28:4 (2011), 26-48. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276411404907

Lemke, Thomas, "Foucault, Governmentality, Critique," *Rethinking Marxism* 14:3 (2002), 49-64. https://doi.org/10.1080/089356902101242288

Lemke, Thomas, *Foucault's Analysis of Modern Governmentality: A Critique of Political Reason* [1997]. New York: Verso, 2019.

Author info
Conor Bean
cbean6@jhu.edu
PhD Candidate
Political Science
Johns Hopkins University
USA

FOUCAULT
STUDIES

© Toon Meijaard
ISSN: 1832-5203
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.vi32.6710
Foucault Studies, No. 32, 105-108, October 2022

Article reuse guidelines:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

REVIEW

Paul Allen Miller, *Foucault's Seminars on Antiquity: Learning to Speak the Truth*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. Pp. 232. ISBN: 978-1474278669 (hardback).

If every form of power has a claim to truth, there must be forms of speaking the truth to power. From 1980 to 1984, Foucault tells his students how mythical figures that represented power, such as Oedipus Tyrannus, Dionysius the Younger, and Socrates' condemners, were told the truth; a form of speaking with a historically particular relation between truth and the speaker as its condition.

In *Foucault's Seminars on Antiquity: Learning to Speak the Truth* (2022), Paul Allen Miller provides us with an exhausting overview of Foucault's last five lecture series at the Collège de France. In the five chapters, Miller discusses the lecture series and traces the critical and conceptual developments in Foucault's work on the subject of Antiquity. Each section is introduced by two blocks of quotations of Foucault's text or the text of one of Foucault's references. Through the citations, Miller shines a new light on what Foucault was writing about, and what Foucault found of great interest, using his own carefully made translations and offering us alternatives to the existing editions.

The book is not limited to the lectures alone. It is a historical inquiry of itself, which is highly relevant for all readers interested in the texts and plays that Foucault discussed. The book is strong in its clear, detailed, and extended explanations of Foucault and his interests in Antique thinking. However, Miller chose to limit himself to Foucault and Foucault's references, leaving quite a gap between Foucault's death almost 38 years ago and the present. The choice limits the conceptual possibilities of the book.

Interestingly, Miller introduces his book with an inquiry of how Foucault became increasingly occupied with Ancient philosophy from the 1970s onwards and challenges the story of the eight-year silence in which Foucault is said to shift his interests towards Antique forms of subjectivation. It is already in 1971, writes Miller, that Foucault held a lecture series that was titled *La volonté de savoir*, with a content quite far from the book from 1976 (p. 4-5). Foucault speaks about Aristotle and Nietzsche as representatives of a specific form of subjectivity in which a subject has the ability to speak the truth through the relation it has with itself. According to Miller, the question of the relation between subject and truth is also already present during the lecturing on disciplinary power and biopolitics. If, according to Miller, Foucault asks 'what is the truth, and what is its relation to power',

there is in his work already a specific relationship between subject and truth that is not fully reducible to relations of power (p. 16).

Miller describes how Foucault sees a new type of subject in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. For Foucault, the play is essentially a murder mystery in which eyewitness accounts and third parties are needed to find the truth about Laius, the murdered king of Thebes. Miller shows us how Foucault problematizes the psychoanalytical reading of the play and how it is exemplary of a form of subjectivity in which truth is not residing in the subject but outside of the subject. In this way, he contextualizes Foucault's argument as an argument against the relationship between subject and truth, as brought forward in psychoanalysis, in an attempt to save the play of *Oedipus Tyrannus* from a psychoanalytical reading. However, the reading seems to oppose the reading of the relation between subject and truth that we find from *The Subject and Truth* and onwards, in which Foucault describes how the Antique subject gained access to the truth through spiritual exercise. It seems as if Foucault found something more promising.

Through the reading of the lecture series of '80 and '81 before going to *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* from '82, Miller is able to present a highly original reading of the latter. If we follow Miller's approach, the newly introduced elements are philosophical care for the self, spirituality, self-knowledge, and *parrhēsia*, and throughout the lecture series the four elements are unrelated to sexual comportments but appear as forms of self-reflexivity needed to become a subject of true knowledge, a *phronimos*, whose actions accord with its theoretical knowledge (p. 85).

Miller is very specific in his introduction of *parrhēsia* in the 1982 course, in which it does not yet occupy central space. Surprisingly, Miller chose to present it in connection to the Alcibiades dialogue, in which the 'risk' for the philosopher is almost absent because Alcibiades is in love with Socrates. The philosophical activity in the activity of frank speech is a problematization of what was thought to be certain, and Plato's works sometimes end with a resolution of the problem (e.g., in *Republic*) but mostly remain at the problematization. There is not yet much of a courage of truth, although the 'vocation of philosophy', the commitment to the combatting of false opinion, has the execution of Socrates as its ultimate consequence (p. 96 and 175). Here, Miller does not so much emphasize the well-known motive of subjectivity as resistance and vigilance but predominantly develops the argument that Foucault is telling the truth to us. He chooses to conclude his chapter with an explanation of practices of hermeneutics of the self in identity formations. Just as the 'New Soviet Man' or 'Japanese Company Man' transformed itself in response to institutional and governmental structures, we academics transform ourselves according to unstated assumptions of university life (p. 120). Miller notes that Foucault himself worked through the archives to describe 'a decisive moment on which the modern subject's mode of being is still engaged' and shows that modern identity-formation and Antique forms of subjectivation progress along of similar lines (p. 83). According to Miller, a contemporary example of such practices is the checking of privilege within progressive groups (p. 121).

In chapter four, on *The Government of the Self and Others*, Miller reminds us of Foucault's interest in Kant in the creation of a genealogy of truth in which, in order to come to the truth, the Other is excluded. Since Kant, spiritual guidance no longer belongs to the realm of philosophy, and thinking can be done in private. Contrary to *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* in which Foucault speaks of a loss in modernity of the subject's work on the self to gain access to the truth, Enlightenment is presented as 'maturation' of the subject. The subject has access to the truth because of what it is and not because of the care for the self. It is in the fourth chapter that the book offers its strongest conceptual possibilities, since Miller presents *parrhēsia* not as form of telling the truth that is lost in Antiquity but as an ever present historical possibility: 'Thus the emancipated thinker of modernity is one who must stand before the present and speak frankly' (p. 130). Miller's fourth chapter brings the possibility of speaking the truth to the 20th century, serving as a theoretical introduction to the final chapter. After his disappointment in the GIP, Foucault thought that the one who speaks the truth to power should be on its own. However, it is here that Miller's focus on the individual in his last years shows the limitations of the project. The exclusive focus on Foucault and his interests in a form of speaking the truth to power makes it look like as if we are waiting for Foucault's successor.

'The Courage of Truth: Philosophical Life in the Face of Death' is the title of the final chapter of the book. Miller interweaves the story of Foucault's last phase in his life with the latter's comparison between himself and Socrates: since the unexamined life is not worth living, we must think and act according to our thoughts until death takes us. We cannot stop saying the truth even when it has a cost for ourselves; either when we are executed for it or when we become too ill to work and lecture. As Miller reminds us, although the lecture rooms were still full, Foucault did not die as a star, and a great many thinkers deplored his turn away from the analyses of power. In his reading of Foucault's last years, Miller insists on Foucault's emphasis on self-examination: Foucault does not tell us what we want to hear, but he is telling the truth to all of us, and we cannot get away with the genealogy of this or that. Miller's description of the history of the reception of *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care for the Self* in the U.S. in the introduction anticipates a sad introduction to the last chapter: Miller feels the need to defend Foucault against the accusation that Foucault deliberately infected others with HIV, an accusation that can too easily be made with contemporary knowledge of the virus and that goes together with the resentment and disappointment in Foucault in the American progressive left and the aversion against him in the conservative right.

Parrhēsia is only the case when you say, with an undetermined risk, not what others want to hear but what needs to be said. Foucault took the risk of being 'called out' by his contemporaries by leaving out references to women like Sappho and by making historically debatable choices in the description of sexual and ethical conducts in Antiquity (Miller 2021, 12). But, as he emphasizes in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, the historical inquiries of his last years were not only motivated by historical curiosity. He wanted to trace the historical relation between subject and truth, which is where he found how the Antique subject of true knowledge became the subject of hermeneutics. However, in this same

history he saw the actual existence of forms of speaking the truth to power, that is, to problematize the omnipresent relations of power both inside and outside the university buildings. As Miller says: To be a professor of philosophy is a career choice, to be a philosopher is a vocation (p. 96).

Author info
Toon Meijaard
toon.meijaard@gmail.com
MA in Philosophy
University of Amsterdam
The Netherlands

Toon Meijaard is interested in the philosophy of disease and finds his inspiration in French philosophy, Nietzsche, and the anti-ableism studies. He recently finishing his thesis, which is titled 'Medicalization and Hermeneutics: the Care of the Self in Michel Foucault's *L'Herméneutique du sujet*'.

FOUCAULT
STUDIES

© Jasper Friedrich
ISSN: 1832-5203
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.vi32.6711
Foucault Studies, No. 32, 109-113, October 2022

Article reuse guidelines:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

REVIEW

Stuart Elden, *The Early Foucault.* Cambridge: Polity, 2021. Pp. 281. ISBN: 978-1-5095-2595-9 (hardback).

The historiography of Michel Foucault has recently become an embattled area of scholarly interest; a scene for fierce debates about the past and future of progressive politics and academic theory.[1] Against this backdrop, Elden's latest book on the early Foucault feels like a breath of fresh air—somewhat dusty, antiquarian air, perhaps, but refreshing nevertheless. *The Early Foucault* is the latest instalment in Elden's ambitious series of books which aims to provide a detailed intellectual history of the philosopher's entire career. The present volume is the third to appear—after *Foucault's Last Decade* (2016) and *Foucault: The Birth of Power* (2017)—but chronologically the first, covering Foucault's intellectual development from his student days to the publication of *History of Madness* (a fourth and final volume, *The Archaeology of Foucault* is in the making). As Elden puts it, '[w]hile many studies of Foucault begin with the first major book, *History of Madness*, in 1961, that is where this book ends' (p. 5).

The Early Foucault is, first and foremost, a treasure trove of information for any scholar interested in the intellectual history of Michel Foucault. It follows Elden's previous two volumes in providing impressively detailed analysis of the gradual changes in Foucault's scholarly interests and the direction of his work. While the book is mainly structured as a history of *History of Madness*, the many 'other paths explored but not ultimately taken' also form a major theme of the book (6). *The Early Foucault* thus very much continues the approach of *Foucault's Last Decade* and *The Birth of Power* in its impressive attention to detail, in the enormous range of sources, and in highlighting subtle continuities where, superficially, there appear to be ruptures in Foucault's intellectual development. Nevertheless, the fact that this period of Foucault's life has so far been much less explored than his later developments means that Elden relies more on archival sources compared to the previous volumes, and rather than intervening in existing debates about the philosopher's intellectual trajectory, he provides large amounts of new information about periods of Foucault's life that were so far barely discussed. This means that *The Early Foucault*

---

[1] See, for example, Mitchell Dean and Daniel Zamora, *The Last Man Takes LSD: Foucault and the End of Revolution* (2021); Stephen W. Sawyer and Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins, eds., *Foucault, Neoliberalism, and Beyond* (2019).

provides an enormous wealth of information, much of which was not hitherto readily accessible to scholars—but, at times, this arguably comes at the expense of deeper analysis or interpretation of the significance of these materials. Given the amount of new information densely packed into *The Early Foucault*, a full overview of everything this book offers is difficult. I will therefore limit myself here to a very general overview, while highlighting, in a very selective fashion, some of the threads of Elden's arguments that I find most interesting (and, in a few places, frustratingly underdeveloped).

The Early Foucault proceeds in strict chronological order beginning, in chapter 1, with Foucault's academic work and interests as a student, and continuing, in chapter 2, with his first teaching posts at Lille and ENS. The most significant theme of these chapters is Foucault's early interest in psychology and psychoanalysis, particularly the work of Merleau-Ponty and Lacan, which provides the main thread running throughout the entire book culminating with the *History of Madness*. Elden furnishes fascinating accounts of Foucault's wide engagement with different strands of psychological thought, as well as his experiences with practical psychiatric research—where he 'was used as both "an experimental subject or as an experimenter," also producing reports on patients and conducting tests' and helping to 'assess the medical and psychological state of prisoners' (47-8). The latter experience quite clearly influenced Foucault's later thought, but one of Elden's main accomplishments is the way he convincingly shows how Foucault's interests in everything from phenomenology to Soviet psychology and existential psychotherapy influenced his intellectual trajectory—even though the traces of these influences were often more or less deliberately erased later. The main takeaway from these chapters is 'that when in subsequent publications, lectures or interviews Foucault discusses Hegel or Husserl, Freud or psychology, it was on the basis of a thorough knowledge of the material' (p. 52).

This early interests in psychology resulted in three publications: Foucault's first book, *Mental Illness and Personality* (1954), as well as two little-known book chapters written around 1953. These are the subject matter of chapter 3, and they all represent Foucault's early attempts to wrestle with the problems of mental illness and his search for an alternative to orthodox positivist psychology. Elden deftly takes us through the French philosopher's flirts with a series of approaches that he would later reject, including phenomenological, existential, and Marxist psychology. This chapter is, perhaps, the best example of Elden's ability to give equal weight to the (not always obvious) continuities in Foucault's thought as well as the breaks. Thus, he convincingly points to the significance for the early Foucault of the Marxist concept of alienation, which would later drop out of his thought entirely; yet, at the same time, this chapter highlights how these very early works do not *only* represent false starts—as much as Foucault's own attempts to later cover his tracks would suggest as much. Already in the 1954 book, for instance, he grapples with questions of how psychology 'make[s] the patient a deviant and seek[s] the origin of the morbid in the abnormal' through 'a projection of cultural norms' (p. 71). Given what

seems to be a recent rise in interest in Foucault's early psychological thought,[2] I have no doubt that this chapter will provide fodder for further interesting work, both in terms of better contextualising Foucault's later work but also in terms of treating these early works as interesting analyses in their own right—which could perhaps even serve to add some nuance to contemporary Foucauldian-inspired work on mental illness, which, arguably, is often marred by a lack of attention to phenomenological and material aspects of mental disorder. Elden does not explore these possible lines of thought himself, but his lucid account of the nuances of Foucault's thinking in this period certainly provides a great starting point.

The following two chapters round off the part of the book dealing with Foucault's work prior to writing *History of Madness* with a discussion of his involvement in translating the existential psychologist Binswanger and the medical anthropologist von Weizsäcker (Chapter 4), and his reading of Nietzsche and Heidegger (Chapter 5). These chapters are a mixed bag. Elden subtly, but very convincingly, makes the point that the time leading up to the publication of *History of Madness* was far from a 'period of silence,' which was 'not leading anywhere in particular,' as Macey has described it.[3] Instead, '[w]hat is perhaps most remarkable is how much [Foucault] did before beginning his theses' and even the paths that were ultimately abandoned 'give a different sense of Foucault's breadth and depth' (111-2). Unfortunately, though, these are also the chapters where Elden struggles the most to really convey the importance of the material discussed for our understanding of Foucault because he tends to get lost in excessive detail (though, clearly, Elden's eye for detail is also a major strength). In several places—like the part about Foucault's choices as a translator, some parts about von Weizsäcker's work, and not least the detailed description of a conference Heidegger gave in France but which Foucault never attended—the discussion could have done with slightly less detail but more contextualization and interpretation.

Chapters 6 and 7 deal with Foucault's writing of his two theses: the primary thesis, which was published as *History of Madness*, and his secondary thesis, a translation of Kant's *Anthropology* along with a long introduction. This work coincided with Foucault's postings in Uppsala, Warsaw, and Hamburg. As Foucault did not publish during this time, Elden draws on very impressive archival work to discuss his teachings and cultural activities abroad, and of course Foucault's own archival work, especially in the Uppsala library. Elden's work in reconstructing Foucault's activities during this time, especially in Uppsala, through sources such as local newspaper adverts for lectures and talks is truly first-rate. To what extent this information will prove significant for our understanding of Foucault's intellectual development remains to be seen, but for collecting this wealth of information and making it available in an accessible form to other scholars, Elden is certainly to be commended.

---

[2] For example: Camille Robcis, *Disalienation: Politics, Philosophy, and Radical Psychiatry in Postwar France* (2021), chap. 4; Hannah Lyn Venable, "The Carnival of the Mad: Foucault's Window into the Origin of Psychology," *Foucault Studies* 30 (2021), 54–79.

[3] David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (1993), 70–71.

The final substantive chapter naturally discusses the defense and publication of Foucault's thesis, *The History of Madness*, but it is the discussion of Foucault's revision of his earlier book, *Mental Illness and Personality*, which serves as a natural conclusion to Elden's story. While *The Early Foucault* is essentially about the developments that led Foucault to write *History of Madness*, it is the story of his *actual* first book, which he tried to disown, that gives Elden a chance to explicitly reflect on the evolution of Foucault throughout this period. As is well known, Foucault unsuccessfully tried to prevent the republication of the 1954 book, and, as a compromise, a heavily revised edition was released in 1962 under the title *Mental Illness and Psychology*. Elden presents what is, to my knowledge, the first detailed and systematic account of the changes Foucault made to this book, and it makes for intriguing reading. In addition to removing an original chapter that discussed Pavlov and materialist approaches to psychology, Foucault did a 'fairly thorough job of removing overtly Marxist language' from the entire text. Elden points out fascinating lexical substitutions, such as 'our culture' for 'capitalism', 'European' for 'bourgeois', and 'system of economic relations' for 'exploitation' (p. 180-1). There is no doubt that the anti-Foucauldian left could have a field day with the way these substitutions seem to mirror general tendencies on the left to replace economic with cultural terms—but it is, of course, old news that the mature Foucault was incredibly wary of Marxist vocabulary. The interesting contribution of *The Early Foucault*, and Elden makes the point with characteristic nuance and subtlety, is to show in detail how these shifts in Foucault's thinking came about in the context of his thinking about psychology and mental illness. The discussion of the changes he made to *Mental Illness and Psychology* function almost perfectly as a narrative device that wraps up and recaps this slow development which Elden has carefully narrated throughout the book.

In sum, *The Early Foucault* represents a fantastic resource for scholars interested in Foucault's intellectual development, and especially his thought on psychology and mental illness. Since mental health seems to be a topic very much in vogue today, the appearance of Elden's book is highly welcome and will no doubt contribute to the growing interest in Foucault's earlier psychological thought as well as post-war French thought on politics and psychiatry more generally.[4] This is not to mention the book's highly interesting discussions of Foucault's more philosophical engagement with Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Nietzsche and others, which my highly selective review has not done justice to. If there is a critical comment to be made about *The Early Foucault*, it is that Elden is at times *too* attentive to detail to the extent that the reader loses sight of the bigger picture and the significance of the stream of information. Elden generally leaves the task of interpreting the wider ramifications of his detailed analyses to the reader—but to anyone who wishes to undertake this task, *The Early Foucault* provides an incomparable source of information.

[4] See, particularly, Robcis, *Disalienation: Politics, Philosophy, and Radical Psychiatry in Postwar France*.

Author info
Jasper Friedrich
jasper.friedrich@politics.ox.ac.uk
DPhil student
Department of Politics and IR
University of Oxford
UK

Jasper Friedrich is a graduate student in political theory at the University of Oxford. He currently works on a DPhil thesis of the politics of anger and depression. He has also worked on mental health more broadly as well as reconciliation and historical injustice.

FOUCAULT
STUDIES

© Jonas Lang
ISSN: 1832-5203
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.vi32.6712
Foucault Studies, No. 32, 114-118, October 2022

Article reuse guidelines:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

REVIEW

Karsten Schubert, *Freiheit als Kritik: Sozialphilosophie nach Foucault*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2018. Pp. 359. ISBN: 978-3-8394-4317-6 (paperback).

Michel Foucault's work has been confronted with many questions regarding the foundations of philosophy. Just like his work on the epistemological soil of civilization and knowledge, the question of human freedom has been brought up countless times in the reception of Foucault's work. And justifiably so. His descriptions of the interconnectedness of power and knowledge, the practices of pathologisation and incarceration and the profound effects these mechanisms have on the formation of sexuality and identity of subjects can seem deterministic. Many authors have put forth their interpretations and critiques on the concepts of freedom found in Foucault's work since Foucault himself never released a work dedicated to the topic of freedom. "Freiheit als Kritik" by Karsten Schubert, a revised version of his doctoral thesis, attempts to bring order into this messy debate still raging to this day, while advocating for a new concept of freedom that tries to overcome and complement the by now canonical trinity of negative, positive and social freedom. The book has three main goals. Firstly, it tries to reconstruct the positions different scholars assumed in the debate about freedom in Foucault's reception, while defending Foucault against attacks on his work. Secondly, it tries to introduce fundamental philosophical concepts of freedom and differentiate the problems that different readings of Foucault's work can cause for them. Finally, Schubert puts forth his own understanding of "freedom as critique". This concept solves the problems of freedom by reformulating them through the lens of institutional and political theory. The solution is a socio-political theory revolving around institutions permanently instilling reflexive practices into individuals as critical subjectivity (p. 11-26).

Schubert introduces the three paradigmatic understandings of freedom: negative, meaning the absence of external coercion; positive, being the ability to reflect one's own "true" wishes and needs; and social freedom, which can only be realised in social interaction. He also identifies two main problems arising for those concepts in the reception of Foucault. Firstly, the problem of power determination: With Foucault's analysis of all-encompassing power structures, there is no room outside of power, i.e., there is no place without coercion resulting in an absence of (negative) freedom. Secondly, the problem of subjectivation, which arises out of the more radical reading of Foucault's analysis of the

subject and the social determination of subjective wishes, needs, beliefs and motivations. This results in the absence of (positive) freedom since the subject is not able to reflect on its "natural", "real" or "pre-social" identity (p. 39-49). Schubert then identifies four paradigms in the reception and interpretation of Foucault and systematically develops them in conjunction with the positions of four different authors.

"Foucault is coherent": The first paradigm is developed through an interpretation of Paul Patton's defence of Foucault against Charles Taylor's critique of his works. Taylor had attacked Foucault for his negative conception of freedom, being solely based on the abstinence of power. Foucault's analysis of all penetrating and ever present power structures, Taylor argued, had left no room for freedom with his alleged negative conception of it. Patton defends Foucault by clarifying that, just like Taylor, Foucault actually has a positive or reflexive understanding of freedom, and that the main problem of Taylor's analysis is a missing differentiation of power and domination. Patton argues that Foucault always implied a concept of positive freedom and later clarified it, for example, in his text "Subject and Power". Patton understands freedom in the Foucauldian sense as the ability to criticise the effects of power. This opens up the possibility to reflect on one's own relatedness to unescapable power structures. By proving Foucault has a positive understanding of freedom, Patton resolves the problem posed by Taylor (p. 49-56). The problem of "power determination" is solved. However, simply changing the analytical definition of freedom to a positive one does not solve the problem of subjectivation (p. 56-61).

"Foucault corrects himself": is the second paradigm Schubert develops by a close reading of Thomas Lemke's work. Lemke shares the "rational core" (p. 72) of Taylors critique, thereby supporting the notion that Foucault's concept of discipline lacks an understanding of freedom. For Lemke, Foucault does develop a coherent strategy in his later works through the concept of "Government", which enables Foucault to include macro-phenomena of power, such as the state, laws, etc., into his analysis that were previously excluded by the focus on the "microphysics of power". Lemke understands those structures of power as always being present, influencing the subjects and their understandings of themselves, while not determining their actions (p. 89-111). According to Lemke, the "problem of power determination" is solved by Foucault himself in his essay "Subject and Power" through the differentiation of power and domination. Government is the strategic power structure creating subjects in the first place and only giving incentives to act in one way or another. Freedom is just the other side of the coin and is defined as the ability to act differently in any given situation against the incentives. Domination, however, determines the actions of subjects, therefore not influencing them with power but with coercion, something that has nothing to do with the question of freedom anymore. But government and power are not the only form of influencing/creating subjects. Lemke finds a solution for the problem of subjectivation in Foucault's works on ethics; mainly the II. and III. part of the "history of sexuality". By understanding technologies of the self as subjectivation, Lemke develops the idea of a resistant subjectivity that is always self-subjecting against the influence of the bigger power structures (p. 112-127). Just as with Patton, for Schubert this argument does not hold up. The Subject would need a moment of reflection,

free of power incentives and governmentality, to determine its *own* goals, views and needs. However, Lemke's theory of power and government precisely argues for the immanence of government, always being present and subjectivating, leaving neither time nor room without this influence on the subject. The problem of subjectivation is solved mechanically by the possibility of subjects to influence themselves via technologies of the self, although not substantially since the needs and goals of the subject would already be radically defined in accordance with the power structures governing it (p. 169-171). Schubert calls this an ontological "Kurzschluss" (p. 19), which is German for two terms: a logical fallacy and an electrical short-circuit.

"Foucault criticizes coherently": This is the third paradigm in the debate on Foucault's understanding of freedom. Martin Saar's concept of "genealogy as critique", as developed in his dissertation, tries to bypass Lemke's problem of the ontological "Kurzschluss" altogether. For Saar, Foucault's works are not trying to formulate a coherent theory of the subject or its constitution through power. Instead, Foucault's radical and "dramatic" (p. 177) descriptions of these concepts work as moments of critique, while using their affective character to evoke a moment of reflection in the subjects (p. 173-203). In this understanding, Foucault's works are not solving the socio-philosophical problem of absolute subjectivation by governmentality, discourses and normative power structures. They are themselves actively inciting an emotional response of the subjects to these structures, thereby creating possibilities for a critique of the power dependent processes of subjectivation. Where Patton and Lemke tried to find a socio-philosophical solution to a sociologist or social-theorist Foucault, Saar introduces a new perspective by solving the problem of power determination with an understanding of Foucault as a rhetorical and dramatic critic of the effects of power. The problem of subjectivation cannot be solved with his genealogical critique, because a subject can only be genealogically affected to incite critique if it is at least already partly free. Saar's work implies a fluidity of power and freedom and, as Schubert works out, necessarily opens up the theory since his solution does not apply to the field of social theory. "Either one pursues genealogical criticism, but then the social theoretical statements are subordinated to the mode of criticism, or one pursues the socio-theoretical problems independently. Then the mode of genealogy as a form of critique needs to be discarded in favor of classical political theory, which works with normative differentiations of political and social institutions. Thus, in retrospect, the problems that were worked out in Lemke's approach could be explained. He tries to do social theory while remaining faithful to Foucault's method of genealogy, especially its anti-normativity, and rejects scientifically based political criticism" (p. 248). Developing this political theory is the goal of the final two chapters.

"Foucault is not enough" is the forth analytical framework by Amy Allen, who states that the problem of freedom simply cannot be solved with Foucault's works alone as the three previous paradigms postulated. Her solution consists of a connection between Foucault's critique and analysis of power and Habermas' normative theory. For her, the Foucauldian problem of power determination stems from the lack of differentiation between power structures defined by repression and power structures defined by recognition.

While Foucault helps to understand the repressive side of power, he provides no insights into normativity and universality. Habermas can fill this gap, but he lacks the deep understanding of the influence that power has in the formation of subjectivity. A "contextualised universality" is the common ground between both thinkers, Allen makes out (p. 267-277). Critical subjectivity is a guarantee of freedom for her, but Schubert identifies two shortcomings of her work. Firstly, Allen understands freedom as a universal value of modern society that is universally understood and acknowledged. As Lemke's analysis of neoliberal governmentality shows, this erroneously skips the problem of subjectivation in the name of freedom itself (p. 277-283). Secondly, she sees the possibility of critical subjectivation in social movements, especially liberal ones like queer, feminist, and anti-capitalist struggles. Through this, she falls back behind the already established postfundamentalist understandings of normativity and the immanent uncertainty of any normative regime (p. 283-294). Therefore, a more specific concept of freedom is necessary. One that works as a moral institution – enabling subjects to criticise any form of subjectivation, regardless of normative implications and political project.

Freedom as critique is a dialectical and reflexive concept able to achieve this. While subjects are inherently formed by the power structures surrounding them, institutions can instil a critical potential in them. And since institutions are inherently formed by subjects, a reflexive relation between both sides can be the basis of a political theory. This concept of freedom is able to transcend both the anarchist tendencies of postfundamentalist theories and liberal institutionalism's naive normativity stemming from its missing understanding of subjectivation through power. "This means that the solution to the problem of subjectivation can be found in a postfundamentalist pluralist theory of democracy. In this context, the liberal distinction between moral-universal institutions and particular political-ethical projects is not abandoned, but is processed in a way that is critical of power and tradition" (p. 25).

Overall, Schubert's work achieves its initial goals. It recreates and systematizes the debate on freedom in Foucault's work, while also providing insights into the defensive positions of Patton, Lemke, Saar and Allen. It also develops a fourth, reflexive and dialectical concept of freedom as critique and sets up a multitude of possible connections to institutional political theory and radical democracy. If the problem of an ontological "Kurzschluss" and absolute subjectivation without any predetermined potential of reflection, and therefore the possibility of resistant subjectivity, is actually what Foucault believed in, can be called into question and perhaps even rejected with regard to "Subject and Power", as well as the positions of Lemke, Saar and Allen. But defending Foucault against even the most radical readings of his works is an important socio-philosophical exercise that opens up possibilities for postfundamentalist political theory in general. "Freiheit als Kritik" proposes an original argument that may be even more relevant to the bigger picture surrounding the postmodern notion of blurring the lines between subject and object than to Foucault himself. Everyone interested in Foucault, the contestation of modern universality by "postmodern" philosophy or contemporary political theory in general – preferably all of these topics – will benefit immensely from Schubert's insights. Especially his

meticulousness in the footnotes, which give a lot of context outside the dominant line of argumentation and offer valuable insights into the contemporary academic discourse and reception of Foucault's works.

Author info
Jonas Lang
Jonas.lang1998@web.de
MA student in Political Theory
(Department 03 Social Sciences)
Goethe-University Frankfurt
Germany

Jonas Lang studies Political Theory at the Goethe University in Frankfurt. His main interests are contemporary political theory and philosophy, mainly the works of Foucault and the second and third generation of the Frankfurt School.