

MICHEL FOUCAULT



SECURITY, TERRITORY, POPULATION

LECTURES AT THE COLLÈGE DE FRANCE
1977-1978

EDITED BY MICHEL SENELLART

GENERAL EDITORS: FRANÇOIS EWALD & ALESSANDRO FONTANA

ENGLISH SERIES EDITOR: ARNOLD I. DAVIDSON

TRANSLATED BY GRAHAM BURCHELL

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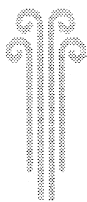
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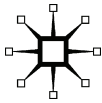
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SECURITY, TERRITORY, POPULATION

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FOREWORD

MICHEL FOUCAULT TAUGHT AT the Collège de France from January 1971 until his death in June 1984 (with the exception of 1977 when he took a sabbatical year). The title of his chair was “The History of Systems of Thought.”

On the proposal of Jules Vuillemin, the chair was created on 30 November 1969 by the general assembly of the professors of the Collège de France and replaced that of “The History of Philosophical Thought” held by Jean Hyppolite until his death. The same assembly elected Michel Foucault to the new chair on 12 April 1970.¹ He was 43 years old.

Michel Foucault’s inaugural lecture was delivered on 2 December 1970.² Teaching at the Collège de France is governed by particular rules. Professors must provide 26 hours of teaching a year (with the possibility of a maximum of half this total being given in the form of seminars³). Each year they must present their original research and this obliges them to change the content of their teaching for each course. Courses and seminars are completely open; no enrolment or qualification is required and the professors do not award any qualifications.⁴ In the terminology of the Collège de France, the professors do not have students but only auditors.

Michel Foucault’s courses were held every Wednesday from January to March. The huge audience made up of students, teachers, researchers and the curious, including many who came from outside France, required two amphitheatres of the Collège de France. Foucault often complained about the distance between himself and his “public” and of how few exchanges the course made possible.⁵ He would have liked a seminar in which real collective work could take place and made a number of attempts to bring

this about. In the final years he devoted a long period to answering his auditors' questions at the end of each course.

This is how Gérard Petitjean, a journalist from *Le Nouvel Observateur*, described the atmosphere at Foucault's lectures in 1975:

When Foucault enters the amphitheater, brisk and dynamic like someone who plunges into the water, he steps over bodies to reach his chair, pushes away the cassette recorders so he can put down his papers, removes his jacket, lights a lamp and sets off at full speed. His voice is strong and effective, amplified by loudspeakers that are the only concession to modernism in a hall that is barely lit by light spread from stucco bowls. The hall has three hundred places and there are five hundred people packed together, filling the smallest free space . . . There is no oratorical effect. It is clear and terribly effective. There is absolutely no concession to improvisation. Foucault has twelve hours each year to explain in a public course the direction taken by his research in the year just ended. So everything is concentrated and he fills the margins like correspondents who have too much to say for the space available to them. At 19.15 Foucault stops. The students rush towards his desk; not to speak to him, but to stop their cassette recorders. There are no questions. In the pushing and shoving Foucault is alone. Foucault remarks: "It should be possible to discuss what I have put forward. Sometimes, when it has not been a good lecture, it would need very little, just one question, to put everything straight. However, this question never comes. The group effect in France makes any genuine discussion impossible. And as there is no feedback, the course is theatricalized. My relationship with the people there is like that of an actor or an acrobat. And when I have finished speaking, a sensation of total solitude . . ." ⁶

Foucault approached his teaching as a researcher: explorations for a future book as well as the opening up of fields of problematization were formulated as an invitation to possible future researchers. This is why the courses at the Collège de France do not duplicate the published books. They are not sketches for the books even though both books and

courses share certain themes. They have their own status. They arise from a specific discursive regime within the set of Foucault's "philosophical activities." In particular they set out the program for a genealogy of knowledge/power relations, which are the terms in which he thinks of his work from the beginning of the 1970s, as opposed to the program of an archeology of discursive formations that previously orientated his work.⁷

The courses also performed a role in contemporary reality. Those who followed his courses were not only held in thrall by the narrative that unfolded week by week and seduced by the rigorous exposition, they also found a perspective on contemporary reality. Michel Foucault's art consisted in using history to cut diagonally through contemporary reality. He could speak of Nietzsche or Aristotle, of expert psychiatric opinion or the Christian pastoral, but those who attended his lectures always took from what he said a perspective on the present and contemporary events. Foucault's specific strength in his courses was the subtle interplay between learned erudition, personal commitment, and work on the event.



With their development and refinement in the 1970s, Foucault's desk was quickly invaded by cassette recorders. The courses—and some seminars—have thus been preserved.

This edition is based on the words delivered in public by Foucault. It gives a transcription of these words that is as literal as possible.⁸ We would have liked to present it as such. However, the transition from an oral to a written presentation calls for editorial intervention: at the very least it requires the introduction of punctuation and division into paragraphs. Our principle has been always to remain as close as possible to the course actually delivered.

Summaries and repetitions have been removed whenever it seemed to be absolutely necessary. Interrupted sentences have been restored and faulty constructions corrected. Suspension points indicate that the recording is inaudible. When a sentence is obscure there is a conjectural integration or an addition between square brackets. An asterisk directing the reader to the bottom of the page indicates a significant

divergence between the notes used by Foucault and the words actually uttered. Quotations have been checked and references to the texts used are indicated. The critical apparatus is limited to the elucidation of obscure points, the explanation of some allusions, and the clarification of critical points. To make the lectures easier to read, each lecture is preceded by a brief summary that indicates its principal articulations.

The text of the course is followed by the summary published by the *Annuaire du Collège de France*. Foucault usually wrote these in June, some time after the end of the course. It was an opportunity for him to pick out retrospectively the intention and objectives of the course. It constitutes the best introduction to the course.

Each volume ends with a “context” for which the course editors are responsible. It seeks to provide the reader with elements of the biographical, ideological, and political context, situating the course within the published work and providing indications concerning its place within the corpus used in order to facilitate understanding and to avoid misinterpretations that might arise from a neglect of the circumstances in which each course was developed and delivered.

Security, Territory, Population, the course delivered in 1978, is edited by Michel Senellart.



A new aspect of Michel Foucault’s “œuvre” is published with this edition of the Collège de France courses.

Strictly speaking it is not a matter of unpublished work, since this edition reproduces words uttered publicly by Foucault, excluding the often highly developed written material he used to support his lectures. Daniel Defert possesses Michel Foucault’s notes and he is to be warmly thanked for allowing the editors to consult them.

This edition of the Collège de France courses was authorized by Michel Foucault’s heirs who wanted to be able to satisfy the strong demand for their publication, in France as elsewhere, and to do this under indisputably responsible conditions. The editors have tried to be equal to the degree of confidence placed in them.

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1. Michel Foucault concluded a short document drawn up in support of his candidacy with these words: "We should undertake the history of systems of thought." "Titres et travaux" in *Dits et Écrits, 1954-1988*, four volumes, eds. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 1994) vol. 1, p. 846; English translation by Robert Hurley, "Candidacy Presentation: Collège de France" in *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984, vol. 1: Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) p. 9.
 2. It was published by Gallimard in May 1971 with the title *L'Ordre du discours* (Paris). English translation by Rupert Swyer, "The Order of Discourse," appendix to M. Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1972).
 3. This was Foucault's practice until the start of the 1980s.
 4. Within the framework of the Collège de France.
 5. In 1976, in the vain hope of reducing the size of the audience, Michel Foucault changed the time of his course from 17.45 to 9.00. See the beginning of the first lecture (7 January 1976) of "*Il faut défendre la société.*" *Cours au Collège de France, 1976* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 1997); English translation by David Macey, "*Society Must be Defended.*" *Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 2003).
 6. Gérard Petitjean, "Les Grands Prêtres de l'université française," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 7 April 1975.
 7. See especially, "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire" in *Dits et Écrits*, vol. 2, p. 137. English translation by Donald F. Brouchard and Sherry Simon, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984, vol. 2: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998) pp. 369-392.
 8. We have made use of the recordings made by Gilbert Burlet and Jacques Lagrange in particular. These are deposited in the Collège de France and the Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine.



INTRODUCTION*

IN THE YEARS BETWEEN December, 1976 and May, 1984 Michel Foucault published no new books. Yet far from being a period of silence, Foucault concentrated an extraordinary amount of intellectual activity in essays, lectures, interviews, and especially in his courses at the Collège de France. Without access to these courses, it was extremely difficult to understand Foucault's reorientation from an analysis of the strategies and tactics of power immanent in the modern discourse on sexuality (1976) to an analysis of the ancient forms and modalities of relation to oneself by which one constituted oneself as a moral subject of sexual conduct (1984). In short, Foucault's passage from the political to the ethical dimension of sexuality seemed sudden and inexplicable. Moreover, it was clear from his published essays and interviews that this displacement of focus had consequences far beyond the specific domain of the history of sexuality.

Security, Territory, Population contains a conceptual hinge, a key concept, that allows us to link together the political and ethical axes of Foucault's thought. But this essential moment has been rather undervalued due to the fact that the main legacy of this course has been to give rise to so-called "governmentality studies." There is absolutely no doubt that the practices of governmentality and the historically precedent practices of pastoral power studied by Foucault in this course open up a new and significant field of inquiry, both within Foucault's own work and more generally. Yet one should not overlook the fact that pastoral

* This introduction is dedicated to my students at the University of Pisa who read *Security, Territory, Population* with me in Spring, 2007.

power and governmentality are historically and philosophically contiguous in that they take as the object of their techniques and practices the *conduct* of human beings. If the “government of men” is understood as an activity that undertakes to conduct individuals, “pastoral power” concentrates this activity in the regime of religious institutions, while governmentality locates it in the direction of political institutions. As Foucault remarks,

. . . from the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century, generally speaking I think that inasmuch as many pastoral functions were taken up in the exercise of governmentality, and inasmuch as government also begins to want to take responsibility for people’s conduct, to conduct people, then from then on we see revolts of conduct arising less from the religious institution and much more from political institutions.¹

Indeed, it is Foucault’s analysis of the notions of conduct and counter-conduct in his lecture of 1 March 1978 that seems to me to constitute one of the richest and most brilliant moments in the entire course. Beginning from the Greek expression *oikonomia psuchōn* and the Latin expression *regimen animarum*, Foucault proposes the concept of *conduct* as the most adequate translation of these expressions, taking philosophical advantage of the way in which “conduct” can refer to two things:

Conduct is the activity of conducting (*conduire*), of conduction (*la conduction*) if you like, but it is equally the way in which one conducts oneself (*se conduit*), lets oneself be conducted (*se laisse conduire*), and finally, in which one behaves (*se comporter*) under the influence of a conduct as the action of conducting or of conduction (*conduction*).²

One already sees here the double dimension of conduct, namely the activity of conducting an individual, conduction as a relation between individuals, and the way in which an individual conducts himself or is conducted, his conduct or behavior in the narrower sense of the term. Yet Foucault moves quickly from the quite specific form of power that

takes as its object the conduct of individuals to the correlative counter-movements that he initially designates as specific revolts of conduct.

Just as there have been forms of resistance to power as the exercise of political sovereignty and just as there have been other equally intentional [*voulues*, that is “willed”] forms of resistance or refusal that were directed at power in the form of economic exploitation, have there not been forms of resistance to power as conducting?³

These forms of resistance also have a double dimension. They are movements characterized by wanting to be conducted differently, whose objective is a different type of conduction, and that also attempt to indicate an area in which each individual can conduct himself, the domain of one's own conduct or behavior.⁴

In the first volume of his history of sexuality *La Volonté de savoir* (*The Will to Know*), writing from a directly political point of view, Foucault had already insisted that resistance is not in a position of exteriority with respect to power, and that points of resistance do not answer to a set of principles heterogenous to relations of power.⁵ Resistance is “coextensive and absolutely contemporaneous” to power; resistances exist within the strategic field of relations of power and relations of power themselves only exist relative to a multiplicity of points of resistance.⁶ In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault also emphasizes the non-exteriority, the immanent relation, of conduct and counter-conduct. The fundamental elements of the counter-conduct analyzed by Foucault are not absolutely external to the conduct imposed by Christian pastoral power. Conduct and counter-conduct share a series of elements that can be utilized and re-utilized, re-implanted, re-inserted, taken up in the direction of reinforcing a certain mode of conduct or of creating and re-creating a type of counter-conduct:

... the struggle was not conducted in the form of absolute exteriority, but rather in the form of the permanent use of tactical elements that are pertinent in the anti-pastoral struggle to the very extent that they are part, even in a marginal way, of the general horizon of Christianity.⁷

Moreover, it is noteworthy that in the case of power/resistance and in that of conduct/counter-conduct, Foucault stresses that the tactical immanence of both resistance and counter-conduct to their respective fields of action should not lead one to conclude that they are simply a passive underside, a merely negative or reactive phenomenon, a kind of disappointing after-effect.⁸ In each case Foucault employs the same kind of almost technical expression: resistance is not “*la marque en creux*” of power, counter-conducts are not “*les phénomènes en creux*” of the pastorate.⁹ As he says in the interview “Non au sexe roi”, if resistance were nothing more than the reverse image of power, it would not resist; in order to resist one must activate something “as inventive, as mobile, as productive” as power itself.¹⁰ Foucault similarly underlines the productivity of counter-conduct which goes beyond the purely negative act of disobedience.¹¹ Finally, as a counterpart to the celebrated motto “where there is power, there is resistance,” one could invoke Foucault’s remark about the “immediate and founding correlation between conduct and counter-conduct,” a correlation that is not only historical but also conceptual.¹²

In light of all of these parallels between resistance and counter-conduct, what does the creation of the couple conduct/counter-conduct in 1978 add to Foucault’s previous conceptualization? On the one hand, the notion of counter-conduct adds an explicitly ethical component to the notion of resistance; on the other hand, this notion allows one to move easily between the ethical and the political, letting us see their many points of contact and intersection. Foucault’s three initial examples—the appearance of desertion-insubordination, the development of secret societies, and the rise of medical dissent—bring to light both of these aspects of the notion of conduct/counter-conduct. Furthermore, Foucault’s problem of vocabulary, his attempt to find a specific word to designate the resistances, refusals, revolts against being conducted in a certain way, show how careful he was in wanting to find a concept that neglected neither the ethical nor the political dimensions and that made it possible to recognize their nexus. After rejecting the notions of “revolt,” “disobedience,” “insubordination,” “dissidence,” and “misconduct,” for reasons ranging from their being notions that are either too strong, too weak, too localized, too passive, or too substance-like,

Foucault proposes the expression “counter-conduct”—“counter-conduct in the sense of struggle against the procedures implemented for conducting others”—and notes that anti-pastoral counter-conduct can be found at a doctrinal level, in the form of individual behavior, and in strongly organized groups.¹³

When Foucault returns to the notion of conduct in his essay “Le sujet et le pouvoir,” he emphasizes that this notion is perhaps “one of those that best allows us to grasp what is specific to relations of power,” immediately placing “conduct” in a political field.¹⁴ As in 1978, he observes that “conduct is both the act of ‘directing’ [*mener*] others (according to more or less strict mechanisms of coercion) and the way of behaving [*se comporter*] in a more or less open field of possibilities”, and then adds that the exercise of power consists in “‘conducting conduct’ [*conduire des conduites*]’.”¹⁵ Next, Foucault draws a direct connection between power and government, again distinguishing government from political and economic subjection, and highlighting the fact that to govern an individual or a group is “to act on the possibilities of action of other individuals,” is a “mode of action on the actions of others.”¹⁶ Thus, according to Foucault, “to govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of actions of others.”¹⁷ Although much less conceptually detailed in *La Volonté de savoir*, Foucault’s fundamental idea of studying power as a multiplicity of force relations has many of the same consequences as his later articulation of the notion of conduct. These force relations, unequal but also local and unstable, give rise to states of power, and modifications of these same relations transform those situations of power.¹⁸ A force is not a metaphysical substance or abstraction, but is always given in a particular relation; a force can be identified as any factor in a relation that affects the elements of the relation; *anything* that influences the actions of individuals in a relation, that has an effect on their actions, is in this sense a force. And thus force relations structure the possible field of actions of individuals. Resistance and counter-conduct modify these force relations, counter the locally stabilized organizations of power, and thereby affect, in a new way, the possibilities of action of others. A force relation can be immanent in a physical environment, in a social configuration, in a pattern of behavior, in a bodily gesture, in a certain attitude, in a way of life. All of these features

can structure the field of action of individuals, and thus power and resistance “come from everywhere.”¹⁹

Foucault’s analysis of the different forms of counter-conduct found in a number of anti-pastoral communities in the Middle Ages brings clearly to the forefront the political dimension of counter-conduct. As he says in concluding his discussion, “in some of these communities there was a counter-society aspect, a carnival aspect, overturning social relations and hierarchy.”²⁰ But even apparently personal or individual forms of counter-conduct such as the return to Scripture or the adherence to a certain set of eschatological beliefs have a political dimension, that is, modify force relations between individuals, acting on the possibilities of action. Reading Scripture as “a spiritual act that puts the faithful in the presence of God’s word and which consequently finds its law and guarantee in this inner illumination” is a counter-conduct that is “used against and to short-circuit, as it were, the pastorate.”²¹ And eschatological beliefs that imply that the faithful “will no longer need a shepherd” are also a way of “disqualifying the pastor’s role,” a counter-conduct with profound political effects.²²

The ethical dimension of counter-conduct is clearly present when Foucault mentions the *devotio moderna*, an anti-pastoral struggle expressed and manifested in “a whole new attitude, religious comportment, way of doing things and being, and a whole new way of relating to God, obligations, morality, as well as to civil life.”²³ Foucault’s detailed discussion of asceticism as a form of counter-conduct—beginning from the idea that “asceticism is an exercise of self on self; it is a sort of close combat of the individual with himself in which the authority, presence, and gaze of someone else is, if not impossible, at least unnecessary”—cannot help but bring to mind his late idea of ethics as a relation to oneself, the constitution of oneself as a moral subject, and the related notions of “modes of subjectivation” and “practices of the self.”²⁴ When Foucault introduces the idea of ethics as the self’s relation to itself, as distinct from a moral code and the actual behavior of individuals with respect to this code, he does so by claiming that there are “different ways of ‘conducting oneself’ [*se conduire*] morally,” emphasizing this other aspect of morality, namely “the way in which one should ‘conduct oneself’ [*se conduire*].”²⁵ What then follows is a much more precise and unambiguous description,

from the ethical point of view, of the second sense of “conduct” mentioned in *Security, Territory, Population*. And Foucault’s conclusion links together the aspects of conduct as moral action and as moral self-constitution:

There is no specific moral action that does not refer to the unity of a moral conduct; no moral conduct that does not call for the constitution of oneself as a moral subject; and no constitution of the moral subject without “modes of subjectivation” and without an “ascetics” or “practices of the self” that support them [the modes of subjectivation].²⁶

In the first lecture of *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, when Foucault takes up the notion of the “care of the self” (*epimeleia heauton*), he identifies three components of this care: a general attitude with respect to oneself, to others, and to the world; a form of attention turned towards oneself; a series of practices or techniques of the self.²⁷ Attitude, attention, and practices of the self are all features of the ethical sense of conduct.

In “Le sujet et le pouvoir” Foucault stresses that power, understood as the government of men, includes the element of freedom:

Power is only exercised on “free subjects” and only insofar as they are “free”—understanding by this claim individual or collective subjects faced with a field of possibility in which several conducts, several reactions, and various modes of behavior can take place.²⁸

This quotation underscores Foucault’s assertion that power never exhaustively determines a subject’s possibilities, and it specifies the relevant field of possibility as that of conduct or behavior, taking the latter in the widest sense of the term. If we recall Foucault’s remark that “ethics is the deliberative form that freedom takes,” the “deliberative practice of freedom,” we can also see that for Foucault ethics is in effect a kind of freedom of conduct.²⁹ In a series of remarkable formulas concerning freedom, Foucault speaks of the “insubordination of freedom,” the “rebelliousness of the will and the intransitivity of freedom,” the

“art of voluntary inservitude” and of “deliberative indocility.”³⁰ All of these phrases belong to the semantic field of counter-conduct and make evident the double ethical and political scope of this counter-conduct.

The discussion of asceticism in *Security, Territory, Population* is a perfect example of the art of voluntary intractability, the exercise of freedom as a form of counter-conduct. According to Foucault’s analysis, Christianity is not an ascetic religion, since the organization of pastoral power with its requirement of permanent obedience and renunciation of one’s individual will is incompatible with the structure and practice of asceticism:

... whenever and wherever pastoral counter-conducts develop in the Middle Ages, asceticism was one of their points of support and instruments against the pastorate . . . Insofar as the pastorate characterizes its structures of power, Christianity is fundamentally anti-ascetic, and asceticism is rather a sort of tactical element, an element of reversal by which certain themes of Christian theology or religious experience are utilized against these structures of power.³¹

The challenge represented by the ascetic exercise of the self on the self, which becomes a kind of egoistic self-mastery, provokes a counter-conduct to pastoral obedience, and gives rise to a type of *apatheia* that is much closer to the Greek *apatheia* which guarantees the mastery of oneself than to the Christian *apatheia*, part of pastoral power, which requires the continual renunciation of a will that is turned towards oneself.³² Finally, mysticism is a form of counter-conduct that has the distinction of being an experience that “by definition escapes pastoral power.”³³ Eluding pastoral examination, confession, and teaching, mystical experience short-circuits the pastoral hierarchy:

In the pastorate, the pastor’s direction of the individual’s soul was necessary, and no communication between the soul and God could take place that was not either ruled out or controlled by the pastor.³⁴

The direct, immediate communication between the soul and God in mysticism thus marks the distance separating mysticism from the pastorate.

When in the discussion following his lecture “Qu’est-ce que la critique? [Critique et Aukflärung],” given less than two months after the conclusion of *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault designates mysticism as one of the first major revolts of conduct in the West, he underlines the conjunction of the ethical and the political in the history of mysticism: “mysticism as individual experience and institutional and political struggle are absolutely united, and in any case constantly referred to one another.”³⁵ Spiritual movements intertwined with popular struggle are one historically prominent source of counter-conduct.

It is astonishing, and of profound significance, that the autonomous sphere of conduct has been more or less invisible in the history of modern (as opposed to ancient) moral and political philosophy. The “juridification” of moral and political experience has meant that the role of conduct has typically been subordinated to that of the law, thus losing its specificity and its particular force.³⁶ Perhaps the major exception to this absence of attention to the sphere of conduct can be found in the third chapter of John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*, where the political and moral importance of conduct is central.³⁷ As Mill says,

No one’s idea of excellence in conduct is that people should do absolutely nothing but copy one another. No one would assert that people ought not to put into their mode of life, and into the conduct of their concerns, any impress whatever of their own judgment, or of their own individual character.³⁸

But as Mill goes on to observe, we are governed by custom, “the traditions or customs of other people are the rule of conduct,” and we do not choose our plan of life or determine our own conduct.³⁹

I do not mean that they [individuals] chose what is customary, in preference to what suits their own inclination. It does not occur to them to have any inclination, except for what is customary. Thus the mind itself is bowed to the yoke: even in what people do for pleasure, conformity is the first thing thought of; they like in crowds; they exercise choice only among things commonly done: peculiarity of taste, eccentricity of conduct, are shunned equally with crimes . . .⁴⁰

“Eccentricity of conduct” is Mill’s name for counter-conduct, and he strikingly opposes “originality in thought and action” to the “despotism of custom.”⁴¹ Indeed, *On Liberty* contains moments of lyrical encomium to counter-conduct:

In this age the mere example of non-conformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service. Precisely because the tyranny of opinion is such as to make eccentricity a reproach, it is desirable, in order to break through that tyranny, that people should be eccentric . . . That so few now dare to be eccentric, marks the chief danger of the time.⁴²

And Mill recognizes that uniformity of conduct weakens the possibility of resistance:

The demand that all other people shall resemble ourselves, grows by what it feeds on. If resistance waits till life is reduced *nearly* to one uniform type, all deviations from that type will come to be considered impious, immoral, even monstrous and contrary to nature. Mankind speedily become unable to conceive diversity, when they have been for some time unaccustomed to see it.⁴³

The counter-conduct required by putting into practice one’s “own mode of laying out his existence” is the only domain of force consonant with the political principle of liberty and the politics of individual differences.⁴⁴ However much Mill’s conclusions may differ from Foucault’s, *On Liberty* has the merit of both isolating the conceptual specificity of conduct and of identifying its singular ethical-political value.

Foucault’s appreciation of the feminist and gay movements can best be understood from the point of view of the notion of conduct/counter-conduct. Already in *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault connects one historically important form of counter-conduct to the status of women: “these revolts of conduct are often linked up with the problem of women and their status in society, in civil society or in religious society.”⁴⁵ And he gives as examples the movement of Rhenish *Nonnenmystik*, the groups formed around women prophets in the Middle Ages, and

various Spanish and French groups of spiritual direction in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Foucault's interest in the modern history of relations among women revolves around the question of female friendship, how it develops, what kind of conduct it involves, how women were bound to one another through a certain type of affect, of affection. He was especially attentive to the "response [of women], often innovative and creative, to a status that was imposed upon them."⁴⁶ And he was well aware that the creative counter-conduct of women was often the target of the harshest criticism against them, as if the civil debate around juridical issues could not but degenerate when the topic turned to the behavior of women. He would certainly have shared the acute perception of Mill: "... the man, and still more the woman, who can be accused either of doing 'what nobody does', or of not doing 'what everybody does', is the subject of as much depreciatory remark as if he or she had committed some grave moral delinquency."⁴⁷

Foucault's famous remark that what makes homosexuality "disturbing" is the "homosexual mode of life much more than the sexual act itself" is directly related to the way in which this mode of life is a center of counter-conduct.⁴⁸ Foucault attaches great significance to that aspect of the gay movement which puts into play "relations in the absence of codes or established lines of conduct," "affective intensities," "forms that change."⁴⁹ Foucault describes these relations with the same expression, *court-circuit*, that he had used to describe religious counter-conduct: "these relations create a short-circuit, and introduce love where there should be law, rule, habit."⁵⁰ Gay counter-conduct, a new mode of life, gay culture in the widest sense of the term, is what fascinated Foucault:

... a culture that invents modalities of relations, modes of existence, types of values, forms of exchange between individuals that are really new, that are not homogenous to nor superimposable on general cultural forms. If this is possible, then gay culture will not be simply a choice of homosexuals for homosexuals. It will create relations that are, up to a certain point, transposable to heterosexuals. One has to overturn things a bit, and rather than say what one said at a certain moment—"Let us try to reintroduce

homosexuality into the general normality of social relations”—let us say the opposite: “No. Let it [homosexuality] escape as far as possible from the type of relations that are proposed to us in our society, and let us try to create in the empty space in which we find ourselves new relational possibilities.”⁵¹

This new space of, so to speak, gay counter-conduct will create the possibility for others to “enrich their life by modifying their own scheme of relations,” with the effect that “unforeseen lines of force will be formed.”⁵²

This space of counter-conduct cannot be reduced to the juridical sphere, and that is why Foucault maintained that one should consider “the battle for gay rights as an episode that cannot represent the final stage” of the struggle.⁵³ The real effects (*effets réels*) of the battle for rights should be looked for much more in “attitudes, [in] schemes of behavior, than [in] legal formulations,” and thus the attempt to create a new mode of life is much more pertinent than the question of individual rights.⁵⁴ The rights that derive from marital and family relations are a way of stabilizing, rendering stationary, certain forms of conduct; as Foucault says, extending these rights to other persons is but a first step, since “if one asks people to reproduce marriage bonds in order for their personal relation to be recognized, the progress realized is slight.”⁵⁵ Our legal, social, institutional world is one in which the only relations possible are “extremely few, extremely schematized, extremely poor.”⁵⁶ Given that “a rich relational world would be extremely complicated to manage,” the institutional framework of our society has attempted to narrow the possibility of relations, and, following Foucault’s diagnosis, we have “to fight against the impoverishment of the relational fabric” of our social world.⁵⁷ We have all heard the “progressive” sentiments of those liberals who announce that they are not opposed to gay marriage as long “as they behave like married couples.” It is precisely the threat of counter-conduct, and not the legal status, that is most disruptive and unsettling.

This is certainly one reason why Foucault announced that after studying the history of sexuality, he wanted to understand the history of friendships—friendships that for centuries allowed one to live “very

intense affective relations” and that also had “economic and social implications.”⁵⁸ The kinds of counter-conduct made possible by these friendships both changed the force relations between individuals and modified one’s relation to oneself. One conducts oneself in another way with friends, fabricating new ethical and political possibilities. Beginning in the sixteenth century, as we find texts that criticize (especially male) friendships as “something dangerous,” this type of friendship begins to disappear.⁵⁹ And Foucault’s suggestion was that this space of dangerous friendship came to be occupied by the problem of homosexuality, of sexual relationships between men: “the disappearance of friendship as a social relation and the fact that homosexuality was declared a social, political, and medical problem are part of the same process.”⁶⁰ The constitution of homosexuality as a separate medical and psychiatric problem was much more effective as a technique of control than the attempt to regulate friendship. Even today, behind every intense friendship lurks the shadow of sex, so that we no longer see the striking perturbations of friendship. The counter-conduct of friendship has become pathologized—the unruliness of friendship is but a form of abnormality.

What Foucault once named the “struggles against subjection” and “for a new subjectivity” could also be described as a struggle against a certain type of conduction and for another form of conduct.⁶¹ The Kantian question of “who we are at this precise moment of history” is inseparable from this question of our conduct.⁶² To become other than what we are requires an ethics and politics of counter-conduct. Foucault arrived at the conclusion that,

Probably the principal objective today is not to discover but to refuse what we are . . . We have to promote new forms of subjectivity while refusing the type of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries.⁶³

This double refusal and promotion is the domain of counter-conduct, a sphere of revolt that incites a process of productivity.⁶⁴ Moreover, Foucault explicitly links this domain to his definition of the “critical attitude,” a political and moral attitude, a manner of thinking, that is a