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Group for Social Engagement Studies
Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade
December 5–7 2014, Belgrade

Engaging Foucault
International Scientific Conference

Conference organizers:

GROUP FOR SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT STUDIES

(Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade)

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June 25, 2014 marks the 30th anniversary of the passing of Michel Foucault. During his lifetime, Foucault was, in his own words, described as an anarchist and a leftist; a covert Marxist and an explicit or covert anti-Marxist; a nihilist, a technocrat in the service of Gaullism and a neoliberal. In addition, Foucault could also be described as an intellectual who cannot be aligned or positioned within the existing matrices of thought and action, especially when these are ideologically defined. How then should one understand the societal and political implications of Foucault's work? These dilemmas remain very much unresolved today.

The conference "Engaging Foucault" will gather international and regional theorists who have engaged with Foucault's work, either endorsing or disputing the main premises of his work. The intended aim of the conference is to open up space for a general discussion on the actuality of Foucault's work. Bearing in mind the specific political economy of truth and power, on which Foucault wrote extensively, we intend to examine the changes in scientific and theoretical discourses, as well as the institutions that produce these changes. In what ways is this production economically and politically initiated, expanded and consumed? What is the form of control and dissemination of certain regimes of truth through reforms and old and new ideological struggles around them?

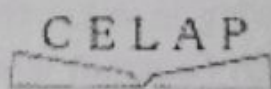
Taking as our point of departure Foucault's statement that the role of the intellectual is not merely to criticize ideological contents supposedly linked to science, or furnish him/herself with the most appropriate ideology, we want to incite a debate on the possibilities of "constituting a new politics of truth", advocated by Foucault. Thus, central to this conference would be the investigation into the possibilities for (re-)articulating public engagement today: how to change political, economic, social and institutional regimes of production of truths? The debate should, in that sense, critically examine the meanings of emancipatory practices, social movements, contemporary forms of innovative action and engaged theory through the Foucauldian optic of bio-politics and 'thanato-politics', sexuality and (non)identity, resistance, 'counter-power', 'techniques of the self' and the genealogies of societally engaged practices (e.g. insurrectionary knowledge and action). In light of the uprisings that have spread in recent years across the globe and are characterized by a variety of causes and consequences, this conference should critically reflect on the meaning of 'engagement' – what is public engagement, who can be called 'engaged' and in what sense, what are the effects of engaged thought and action – in the spirit of Foucault's cues.

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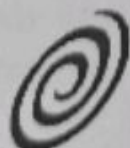


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*Foucault and Historically Conditioned Episteme:
Possibilities for an Epistemological Project*

Foucault insists that his philosophical background is Kantian. What that means is that Foucault wants, just as Kant does, to examine limits and boundaries of reason. However, unlike Kant, he doesn't use methods of transcendental philosophy. As Foucault claims, his methods are rather guided by Nietzschean method of genealogy, i.e. investigation of historical conditions for concrete bounds of rationality.

In this work I will try to examine epistemological significance of these methods. Namely, taking into account that Foucault examines the limits created by historically conditioned episteme, the question is how should epistemology work on its own boundaries?

Tetz Hakoda, Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University

Foucault's Counter-Theory of Sovereignty

This presentation aims to reintroduce the question of sovereignty into the Foucauldian perspective of government by focusing on the notion of war. His pastoral power theory is often said to show a lack of study on sovereignty. Certainly, he rejects the essentialist view of power, but he has a great interest in how the sovereignty or the right to government has been contested in modern societies. The extensive discussion of the relationship between history and war in *Society Must Be Defended* shows this. Foucault claimed that ways of historicizing war directly concern the political legitimacy. While war serves as a fiction for an imaginary contract of domination, it offers an opportunity to political confrontation by invoking the "forgotten" (not necessarily real) past memory and present reality of oppression. Besides, it has been another name for social defense since territorial states "internalized" the war: it always wages "civil war" against inner "dangerous" population. War is a grid of intelligibility for the question of sovereignty, somewhat anticipating the scheme of government of self and others. As the terminology changed at the end of 1970s, Foucault started to deal with that question in terms of

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