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CHAPTER 32

MICHEL FOUCAULT (1926–1984)

RICHARD WEISKOPF AND HUGH WILLMOTT

> Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write.
>
> (Foucault, 1989: 17)

32.1 INTRODUCTION

FROM THE opening quotation, it is evident that Foucault is disinclined to 'remain the same'. He is resistant to forces that impose stasis, consistency, and homogeneity and so invites us to understand his thinking as 'work in process'. We, as authors of this chapter, risk contributing to a venture in which we exercise the 'morality of the bureaucrat' inspecting Foucault's papers to determine 'who he is', how his approach is to be categorized, or whether he did or didn't contribute to a body of knowledge identified as 'process' or 'process philosophy'. Conscious of this danger, we will endeavour to exercise our freedom in ways that minimize engagement of a bureaucratic form of 'morality'. More positively, we hope to provoke, and point to, ways of enriching how thinking ascribed to 'Foucault' is received and appreciated. Foucault, we suggest, was committed to a critical stance that led him repeatedly to challenge established 'truths', including his own thinking. It has also served to frustrate, if rarely elude, those ('bureaucrats') who endeavour to confine 'Foucault' within, and so make him accountable for, positions that he either never occupied or abandoned prior to receiving their attentions.

It is Foucault's 'systematic scepticism toward all anthropological universals' (Foucault, 2003f: 3) and his illumination of the processes and practices through which the subject and object are formed and transformed historically, that make his work significant in

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the context of processual understandings of organization and organizing. His thinking is pertinent, and offers instruction, when reflecting upon the contingency of our knowledge of organizations and of organizing. It is also highly relevant for scrutinizing our status as 'subjects' of organizing—both in the sense of being *subjected* to organizing forces that form and shape us and as subjects who are (potentially) able to engage in a work of transformation. Foucault's thinking attends to the social world, including the world of organization, as fluid and dynamic, as a no-thing that is continuously 'coming into being'. Phenomena that come to our attention—such as 'the organization' and 'the subject'—are not, for Foucault, manifestations of a (unchanging) substance that the human sciences are able to reveal. Rather, from a Foucauldian standpoint, 'the subject' and 'the organization' are 'forms' constituted through discourses and practices and are always specific to particular social and historical contexts. 'It [the subject] is a form, and this form is not primarily or always identical to itself' (Foucault, 1997: 290). At any point in history, the subject—the same applies to the organization—is already established and shaped, but *only* exists in the 'embryonic form of its future becoming' (O'Leary, 2002: 120). When addressed in this way, 'organization' is not a thing but, rather, the name for a multiplicity of practices by which we invent and reinvent ourselves by *giving form* to our relations to ourselves as well as to others.

We begin by expanding upon 'Foucault' as a placeholder for a particular style, or styles, of thinking that contributes to an appreciation of process. We then turn to Foucault's understanding of discourse, history, and practices where we focus upon his challenge to a representationalist view of the world and his distinctive view of the dynamics of history. In turn, this provides a basis for some selective reflections on the engagement of Foucault's thinking within the field of organization studies and some conclusions on the general vision it opens up.

32.2 Foucault?

Who is, or was, Foucault? Not one, but many. He has been variously identified/named as a 'philosopher', 'structuralist', 'post-structuralist', 'political activist', 'gay rights activist', 'pseudo-marxist', 'krypto-normativist', 'happy positivist', 'anti-modernist', and 'postmodernist'. Each label orders and confines the figure 'Foucault' within a particular system of meanings; each identity invites us to position him within an associated normative frame and perceive and evaluate his work accordingly. When considering Foucault's work, including its relation to process philosophy, it is therefore prudent to heed his cautions about presenting 'simplistic appropriation(s) of others for the purpose of communication' (Foucault, 1986a: 9).

In the context of this *Handbook*, the designation 'philosopher'—the first of the identities ascribed to Foucault a moment ago—is salient, but problematic. On the one hand, there is a strong case for identifying Foucault as one of the most influential philosophers of our times, so making his inclusion in this volume unexceptional or even 'essential'.

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On the other hand, his work is not easily subsumed or catalogued under 'philosophy'. It is notable that social scientists, and even students of business and management, have been more enthusiastic adopters of Foucault than most professional or academic philosophers. Indeed, up until the end of the 1970s at least, Foucault consistently refused the appellation of philosopher in the classical sense (Foucault, 2001: 861)—that is, a thinker who searches for the truth *behind* phenomena, or strives to disclose the foundations for truth. With regard to 'process' Foucault was not concerned with articulating a general theory or metaphysics of 'process', of 'becoming', or of 'change' (see Chia, 2003) but, instead, with 'an analysis of *transformations* in their specificity' (Foucault, 1991b: 56, original emphasis). Seeking to pigeon-hole Foucault within an academic discipline is futile. It is more illuminating to consider whether any theme, albeit one that is approached in diverse ways, can be found running through his work. Here again, Foucault offers a potent suggestion: the study of 'the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects' (Foucault, 1982a: 208). His work has dealt with various 'modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects' (Foucault, 1982a: 208).

The study of how human beings are transformed into subjects through 'modes of objectification' includes, for example, the 'modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of sciences' (Foucault, 1982a: 208), the disciplinary practices of 'confinement' and 'correction' institutionalized within the *Hôpital Général* described in *Madness and Civilization* (1965), and the panoptic technologies described in *Discipline and Punish* (1977). Such objectifications are seen to arrest and regulate emerging movement and fix subjects in conceptual and institutional frames. But Foucault also stresses that power-invested stabilizations are never finalized. In his later work, Foucault studies 'the way a human being turns him or herself into a subject' (Foucault, 1982a: 208). We are, in Foucault's view, always in the midst of concrete transformations, and it is the interplay and interconnection of processes of 'objectivation' and 'subjectivation' in historically specific practices that accounts for these transformations of ourselves (Foucault, 2003f). As subjects, we 'do not simply circulate in those networks (of power)'. Rather, we are 'in a position to both submit to and exercise this power through which human beings are transformed into subjects. [Subjects] are never the inert or consenting targets of power; they are always also its relays. In other words, *power passes through individuals*. It is not applied to them' (Foucault 2003g: 29, emphasis added).

Foucault addresses the *history* of truth, including the truths ascribed to the subject. Truth is conceived as a contingent outcome of historical processes from which power cannot be exorcised. In regarding truth and knowledge as *contingent*, Foucault rejects a notion of truth counterposed to falsity or ideology. Rather than with the 'production of true utterances' (e.g. on the subject), he was concerned with the 'truth-effects' of certain established positions. More specifically, he said: 'my problem is to see how men govern (themselves and others) by the production of truth' (Foucault, 1991a: 79). The view of the historicity of truth, knowledge, and the subject is affirmed by Foucault's occupancy of a chair, named 'history of systems of thought', at the *Collège de France*. Despite the recognition vested in this appointment, few historians recognize or value Foucault as one of their number. This,

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ironically enough, is partly because Foucault considered himself to be practising '*wirkliche Historie*' (true history) in Nietzsche's sense. That is to say, his interest was in the 'history of the present' rather than in a representation of the past, showing how things—concepts, ideas, practices that we tend to take as givens—are an outcome of historical struggles. In sum, it would seem that Foucault is too much of a philosopher to be accepted by historians, and too much of a historian to be claimed by philosophers. For those less hostile to Foucault's imperviousness to easy categorization and disciplinary membership, his historical orientation enhances his status as a philosopher, and vice versa.

An alternative to attributing a unified identity to 'Foucault' or classifying his work would be to regard 'Foucault' as a name given to a 'site of a multiplicity of practices and labors' (Rabinow and Rose, 2003: xx). This alternative is more consistent with Foucault's self-understanding as 'experimenter' who writes 'experience books' (*livre-expérience*) instead of 'truth-books' (*livre-verité*) (Foucault 2001: 866). Considered in this way, 'Foucault' is a 'multiplicity' that has emerged in a particular historical/intellectual context: Paris where, in the 1950s and 1960s, existentialism and phenomenology (Sartre, Merleau-Ponty), on the one hand, and structuralism (Althusser, Levis-Strauss, and Saussure), on the other, were in the ascendant and occasionally in productive tension. The distinctive political as well as the intellectual qualities of this context are important. Foucault inherits a specific intellectual tradition to which he responds, and which his thinking acts to transform (Jones, 2002). Specifically, Foucault acknowledges being very hostile to the idea of a founding subject associated with phenomenology (Foucault, 2001; May, 2003). Foucault's connectedness to current affairs is evident from many of his interviews where he often directly engages these questions and associated issues. In his books on the other hand, the primary focus is upon 'lines of transformation' that have led us to become 'this' rather than 'that', and which act to denaturalize (and politicize) *what* or *who* we are *today*. Notably, Foucault's analysis of modes of objectifying 'madness' and the 'mad' in discourses and practices of psychiatry fuelled the anti-psychiatric movement and struggles to reform psychiatric treatment. And Foucault's analysis of the 'birth of the prison' in *Discipline and Punish* cannot be fully appreciated independently of struggles around prison reform in France and the prominent activist role played by Foucault in the *Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons* (GIP) in the early 1970s (Eribon, 1994). Nor can Foucault's interest in the ethics of antiquity—which is explored mainly in the *History of Sexuality, Volumes 2 and 3* (1986a, 1986b)—be satisfactorily comprehended without reference to the contemporary problem of developing a morality/ethics that goes beyond following (moral) rules and regulations (in particular, an ethics after Auschwitz). And, finally, there is Foucault's attention to practices of freedom and alternative modes of self-formation. This is also strongest in his later works, particularly in his final lectures on the practice of *parrhesia* (truth-telling) (Foucault 2010, 2011). The specific construction of the 'free individual' as an 'entrepreneur of himself' which Foucault saw emerging in the context of the economic theories of neoliberalism (Foucault, 2008a) may have prompted his excavation of alternative self-relations and modes of self-formation which operated, historically speaking, before scientific rationalization and Christian confession (Luxon, 2008).

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What, then, of Foucault's broader intellectual location beyond the volatile mix of existentialism, phenomenology, and structuralism in post-war Paris? Some illumination of this question is offered in a lexicon article entitled 'Michel Foucault' in which Foucault playfully adopts the pseudonym 'Maurice Florence' (2003f). Prepared near the end of his life, this article positions Foucault's work within the '*critical* tradition of Kant' (2003f: 1). For Foucault, it was Kant, a master of critique, who made central the questions of 'what is our present?' and 'what we are, *in this very moment*' (Foucault, 1982a: 216, emphasis added)?'[1] They are questions which, for Foucault, are directly connected to the question of critique. What animates Foucault's thinking, we suggest, is a deep and sustained commitment to *the critical attitude*. It is remarkable how, again and again, Foucault (e.g. 2003b, 2003d) returned to Kant's short, but famous, text 'What is Enlightenment?' (Kant, 1784/1949, a text which he admitted was 'something of a blazon, a fetish for (him)' (2010: 7). Most tellingly, in his final lectures on the practice of *parrhesia* (truth-telling) at the *Collége de France*, Foucault discusses Kant's essay at length in the first and second hour (Foucault, 2010: 1–40) and so frames the practice of *parrhesia* as exemplifying and predating the critical attitude of modernity, that questions established authorities and 'regimes of truth' that support them.

In Foucault's reframing of the Enlightenment, the task of philosophical thinking is not to tell the truth 'about' politics or to define ideal models or prescriptions for organizing society. Rather, its purpose is primarily to speak truth *to* power in whatever form such power may take. 'The task of telling the truth is an endless labour: to respect it in all its complexity is an obligation no power can do without—except by imposing the silence of slavery' (Foucault, 1988b: 267). Critique and the critical attitude are not the exclusive preserve of philosophers or other expert merchants of critique. Critique, for Foucault, is not defined by a privileged vantage point from which truths can be revealed; critique makes no claim to possess an impartial, atemporal, neutral yardstick for evaluating and judging various practices. Rather, it is a practice that accompanies—both as 'partner and adversary'—the various 'arts of governing' in seeking 'not to be governed like *that*' (Foucault, 2003b: 264, original emphasis).

32.3 Interrogating Process: History and Discourse

Foucault's writings, we have noted, do not offer a philosophical meditation on process. Nor do they provide a metaphysics of process or a general theory of 'becoming' or change. Reading Foucault, we suggest, can instead challenge and transform our thinking, by 'substituting for the theme of becoming (general form, abstract element, first cause and universal effect, a confused mixture of the identical and the new) an analysis of *transformations* in their specificity' (Foucault, 1991b: 56, original emphasis). In this section we consider how process is interrogated with specific reference to history, discourse, and practices.

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32.3.1 History as the 'Concrete Body of Becoming'

Foucault shares the Hegelian and Marxian understanding that wo/man is a product of history. But he rejects their view that historical development is *determined* by an immanent structuring principle or preceded by an essence which unfolds in the course of its movement. Following Nietzsche, the metaphysical construction of progress is denied: 'Humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at a universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare' (Foucault, 2003e: 358). In Foucault's understanding of history, there is no necessary movement to an end state where contradictions are finally resolved. In place of a comparatively predictable dialectical movement defined by Hegelian or Marxian contradictions, there is, for Foucault, a movement of difference (differential relations of force). The view that 'forces operating in history obey destiny or regulative mechanisms' is rejected. 'Luck' or 'Chance' does not imply the spinning of a coin but, rather, the making of luck (e.g. by developing the capacity to capitalize on events) through a mixture of chance and coincidence involving a clash of forces. 'Chance is not simply the drawing of lots but raising the stakes in every attempt to master chance through the will to power, and giving rise to the risk of an even greater chance' (2003e: 361).

For Foucault, history emerges from a path-dependent yet also unpredictable *unfolding of practices* without necessary pattern or structure (e.g. life-cycles, dialectics, etc.). Accordingly, Foucauldian genealogy studies the emergence or history of ideals, concepts, or practices and thereby 'disrupt(s) its pretended continuity' (2003e: 360). For the genealogist, history is a '*concrete body of becoming*; with its moments of intensity, its lapses, its extended periods of feverish agitation, its fainting spells' (2003e: 354, emphasis added). No underlying logic, programme, code, or causal mechanisms direct(s) its development. To posit any such necessity, Foucault argues, is to submit history to some transcendent principle outside of the specific movement of events. Like all other practices or configurations of practices, even practices that ignite or facilitate transformation are singular events; and the world is, in effect, a 'profusion of entangled events' (2003e: 361). This approach radically denies entative thinking, according to which the world consists of reified objectivities. Behind supposed unities (e.g. 'organizations' or 'individuals') there is no unifying principle that guarantees their stability and no essence to be discovered. Rather, there is an 'unstable assemblage of faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers that threaten the fragile inheritor from within or from underneath' (2003e: 356).

Within 'the concrete body of becoming', practices are repeated, but they are never repeated in exactly the same way. Transformations are not manifestations of an underlying principle, nor are they an effect of implementing a plan of reform. Instead, they emerge from local practices and struggles. As May puts it, for Foucault history 'does not *necessarily* progress or regress. It does not *necessarily* move in a circle. It does not *necessarily* repeat anything. It may progress, or regress, or circle or repeat. But if it does, then this is because of particular local conditions that have arisen, not because it lies in the character of history itself to do so' (2006: 15, emphasis added). Foucault refuses

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mono-causal explanations but he also rejects randomness. History is *contingent*, but not arbitrary: it did take *this* course of development, rather than *that*. In effect, Foucault subscribes to a version of causality which recognizes that, in a given historical situation, multiple and often opposing forces are active at once. What he terms the 'procedure of causal multiplication' is adopted to provide a means of 'analysing an event according to the multiple processes which constitute it'. He explains this with an example:

> to *analyse the practice* of penal incarceration as an 'event' (not as an institutional fact of ideological effect) means to *determine the processes* of 'penalization' (that is, progressive insertion into the form of legal punishment) of already existing practices of internment; the processes of 'carceralizaton' of practices of penal justice (that is, the movement by which imprisonment as a form of punishment and technique of correction becomes a central component of the penal order); ... the penalization of internment comprises a multiplicity of processes such as the formation of closed pedagogical spaces functioning through rewards and punishments, etc. (Foucault, 1991a: 76–7, emphasis added).

From this standpoint, practices and configurations of practices have a *history* and they have a *becoming*. Every new configuration of practices, such as those that he later identified as 'discipline' and 'security', has its own genealogical lines of formation. One can trace back practices to previous practices. Tracing back and following the lines of transformation of (specific) practices does not, however, allow us to uncover some originary principle or causal mechanism from which these practices ostensibly derive. Instead it 'means making visible a *singularity* at places where there is a temptation to invoke a historical constant' (Foucault, 1991a: 76). Practices also have a future. As we shall show in the next section, even though the future is circumscribed by the genealogical conditions of its past, it is novel and unpredictable.

32.3.2 Discourse, Practices, and Power-Knowledge

We have noted how, for Foucault, there is no pre-given order of things that can be revealed; the 'order of things' is produced through historically specific discourses. The various (positive) sciences—including organization science—do not, from this perspective, faithfully represent reality; nor can they credibly aspire, or hope, to do so. Rather, sciences are actively involved in constructing and producing the very reality which they seek to describe or explain (see Osborne and Rose, 1999; Knights, 1992). That said, and before proceeding further, it is relevant to underscore how, for Foucault, discourse is not synonymous with language; and there is no suggestion that what science seeks to capture and disclose can be changed by adopting different terms to represent or adapt it.

To understand 'discourse' as only spoken or written words forming descriptive statements is, from a Foucauldian perspective, symptomatic of (the retention of) representationalist thinking. Discursive practices are the local and historical contingencies which enable and constrain the knowledge-generating activities of speaking, writing,

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thinking, calculating, measuring, and so on. Discursive practices *produce*, rather than describe, the subjects and objects of knowledge. Discourses, Foucault writes, are not to be treated as 'groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) *but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak*' (Foucault, 1989: 54, emphasis added). Such 'objects' include 'authorship', 'organization(s)', and processes of organizing. Our knowledge of reality is inescapably a contingent product of particular discursive practices organizing it, and they are unable to yield a universally credible, mirror-like reflection of it.

Foucault (2003a) demonstrates this point by showing how the humanist sense of the author, as 'genial creator', is a product or 'effect' of a particular, historical discourse. It is this discourse which renders the notion credible and seemingly self-evident. In pointing to its conditions of possibility—a set of historically contingent rules within an order of discourse—Foucault shows how a particular (humanist) sense of authorship is rendered authoritative. By attending to questions such as 'How, under what conditions, and in what forms can something like the subject appear in the order of discourse?' 'What place can it occupy in each type of discourse, what functions can it assume, and by obeying what rules?' (Foucault, 2003a: 390) he signals the possibility of subverting and resisting, rather than accepting and reproducing, a system of dependencies, such as the system which lends authority to the humanist notion of authorship.

In his earlier (archeological) writings, Foucault focuses upon *how subjects and objects of knowledge* are formed by historically specific rules of discourse. He does not exclude practices from consideration but, at this point, he does not seek to explicate how practices and discourse are related, intertwined, or fused. It is only later, starting with his first major genealogical study, *Discipline and Punish*, that Foucault explicitly shifts his understanding and analysis of the formation of subjects/subjectivities towards *practices*. So doing, he contends that 'the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations' (Foucault, 1977: 28). Practices are understood to be embedded within *a nexus of power-knowledge relations* that are themselves reproduced and transformed through practices. The nexus—that is, the hyphen in the power-knowledge relations—is *practices*. This shift of attentiveness from the rules of discourse to practices does not, in our view, imply that the earlier work is misconceived or redundant. Instead, it serves to correct any suggestion of an abstraction of discourse from practices and extends the exploration of constitutive forces. Reappraising his work, Foucault reflects:

> In this piece of research [*Discipline and Punish*], as in my earlier work, the target of analysis wasn't 'institutions', 'theories' or 'ideology', but *practices*—with the aim of grasping the conditions which make these acceptable at a given moment... It is a question of analysing a 'regime of practices'—*practices being understood here as places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken for granted meet and interconnect*. (Foucault, 1991a: 75, original emphasis; second emphasis added).

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A focus on the nexus of power-knowledge relations is, albeit in embryonic form, present even in Foucault's inaugural lecture at the *Collège de France* (*The Order of Discourse*). In this lecture he develops the argument 'that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality' (Foucault, 1981a: 52). A system of limitations and restrictions is a necessary condition for discourse to be effective: 'Exchange and communication are positive figures working inside complex systems of restriction, and probably would not be able to function independently of them' (Foucault, 1981a: 62). Discourse can only constitute meaning via such limitations and restrictions. In fact, meaning is an effect of these limitations. Moreover, as we noted earlier, discourse does not represent 'reality out there' but, instead, (violently) imposes its own principle of order:

> the world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscursive providence which disposes the world in our favour. We must conceive discourse as a violence which we do to things, or in any case as a practice which we impose on them; and it is in this practice that the events of discourse find the principle of regularity. (Foucault, 1981a: 67)

For Foucault—in contrast to phenomenology—there is no lived experience, or essential property, to which analysis can refer as a benchmark of validation. That is because the specification of any such benchmark is itself a product of discourse, ad infinitum. There is only the field of knowledge 'defined by a specific combination of the visible and the sayable' (Webb, 2003: 127). Foucault's critics have characterized his position as solipsistic or relativistic. What such criticism fails to take into account is Foucault's assumption of a gap between the ineffable reality of the world, which includes our 'lived experience', and our knowledge of it. It is discourse—or discursive practices—that constitutes what we can know, and so conditions but does not determine what we feel and perceive. The conditions are themselves a set of transformable rules and are 'in each case a singular crystallization of a complex set of changing relations, actions, rules, and practices' (Webb, 2003: 127).

The understanding of the subject as an 'effect of discourse' and a 'product' of power-infused practices invites the question of the scope for self-formation that is not reduced or reducible to these practices and relations. It is in his later writings that Foucault considers the possibilities of active self-formation that is related to and effected by the historical conditions without being determined by them. More specifically, he explores the possibility of self-creation and ethical self-formation through 'practices of the self' (Foucault 1986a, 1986b, 1997)—a possibility that is opened by the limited capacity of discursive and non-discursive practices to form a closed system that finally excludes all 'outside' and so impedes self-formation and the related capacity to enable it (see also Deleuze, 1988). In a retrospective comment on the 'death of man', proclaimed in *The Order of Things* (1970: 340–3), Foucault offers a clarification of what otherwise might be taken as his endorsement of a deterministic position:[2]

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> *Men [sic] are perpetually engaged in a process* that, in constituting objects, at the same time displaces man, deforms, transforms, and transfigures him as subject. In speaking of the death of man, in a confused, simplifying way, that is what I meant to say. (Foucault, 2000: 276, emphasis added)

Even if the understanding of subjects as effects of historically contingent discourses and products of power-infused practices, radically questions humanistic conceptions of autonomy it does not deny or exclude the possibility of 'struggles *against* subjection' and 'struggles *for* a new subjectivity' (Foucault, 1982a: 212–13, emphasis added). On the contrary, denaturalizing the self and revealing its constitution in contingent power-knowledge relations opens the way to redefine the (humanist) task of 'discovering' or liberating an essential human subject. It is a task characterized by Foucault as an endeavour 'to discover one's true self, to separate it from that which might obscure and alienate it, to decipher its truth' (Foucault, 1982b: 245). Distancing himself from a moral (e.g. Sartrean) notion of 'authenticity', Foucault insists that '(f)rom the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as works of art' (1982b: 237). It is precisely because there is no given or essential self that subjects are repeatedly challenged to engage in a process of self-(trans)formation. For Foucault, this process of creative self-formation is thoroughly historically rooted. It is also inherently political as it involves a *refusal* of normalizing (scientific, administrative, and moral) conceptions that define and fix 'who we are' *and* prompts an experimental practice that disrupts and surpasses historically sedimented conceptions of identity and the self; and so promotes struggles for 'a new subjectivity' (Foucault, 1982a: 213). So, when Foucault asserts that 'the target nowadays is not to *discover* what we are, but to *refuse* what we are' (1982a: 216), this injunction must be interpreted in the context of a radical anti-essentialism that challenges normalized and normalizing conceptions of the self that (arbitrarily) delimit the field of our possibilities. Foucault's 'refusal' is not simply a denial. It is, paradoxically, a 'non-positive affirmation' (Foucault, 1998: 74) that opens the possibility of a 'politics of ourselves' (Allen, 2011)—a process of a self-creation that moves us beyond established and conventionalised identities. Such self-creation does not lie in the distance from, or absence of, power-infused ensemble of practices. Instead, it resides in the 'historically fragile and contingent ways we are folded into it, just as we ourselves are folds of it' (May, 2005: 528). So, when considering the possibility of (active) self-creation through 'practices of the self', Foucault does not posit an ahistorical self that exists before or beyond discourses and practices. Instead, he maintains that there is an infinite number of ways of 'folding the forces' operating on us (Deleuze, 1988; Rose, 1998). Such 'folding' is inevitably bound to practices, but as Foucault makes clear, 'these practices are nevertheless not something invented by the individual himself. They are models he [sic] finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, his social group' (Foucault, 1997: 291). It is in a permanent actualizing of the 'critical attitude' (Foucault, 2003b) in relation to our present practices, and how they govern our

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relations to self and others, that new forms of subjectivity are created: a work in process rather than an outcome or result.

32.4 Organization Studies

We move from our reading of evolving themes in 'Foucault' to the engagement of his writings by students of organization(s). Here we encounter some turbulence, even disorientation. As Knights (2002, 2004) has observed, the tendency has been for organization scholars to 'write Foucault into organization theory' as they take established agenda(s) as a point of departure, and so read (or plunder) Foucault as a source for strengthening established frameworks of perceiving organizational phenomena such as control in organizations. More rare has been an interest in how organizational analysis might be 'written into Foucault' (Knights, 2002) so that established frameworks of analysis become problematic. In this section, we selectively identify some of the more influential Foucauldian contributions to organization studies.

32.4.1 Panopticism

The idea of the Panopticon, which Foucault analysed in *Discipline and Punish* (1977: 195–228), has been seized upon to develop or provide fresh momentum to established areas of organization studies such as control in the workplace (e.g. Ortmann, 1984; Zuboff, 1988; Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992; Barker, 1993). A version of Foucault was brought to a wider audience as his thinking was shown to provide inter alia a distinctive and comparatively accessible illumination of workplace relations. More questionable is whether the reading of Foucault privileged by such analyses sufficiently brought out Foucault's idea of an evolving and dynamic reality. Burrell, for example, when considering the Panopticon, contends that Foucault's 'real point' is that 'as individuals we are incarcerated within an organizational world... whilst we may not live in total institutions, the institutional organization of our lives is total. It is in this sense that Foucault's comment "prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals which all resemble prisons" has to be understood' (Burrell, 1988: 232). A decontextualized reading of such a comment stands in danger of disregarding the ethico-political intent of Foucauldian genealogies.[3] When adopted or recycled in 'Foucauldianism', the contention that 'the institutional organization of our lives is total' (Burrell, 1988: 232), in which incarcerated actors are stripped of agency, presents a straw target for those who, quite justifiably, find it unconvincing (e.g. Reed, 1997, 1988, 2000). The incongruity arises when invocations of the Panopticon are abstracted from Foucault's genealogical (historical) perspective. As a consequence, it omits appreciation of how, in Foucault's analysis, the 'panoptic diagram' has been formed in a contingent history, and is itself evolving and transforming (see also Deleuze, 1988; Foucault, 2007).

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32.4.2 Resistance, Governmentality, and the Apparatus of Security

Empirical studies of organization that draw on Foucault's work, and in particular on his relational understanding of power (Foucault, 1981b: 92–102), have illustrated how infinite forms of resistance emerge in the context of organizations and continuously undermine, reform, and reshape imposed orders (e.g. Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994). Foucault's work on 'discipline' and 'disciplinary power' continues to be a major source of inspiration for critical studies of organization (e.g. Clegg, 1998; McKinlay and Starkey, 1998; Hatchuel et. al., 2005). However, it has also been argued that we now live in, or are entering an era of, 'fluid modernity', which, as Bauman (2001: 11) puts it, is 'post-Panoptical'. The 'disciplinary world of *l'employé*' (Jacques, 1996: 98), where organizations can be understood as 'enclosed spaces', and are populated by docile, normalized subjects, it is suggested, is becoming less recognizable. In so far as processes of financialization and social mediatization are succouring comparatively dynamic and fluid—'post-bureaucratic'—organizations, employee creativity and subjectivity are increasingly seen as 'human capital' to be mobilized and churned, rather than as an unruly capacity that must be 'moulded' into disciplined patterns of identity. In this context, scholarship informed primarily by Foucault's analysis of the 'panoptic diagram' and the disciplinary mode of governing organizations/social relations may become less credible.

To counteract and rebalance studies that exhibit 'Foucauldianism', students of organization have turned to Foucault's later works, where he explores the ethics of antiquity (Foucault, 1986a, 1986b), and complements the analytics of power with notions of 'biopolitics', the 'apparatus of security', and (neoliberal) 'governmentality' (Foucault, 1981b, 2007, 2008). Notably, inspiration has been drawn from an understanding of ethics where the focus is on processes of self-creation and self-governing (e.g. Ibarra-Colado et. al., 2006; Crane, Knights, Starkey, 2008; Chan and Garrick, 2002; Starkey and Hatchuel, 2002; McMurray et al., 2011; Weiskopf and Willmott, 2013). Related studies have explored how contemporary practices and technologies of the self are reframed in the neoliberal context of 'enterprise', enabling forms of 'self-stylization on the flows of business, or a self-management indistinguishable form corporate management' (Spoelstra, 2007: 302).

Foucault's lectures on 'biopolitics' and the 'apparatus of security' (2007, 2008) extend the conceptual means of understanding and problematizing technologies and practices of organizing work relations, and of governing (various) process(es), including processes of subjectification. We have noted how attention in earlier analyses mainly centres on the disciplinary techniques enabling modes of governing by fixing and defining movement, *prescribing* actions and sequences in a process (Townley, 1993, 1994). Foucault's later work explores how discipline is modified and supplemented with regulatory techniques that he calls 'security' or the 'apparatus of security'. These new techniques are better understood as *regulating* flows enabling the controlled circulation of various resources, including the 'human resources' in comparatively open and self-generating

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networks. These techniques seek to influence a 'milieu' (Foucault, 2008: 20): action is brought to bear on the 'rules of the game' rather than on the players; processes are governed by providing general incentives and disincentives for promoting and developing entrepreneurial orientations in a population (Weiskopf and Munro, 2012).

The 'apparatus of security' incorporates and welcomes the exercise of discretion, in contrast to 'discipline' which *prescribes* actions and movements in some detail. In the 'apparatus of security', individual responsibility for making choices is actively promoted and incentivized: the apparatus constructs and channels employee 'freedom' in particular directions. As a form of power, government refers to the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault, 2007) and so has extensive application—notably, through liberal and neoliberal forms of governmentality (McNay, 2009). A common example is the use of performance or output metrics which do not simply impose an ideal norm (as disciplinary regulation does), but derive the norm(al) from the measurement of reality itself (the average number is the norm). These metrics do not contrive to eliminate freedom by dictating precisely how a desired outcome is to be achieved. Instead, the metrics reward discretion when its exercise boosts short-term performance as shown by the measure. The introduction of rankings, ratings, performance indicators, benchmarking techniques, and the like permits 'continuous improvement' rather than adaptation to a fixed norm. It is a new, dynamic form of 'flexible normalism' (Link 2004) encouraging subjects to adapt and 'be creative' in response to the development of new metrics and the continuous shifting of thresholds. In contrast to the panoptic ideal of establishing 'an economic geometry of a "house of certainty" ' (Foucault, 1977: 202), the 'apparatus of security' is favoured as a means of influencing and managing 'space(s) in which a series of uncertain elements unfold' (Foucault, 2008: 20). Its application renders a population (e.g. of citizens or employees) more governable in circumstances where efforts to eliminate, rather than regulate, the exercise of discretion would likely falter or eventuate in poorer performance.

The apparatus of security incorporates liberal principles of laissez-faire and supplements the associated freedoms with technologies of control that allow for the management of the risks and dangers associated with these freedoms (Miller and Rose, 2008; Power, 2007). The 'freedom' attributed to subjects is orchestrated, rather than tightly controlled. Foucauldian studies of neoliberal governmentality have examined the reshaping of public and private organizations through the neoliberal discourse of enterprise (du Gay 1996, 2004)—a discourse inviting employees to understand and conduct themselves in an enterprising manner so as to cultivate their own 'human capital'. When conceived as human capital, the working subject becomes an 'abilities machine' incorporating pressing requirements to continuously modulate and reconfigure its abilities in response to the demands of competitiveness and threats of obsolescence (Foucault, 2008: 224–6). In a post-disciplinary (neoliberal) framing of the employment relationship 'continuous improvement' through 'learning' is advanced as a strategy to maintain employability and is routinely linked to the concept of self-responsibility (Burchell et al., 1991). Characteristically, the normative construction of the autonomous, creative, and ever-active artist/entrepreneur who constantly (re-)invents himself or herself serves

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as subjectivizing norm or model which supports a readiness and openness to change. 'Thinking differently', 'becoming other than one is', and 'making one's life a work of art', which Foucault saw as attempts to break out of a regulated and conventionalized world, are rapidly becoming a norm itself; in the words of Tom Peters: 'Be distinct... or extinct!' (Peters, 2001, front cover). This illustrates a mode of governing that is based on the idea of 'optimization of difference' (Foucault, 2008: 259) rather than imposing a (stable) disciplinary order.

32.4.3 'The Subject' and the Question of Freedom

Studies which engage Foucault's concept of 'governmentality' challenge and counteract a reading of Foucault as an author whose work amounts to 'little more than an elaboration of Weber's "iron cage" argument' (Starkey and McKinlay, 1998: 231). Still, there is a risk of regarding the subject as passive consumer of neoliberal discourse, for example, in studies that focus on the 'enterprising up' of individuals and organizations (see du Gay, 2004). As Bardon and Josserand (2011: 498) suggest, there are two broad stratagems for addressing this issue. One is to assume an 'essentialist ground for action' that exists before or beyond discourse; a second one is to recognize the heterogeneity of discourses and practices from which a sense of agency derives.

The second—anti-essentialist—stratagem is consistent with a radical ontology of becoming that is implied by Foucault's historicization of the subject, and of subjectivity. This does not mean that there is 'nothing outside discourse than more discourse' (Reed, 2000: 525). It is just that what is outside of discourse—a dynamic and shifting field of forces—is knowable only through heterogeneous (power-invested) discourses. There is no difficulty in acknowledging 'materialities' so long as they are recognized to be 'actions upon the actions of others' (Foucault, 1982a: 221); and that their identification is discursive, and thus the product of particular discursive practices, and not a reflection of reality.

Paradoxically, the disappearance of the autonomous 'subject', which follows from the acknowledgement of the multiple discourses and practices that make the subject, facilitates the possibility of overcoming or transgressing what is otherwise taken for granted. It invites us to 'follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch out for openings this disappearance uncovers' (Foucault, 2003a: 380), and thereby to engage in self-(trans)formation. That said, processes of self-creation, or self-formation take place *in relation* to a set of norms established and sedimented in a historical process (Bernauer and Mahon, 2006; Butler, 2005). The possibility of critical reflexivity allows historically situated subjects to form and shape themselves not only within but also *in relation to* the normative matrix that defines modes of being. This possibility opens up the path to an ethico-politics of ourselves which questions and problematizes 'who we are' (our historically constituted identities and the institutional framework and technologies of government that supports them) and engages in individual and collective processes of self-formation.

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32.5 Conclusion

In Foucault's thinking, knowledge is historicized and representationalist accounts (e.g. those generated by the human sciences) are destabilized. Through this destabilization, historically specific 'regimes of truth' that define and fix 'who we are' are denaturalized, and the knowing subject as an autonomous subject of knowledge is deconstructed. By attending to the practices which constitute and organize our relations to self, others, and to things, Foucault prompts us, in our study of organization(s), for example, to pose questions such as: how are subjectivities produced, maintained, and transformed within and through (historically specific) discourses and practices of organizing? What limitations are imposed on us by various forms and modes of governing such relations? And what are the conditions and possibilities for transforming these limitations/practices through an inventive ethico-politics of organizing that questions and problematizes established configurations of practices and moves us beyond contingent limitations?

For Foucault, thinking is a situated practice of reflection that is embedded in a specific historic and societal context. Such thinking, or what Foucault terms 'philosophical activity', is context-dependent; but it is not determined by its context. Rather, it is distinguished by the creation of a distance to contexts—a distance that can be more or less intentionally valued and expanded. Where the distance is increased, it tends to disrupt contexts and initiate new contexts as it fosters a 'displacement and transformation of frameworks of thinking, the changing of received values'. Such transformative thinking is inclusive of 'all the work that has been done to think otherwise, to do something else, to become other than what one is' (Foucault, 2003c: 179). Such thinking does not proceed in a linear progression—for example, as an activity of incremental 'theory building', or as a way of approaching the truth step by step; and it is not preoccupied with separating what is true and false. It is, instead, concerned primarily with reflecting upon our relationship to truth, or what is held to be true. It involves a 'movement by which . . . one detaches oneself from what is accepted as true and seeks other rules' (Foucault, 2003c: 179). It is demanding as well as disorientating, as it interrogates the preconditions of our being; and it thereby invites, risks, or compels a transformation of self.

Such thinking, we have suggested, might inspire an ethico-politics of organizing, which is (necessarily) situated within historically specific relations of power. It extends an invitation to explore and expand the possibility of participating in organization(s), including those of academia, in ways that necessarily involve power of power and do not eliminate domination, yet nonetheless endeavour to minimize it. As Foucault (1997: 298) observes, the vision and practice of an ethico-politics of organizing 'is not of trying to dissolve them [relations of power] in the utopia of completely transparent communication'. Rather, it is to develop 'the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the ethos, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible' (Foucault, 1997: 298).

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Notes

1. Foucault's relation to Kant—which begins with his doctoral thesis comprising a translation of Kant's *Anthropology* and an original introduction to it (Foucault, 2008)—is complex, and it is therefore misleading to identify him simply as 'anti-modernist' or 'postmodernist'.
2. Foucault's anti-humanism provided a valuable corrective to the self-regarding, anthropocentric folly of humanism. It is important to appreciate that Foucault's critique of humanism did not simply or primarily reduce the subject to 'a standardised product of some discourse formation' (Habermas, 1987: 293). Rather, it presents a timely challenge to the excessive centring of 'man' within humanist analysis, and so opens a space for exploring the historically contingent rules of subject formation (Knights and Willmott, 2002). See also Allen (2000).
3. The ethico-political intent of such analysis is to 'free thought from what it silently thinks and so enable it to think differently' (Foucault, 1984a: 16–17, in Bardon and Josserand, 2011: 500) and thereby 'transfigure the taken-for-granted hierarchy of values and practice our liberty' (Bardon and Josserand, 2011: 500).

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