

## Foucault Studies

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Jens Erik Kristensen; with Morris Rabinowitz & Ditte Vilstrup Holm 2009

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### EDITORIAL

#### **Neoliberal Governmentality**

*Sverre Raffnsøe, Alan Rosenberg, Alain Beaulieu, Sam Binkley, Sven Opitz, Jens Erik Kristensen; with Morris Rabinowitz & Ditte Vilstrup Holm.*

It is with great pleasure that we introduce issue 6 of *Foucault Studies*, which is a themed issue on “neoliberal governmentality” that has been guest edited by Sam Binkley from Emerson College, Boston, USA. This is the first special topic-oriented issue of *Foucault Studies*, but we are eager to do more special topic issues in the coming years, and thus invite our readers to propose suitable topics and guest editors.

Before introducing the articles in this issue, we would like to share some news about the recent development of *Foucault Studies*. Re-launching the journal in 2007/2008 was not without its problems, causing delays and a level of communication below our intended standards. The Journal is experimental in its format as we are striving to make it the best publication on Foucault’s thinking, but unfortunately our ambitions have not always met our or our contributors’ expectations. However, we are confident that the problems of last year are now a thing of the past, as we have developed new administrative procedures and secured a renewed and dedicated Editorial Team.

First of all, we welcome as Co-Editors of *Foucault Studies* Sam Binkley from Emerson College, Boston, USA, and Sven Opitz from University of Basel, Switzerland. They join the Editorial Team of Sverre Raffnsøe, (Editor-in-Chief); Alan Rosenberg (Managing Editor and Book Review Editor), Alain Beaulieu (Co-Editor), Jens Erik Kristensen (Co-Editor), and Morris Rabinowitz (Copy Editor).

Furthermore, we are pleased to introduce our new Journal Administrator, Ms. Ditte Vilstrup Holm, who will assist the Editorial Team in the continuing development of *Foucault Studies*. She has previously worked with journal publishing at Blackwell Publishing, managing and developing editorial offices of scientific journals. Already, we are excited to announce that EBSCO Publishing has agreed to include *Foucault Studies* in their library products. EBSCO Publishing is the leading international electronic reference source owned by academic libraries and will thus secure an effective exposure of articles published in *Foucault Studies*.

We invite you to visit our new and improved website [www.foucault-studies.com](http://www.foucault-studies.com) and sign up for E-alerts to receive news of upcoming issues being published and “Calls for Papers” for special issues of *Foucault Studies*. All articles in *Foucault Studies* continue to be published with open access, and we are always interested in receiving high quality articles within the scope of the journal. We strongly encourage our readers to submit articles that explore Foucault’s conceptuality, comparative works involving Foucault’s thought, critical essays studying the impact of Foucault on various fields of study, empirical works using some of Foucault’s ideas, as well as critical works that involve material recently published, such as Foucault’s seminars at the Collège de France or Foucault’s complementary thesis on Kant.

*Foucault Studies* is a forum committed to new approaches to Foucault’s thoughts, and thus we are especially interested in attracting young, promising scholars to publish their articles in the Journal. When the Journal was launched in 2004, one of its intended purposes was to create a forum for the philosophical discussion of Foucault’s thinking that would also serve as a motor for driving the interest of young philosophers towards Foucault as they now had a forum in which to publish. This continues to be one of the ambitions of *Foucault Studies*.

The current issue of *Foucault Studies* includes works organized around the concept of “neoliberal governmentality.” This notion today appears both timely and oddly dated. While scholars have for many years responded to Foucault’s provocative treatment of neoliberalism, it is only with the recent publication in English of Foucault’s lectures of 1978-79, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, that English language scholars now have direct access to his most succinct statements about this term. Therein we find perhaps the most contemporary face of Foucault scholarship, one uniquely appropriate to the most current formations of power, to modes of subjectivity we readily identify in our own lives, and to proposals for resistance that have already been taken up by the global left. At the same time, access to these pages occurs at an odd moment, just as the broader global economic formation known as neoliberalism enters into a convulsive spasm few had anticipated even a year earlier. As this issue goes to press, newspapers openly declare the “End of American Capitalism,” the “New Depression” and heap scorn on the policies of “deregulation” that produced the financial crises of 2008. Thus, the timing of Foucault’s neoliberal engagement is doubly ironic. Foucault began this discussion well before the neoliberalism we know today had come into existence — before, for example, Margaret Thatcher famously shut her eyes to society, seeing only “individuals and families,” or before Ronald Reagan introduced us to his nine least favorite words; “I’m from the government and I’m here to help.” Our reception of Foucault’s theoretical apparatus for the study of neoliberal governmentality may be too late, appearing on the scene, like another owl of Minerva, only when the action is well over.

Whether this is really true, of course, remains to be seen. Yet the excitement generated by Foucault’s engagement with neoliberalism is apparent in the four papers comprising this themed issue, as it was at the conference from which these papers were solicited — the Fifth annual meeting of the Social Theory Forum at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, in April 2008. This event, titled *A Foucault for the 21st Century: Governmentality, Biopolitics and*

*Discipline in the New Millennium*, organized by Sam Binkley and Jorge Capetillo-Ponce, was marked by the presence of this new "economic Foucault," whose character and contemporaneity we have still to explore. The four works comprising this themed issue present only a critical opening on this project. First, Ute Tellman offers a broad and inclusive treatment of the theme of economy in the works of Foucault, and comes away with a critical view of the limitations of Foucault's treatment of the problem. Providing, among other things, a useful synthesis of Foucault's various framings of economy in his earlier archaeological works and in his works of the late 1970's, Tellman points to the limitations of his approach, which derive from Foucault's failure ultimately to deliver the promised goods in his analysis of the economic field as a terrain of dynamic power relations. Foucault's account of the "invisibility" of the market, Tellmann writes, as a remedy to the interventionist strategies of the disciplinary state (long a justification invoked by liberal governments), fails to account for the manner in which market mechanisms operate outside and beyond domains marked by the epistemologies of state institutions.

Next, two articles, by Jason Read and Trent Hamann, provide treatments of neoliberal governmentality as aspects of the production of subjectivity through everyday economic, political and cultural life, particularly where these practices open themselves up to programs of resistance and critique. Jason Read discusses Foucault's lectures of 1978-79, drawing key insights into the analysis of neoliberalism as a mode of governmentality, as a means by which subjectivity is inscribed and produced as a mode of conduct. This analysis benefits, in Read's paper, from its encounter with other authors, specifically Brown, Harvey, Negri and others. The discussion moves beyond mere theoretical reconstruction to arrive at current critical and political questions regarding the critique of neoliberalism, as theorized in various camps. Similarly, the domain of neoliberal governmentality is taken up by Trent Hamann as one linking the production of subjectivity with the problematics of economy. Hamann supplies a rich empirical context to the discussion of the governmentality of neoliberal subjects, drawing not only from a range of policy debates but also technological developments effecting everyday conducts and the production of atomized selfhood through the reconfiguration of distinctions between public and private space. Against the backdrop of conditions of atomization, responsabilization and globalization, Hamann proposes linkages between the analysis of neoliberal governmentality and contemporary challenges to global capitalism. Finally, taking up the thread of subjectivation, Sam Binkley offers a genealogical account of the specific practices of neoliberal governmentality as an undertaking in daily life. Binkley seeks to broaden the palette typically employed in governmentality research, by addressing the multi-dimensional undertaking of self-government, understood as the "work" of governmentality. This entails an analysis of the objects of neoliberal governmentality itself — the resistant matter within embodied conduct upon which the work of governmentality is performed. Taking as an example a popular self-help manual — and visiting Jacques Donzelot's analysis of the origins of social government — Binkley argues a view of neoliberal governmentality as an active and practical undertaking of subjectivation.

Following these articles are thirteen book reviews, providing a wide survey of recent publications in the field of Foucault studies. Book Reviews continues to be a vital part of *Foucault Studies* and we invite our readers to suggest publications that would be of interest to the readers of *Foucault Studies*. On our website [www.foucault-studies.com](http://www.foucault-studies.com) we list books that we want to have reviewed, and we invite all those interested in reviewing for the Journal to consult this list and contact Alan Rosenberg.

In the Editorial Section of issue 5, we announced our intentions to organize an international conference in Copenhagen, but we have not been able to secure the resources for this conference. Instead we ask our readers to look forward to our upcoming issues, which include: *Foucault Studies* 7 (September 2009), a general issue featuring new scholarship in Foucault studies, and a special issue centered on comparative and critical dialogues between the theoretical legacies of Michel Foucault and Norbert Elias. This issue will be guest-edited by Stefanie Ernst (University of Hamburg, Germany).