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## Thinking WithOut

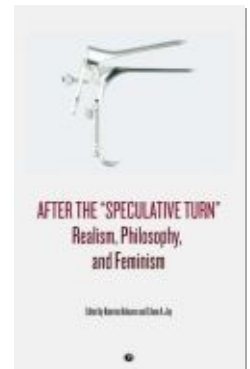
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## Thinking WithOut

*Jelisaveta Blagojević*

Although words such as feminism, gender, women are not included in the title, and are hardly mentioned in the whole text — they are at the very heart of it. It is only through feminist theory that I have realized what it means to have a non-smug theory that is not all about self-satisfaction, self-promotion, and self-preservation as is the case with most Western theoretical projects; it is only through feminist politics that I have discovered what it means to have politics that is not translated into the preservation of the status quo and/or reduced to an instrument of power.

Generations of feminists are showing us how being political always calls for one's own undoing; it involves re-imagining and re-inventing our own positions, locations, and belongings. And finally, it is a life of experiencing the invisibility of women's thinking and doing that teaches us — if we want to make a difference, if we are looking for a change — not to rely on what is visible, thinkable, sayable, audible, or generally, on what is given or taken for granted.

### *1. The Art of Voluntary Insubordination*

The question “What, therefore, am I, I who belong to this humanity,” the one that Foucault poses in “What is Critique,” indicates the rethinking of the present and involves the necessary

radicalism of the practicing critique: It asks what's going on just now? What is happening to us? What is this world, this period, this precise moment in which we are living? All these questions account for ways of rethinking the present, which does not allow us to posit ourselves outside of the possible answers. There is no epistemologically, ethically, ontologically, and politically pure or neutral ground to ask any kind of critical question without being desubjugated and thus self-transformed by that very gesture.

A critique does not consist in merely making a value judgment in accordance with criteria or ideals already in place, that is, saying that things aren't good the way they are. It would be too simple. It is more about looking into various assumptions, familiar notions, established and unexamined ways of thinking upon which the accepted practices of our time are based. Critique, in these terms, would necessarily involve being — untimely, out of synchronicity, while speaking from a position anchored in the present and its regulating conditions. Thus, to do criticism means to make it harder to be governed, as Foucault would say. To do criticism involves the "art of not being governed or better, the art of not being governed like that and at that cost — or the art of not being governed quite so much."<sup>2</sup> It means not accepting as true what an authority tells us is true, or at least not accepting it because an authority tells us that it is true.

Foucault's distinction between government and governmentality points to the ways how the apparatus denoted by the former enters into the practices of everyday life of those who are being governed — how it enters in our very ways of thinking, doing, and being. To be governed is not only to have a form imposed upon one's existence, but to be given the terms within which existence will and will not be possible. Therefrom, the no-

1 Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?," trans. Lysa Hochroth, in *The Politics of Truth*, eds. Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), 41–81.

2 *Ibid.*, 28–29.

tion of critique demands, requires, calls for self-transformative practices.

If the I who is thinking is not endangered, destabilized, shaken, undone by the process of thinking itself—such way of thinking one could not call a critique at all. And it is precisely this self-transformation that makes every step that we take being possibly the invention of the unthinkable. Critique, or “the art of voluntary insubordination,”<sup>3</sup> as Foucault would call it, has to insure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of the politics of truth. Therefore, insubordination to the political conditions of the present demands the insubordination of one to oneself.

There is no possibility of non-demagogical thinking, thinking which merely preserves the status quo and as such is an instrument of power—within the field of thinkable, sayable, visible, or audible—or generally—within the field of what is given and taken for granted.

## 2. *Non-Thought*

The thought, if we are to pursue the Foucauldian notion of critique, pushes toward the direction of non-thought, but that non-thought is “not external to thought but lies at its very heart, as that impossibility of thinking.”<sup>4</sup> Non-thought is thus a condition of thinking precisely because it cannot be thought, yet it simultaneously represents that which calls for and demands thinking.

Allow me to make a digression now:

On the various internet sites where Woody Allen’s quotes are listed, one of the most popular one says: “I believe there is something out there watching us. Unfortunately, it’s the government.” What makes us laugh in this statement of Allen’s can probably be rephrased like this: you, funny people, you believe there is a

3 Ibid., 32.

4 Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Séan Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 97.

God somewhere out there watching and protecting you, but it is much more trivial and obvious — it is only the government, the disciplinary mechanisms of power and its micro-physics.

Unfortunately, however, Allen is aiming to reveal the crude truth about the fact of who or what is settling our "outside" — the point that we can make about the world that we live in is much more scary: *there is no outside at all*. We live in a world in which the "outside" as a possible horizon of the change has been hijacked and stolen. As a result, today, almost everything appears equally thinkable — the sufferings, horrors, and tortures, the end of the life on Earth, market-oriented everyday life, proprietary structures in capitalism, the militarization of the world, etc.

It appears that the problem of the relation between thinking and politics is not only, as we used to think, that the inner logic of thinking preserves the absolute privilege of the existing dominant social order (by not questioning it) and its normative aspects by rendering unthinkable, and thus by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a resistance to this "unquestionable" organizing principles of social relations, some of them being family, nation, religion, but also patriarchy, heteronormativity, etc. What late capitalism has produced is the claustrophobic maneuver of positing that everything is always already included, calculated, possible, thinkable: so, what it took from us is precisely the notion of the "outside" that has been, for a long time, linked to the domain of madness, to the domain of literature, or to that of revolution. We live today in the world without outside and we are thinking without an "outside." On the other hand, in order for thinking not to be a mere repetition of the already known as an "unquestionable" organizing principle of social relations, it has to be the thought of the outside, it has to come from the outside, to stretch in relation to the outside, to be towards the outside, belonging to the outside.

In his book on Foucault, Deleuze has pointed to several crucial aspects in relation to the question of Foucault's "Thought of the Outside," and his efforts to search for the ways it would be possible to think otherwise: first, the task of thought is to liberate the forces that come from the outside; secondly, the outside

is always an openness to a future; (“In this way the outside is always an opening on to a future: nothing ends, since nothing has begun, but everything is transformed”<sup>5</sup>); the thought of the outside is a thought of resistance (to a state of affairs); and finally, the force of the outside is Life.<sup>6</sup>

Thought demands from us to make fiction a necessity and to fictionalize order’s unquestioned status of being reality, to invent new relationships, new possibilities of being-together, solidarity and sharing, that is, modes of being-in-common outside the sentimentalized logic of protection, and the mirroring and self-reflective narcissistic claims of identity. It demands, I would argue, thinking and enacting modes and practices of communality which would be capable of engaging us in order to question power regimes as such and open futurity towards differences not yet anticipated in the normalized frames of present political horizons.

To think is obviously to think “something,” but at the same time to think the specific place where this thinking occurs. Those who think are necessarily put into question by the very act of thinking. Those who think are the double folded side of the object of their thought. If this is not the case (if there is no response to this political, ethical and epistemological call to think oneself thinking), thinking is reduced to a peaceful pace, to the “pre-given,” to that “something” being demagogically offered to thinking — the thought of the familiar. Thinking understood in this demagogical way means to be assigned to think, expected to think, demanded to think — properly — in accordance to the law, to the imperative of common thinking. This imperative states: don’t just think, but think properly — and, we might add, think normatively, be obedient in thinking.

In line with Foucault’s notion of *pensée du dehors*, we can surely state that there is no *proper side of thinking*, some determining criteria that would guarantee us that we are thinking properly. Thinking implies wanderings and deflections, de-

5 Ibid., 89.

6 See *ibid.*, 89–95.

tours — thinking is always seductive. It is not on the “right path,” it can never be. It is misleading, and involves demanding task of turning from the “right path,” from the political and ideological pattern that gave birth to the normative notion of the “proper” side of thinking, or of the practice of taking sides in thinking, of “sides” as such.

As Foucault argues:

It [critique] must be an instrument for those who fight, resist, and who no longer want what is. It must be used in processes of conflict, confrontation and resistance attempts. It must not be the law of the law. It is not a stage in a program. It is a challenge to the status quo.<sup>7</sup>

Accordingly, critique would always mean a certain re-composition, an invention. It means that being political today demands from us an effort of re-imagining, re-inventing our thinking and doing, as well as rethinking the limits and possibilities within which our existence will and/or will not be possible.

### 3. *I Don't Say the Things I Say Because They Are What I Think*

At the very end of his interview for Dutch TV — which, as the story goes, was lost — Michel Foucault (with his mystical, seductive smile) says: “I don’t say the things I say because they are what I think, I say them as a way to make sure they no longer are what I think.”<sup>8</sup>

One of the possible ways to understand this seemingly non-logical, puzzling, and paradoxical statement follows the certain tradition of thinking in the history of the so-called “Western” philosophy in which thinking is understood as something that

7 Michel Foucault, “Table ronde du 20 mai 1978,” in *Michel Foucault: Dits et écrits II, 1976–1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001).

8 An interview which was made with Foucault by Dutch philosopher Fons Elders was preceded by discussion “Human Nature — Justice versus Power” between Foucault and Chomsky on Dutch TV in 1971. The interview was published in Michel Foucault, *Freedom and Knowledge*, eds. Fons Elders and Lionel Claris (Amsterdam: Elders Special Production BV, 2013), 25–47.

cannot be “objective.” Should it be assumed that one of the aims of thinking is the achievement of a certain kind of comprehension, a holistic, stable, and coherent thought intending the object of thinking — as we already said, that very thought will necessarily encompass the one who is thinking, which might, furthermore, cause a specific vertigo in which the thinker and the object of thought are integrally intertwined.

Foucault’s sentence “I don’t say the things I say because they are what I think, I say them as a way to make sure they no longer are what I think” seems to imply that when we are thinking, we never think what we actually think we think, but instead we are caught in this endless, dizzying shifting of thinking and non-thinking, between thinker and the object of thought. This oscillation occurs in a manner which indisputably — for even the tiniest interval or moment in time — excludes the possibility of identification, stabilization, or determination of the positions (between the one who thinks and what is thought) — except in their eternal and dizzying shifts and exchanges.

This Nietzschean view of knowledge as a product, result, and effect of power struggles, that Foucault adopts, has important consequences for the understanding of the “subject” of knowledge. Foucault does not understand the subject as universal, timeless or abstract, as being the source of how one makes sense of the world, and the foundation of all knowledge, thought and action. For Foucault, the knowing subject, the one traditional epistemology speaks about, does not exist in his/her autonomy and universality. Foucault explicitly rejects the subject of the Enlightenment understood as an *a priori* subject of knowledge: “What I refused was precisely that you first of all set up a theory of the subject. [...] What I wanted to know was how the subject constituted himself in such and such determinate form.”<sup>9</sup>

The subject is an effect, the product of specific power and knowledge constellation. That subject is not prior the history, and not pre-given. It is created and changed by outside events; it

9 Foucault quoted in Margaret McLaren, “Foucault and the Subject of Feminism,” *Social Theory and Practice* 23 (1997): 109–27, at 112.



is constantly dissolved and recreated in different configurations along with other forms of knowledge and social practices.<sup>10</sup> This conception of the subject of knowledge as an effect of power and knowledge networks, or this dismissal of the traditional subject of knowledge as one of the central epistemological categories is probably the most radical of Foucault's epistemological moves in his genealogical works. To put it simply, epistemology is not based on the concept of the knower, and knowledge does not have a cause in independently existing knower opposite to the world and other knowers. Foucault rejects the constituting knowing subject of the Enlightenment epistemology. However, Foucault does not reject or abandon the subject completely but he does reject the "philosophy of the subject," the One, universal, disembodied subject, out of space and time, and outside power relations. Foucault's conception of the subject of knowledge displaces the traditional dichotomy between the constituting Cartesian subject, who possesses agency and autonomy, and constituted subject that is entirely determined by social forces. For Foucault, the subject is constituted but it is at the same time the locus of agonism, a permanent provocation to power/knowledge constellation that defines its subjectivity.<sup>11</sup>

By following the similar line of thought, with the idea of the subject created and changed by outside forces and events, in his essay "The Thought of the Outside [*La pensée du dehors*],"<sup>12</sup> Foucault advocates for the way of thinking which accounts for the experience of the "outside"; the way of thinking, which is, according to Foucault, possible

10 See also Clare O'Farrell, *Michel Foucault* (London: Sage Publications, 2005).

11 See Katarina Loncarevic, "Foucault's Genealogy as Epistemology," *Belgrade Philosophical Annual* 24 (2013): 65–81, at 75.

12 The article written in homage to Blanchot, "La pensée du dehors," was originally published in *Critique* in June 1966. In most of Foucault's essays that are usually recognized as the ones that belongs to his early works and called his literally phase, he is concerned with transgression of the boundaries of language. They almost all share similar concerns: the notions of exteriority, self—reflexivity and the relation of language to madness and death.

[p]erhaps through a form of thought whose still vague possibility was sketched by Western culture in its margins. A thought that stands outside subjectivity, setting its limits as though from without, articulating its end, making its dispersion shine forth, taking in only its invincible absence [...] a thought that, in relation to the interiority of our philosophical reflection and the positivity of our knowledge, constitutes what in a phrase we might call “the thought of the outside.”<sup>13</sup>

In this essay, but also in the sentence “I don’t say the things I say because they are what I think, I say them as a way to make sure they no longer are what I think,” Foucault shows how the utterance of the phrase “I speak” or “I say” problematizes the idea of the supposed interiority of an “I think”: “the speaking subject is also the subject about which it speaks.”<sup>14</sup>

For him, the work and responsibility of thinking involves an effort to reflect “outside” the already established, limited and codified, historically constituted structures of thinking. This new way of thinking which accounts for the experience of the “outside” — or the “thought of the outside” as opposed to thinking in relation to the interiority of our philosophical reflection and the positivity of our knowledge which always already repeats what is already known — is a kind of *unthinkable thinking* or the *thinking of the unthinkable*. The term *unthinkable* usually refers to the incapability of being conceived or considered, to something that escapes symbolization and representation, to something that is not comparable or that cannot be believed. It can also mean the incredible, inconceivable, or unimaginable — extremely improbable in a way that goes against common sense. The unthinkable is what is beyond the common sense, rationality and generally accepted norms of thinking and doing. The unthinkable thus equals to non-normative, non-legal, or

13 Michel Foucault, “The Thought of the Outside,” in *Foucault/Blanchot*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and Brian Massumi (New York: Zone Books, 2006), 7–58, at 15–16.

14 *Ibid.*, 10.

even to non-constitutional. The unthinkable is something that cannot find its own name and its own meaning.

In other words, it might also mean that thinking as such makes and reproduces the normativity — that thinking *is* normativity. Does it mean that we *can* think only about the things that we already know? How do we think of change? How do we conceive the political? How do we think the unthinkable?

Coming back to Foucault:

Thinking about the being of language, he claims, opens the subject in the direction of a radical "outside," which destabilizes it and brings it into question. Understood in this manner — according to his interpretation and against the Cartesian tradition of understanding the subject as self-sufficient, self-identical *cogito*, which as such is capable of granting the Truth — the subject is revealed as nothing more than the process of its own disappearance and cancellation. In that sense, the utterance "I don't say the things I say because they are what I think, I say them as a way to make sure they no longer are what I think," indicates that the subject is no longer the sovereign carrier of meaning and significance, but represents a place of opening, exposure and void.

Or, as Jean-Luc Nancy explains, the opening can be understood two ways: "as a wound or as an access route — of entry and exit," and goes on to engage the French notion of "being beside oneself [*être hors de soi*]" in unrecoverability from being exposed to "everything that removes 'us' from 'ourselves,'" that "opens, quite simply, an outside-of according to which we don't come back to ourselves, we don't recover ourselves, nor do we find ourselves." Nancy further concludes that this place of opening, exposure and void is a detour "to that of the other which is outside or is done outside, that is, not the presence of another before me (with its own 'inside') but non-closure, non-return to the self, neither of the other, nor of me."<sup>15</sup>

15 See the interview with Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Real Outside Is 'At the Heart' of the Inside," *Atopia*, 2007, [http://www.rave.ca/en/journals\\_info/1432/moohk/](http://www.rave.ca/en/journals_info/1432/moohk/).

The being of language can appear only if the subject is dead in all of its forms. According to Foucault, this, however, as it was already mentioned before, requires a novel model of thinking, perhaps through a form of thinking which is “outside” of subjectivity and which articulates and announces its own end; a thinking that recognizes its own disappearance as inevitable and its contours as *the thought of the outside*. This thinking is about the absolute, radical outside as opposed to the “inside” of the traditional understanding of the subject, but at the same time also as the radical outside of every possible “inside.”

This radical outside contains no inner essence whatsoever, and neither does it have presence in any positive sense which would allow a sovereign subject to master over it or to possess it within its own subjectivity. Also, the subject cannot appropriate the outside; the very idea of the appropriation of what is outside of the subject, according to Foucault, would imply one of the two disputable understandings of the notion of the inside: first one of them implies some sort of the inner nature of the outside which could be appropriated, and the second one implies the idea of the inside of this “I” which could gain its integrity precisely through appropriation of the outside. “I” forever remains, argues Foucault, that irreversibly outside of the outer.

The inside as the operation of the outside: in all his work Foucault seems haunted by this theme of an inside which is merely the fold of the outside, as if a ship were a folding of the sea.<sup>16</sup>

Thinking of/as the experience of the outside is thus the experience of/as (one’s own) undoing, which exposes the subject to everything that might threaten or question it; that might change it.

Thinking understood in such a manner, Foucault argues, could be considered as dangerous act since the outside can only be experienced in the process of one’s own doubling, undoing, becoming the other.

16 Deleuze, *Foucault*, 81.

But the double is never a projection of the interior; on the contrary, it is an interiorization of the outside. It is not a doubling of the One, but a redoubling of the Other. It is not a reproduction of the Same, but a repetition of the Different. It is not the emanation of an I, but something that places in immanence an always other or a Non-self. It is never the other who is a double in the doubling process, it is a self that lives me as the double of the other: I do not encounter myself on the outside, I find the other in me ("it is always concerned with showing how the Other, the Distant, is also the Near and the Same").<sup>17</sup>

17 Ibid., 98.