

‘Society Must Be Defended’: Lectures at the College de France. By Michel Foucault. Translated by David Macey. NY: Picador, 2003. 352 pp. ISBN 0312203187.

There has long been an uneven relationship between communication scholarship and the work of Michel Foucault. While some have taken him up through discourse analysis and others via a focus on the body, by and large he has been out of disciplinary bounds through his rejection of “ideology” and his famous contretemps with Habermas in the 1980s. Perhaps the release of his lectures from the College de France may revitalize exchanges between communication studies and Foucault, although it remains unlikely that one day our new century of communication studies will be known as “Foucaultia.”

As the chair of “The History of Systems of Thought” at the prestigious College de France, Foucault was required to deliver 26 hours of lectures annually; *Society Must Be Defended* is from 1976 and the first of his 14 previously unpublished lecture-series scheduled for print in the coming years. Among Foucaultian scholars, there is an excitement about the impending releases that matches that of the original events—when those in attendance comprised a who’s who of leading French intellectuals, and loudspeakers were set up in adjoining lecture halls for the overflow. For those of us studying communication there is equal reason for excitement as much common ground is covered in these lectures, albeit via different conceptual configurations. Specifically, 1976 marked a key period of transitions: Foucault began to fully conceptualize the relationship between power-knowledge; he definitively moved beyond juridical forms to microphysical relations of power; he emphasized how amidst our perpetual socio-economic struggles that “truth” is wielded as a strategic weapon in the construction of “legitimate” knowledge; he attempted to get out of the “trap” of domination through a new focus on resistance; and finally, he surpassed the epistemic horizon of discourse analysis with the new concept of the *dispositif*.

What is striking about these lectures is the sheer amount of ground covered and the erudition with which it is negotiated. Readers of *Power/Knowledge* will be familiar with the first two chapters as they appeared therein as ‘Two Lectures.’ That is where Foucault summarizes and problematizes his work of the past five or so years with its focus on the disciplinary subjugation of bodies and of knowledge (having followed a trajectory separate from but resonating with that of the Frankfurt School, particularly the ‘culture industry’ thesis). What is carried forward from this work is the continued breaking apart of the unified *a priori* subject; what is different is Foucault’s now-explicit recognition that resistance is always coextensive with relations of domination. Hence, Foucault asks not ‘how, why, and by what right’ subjects agree to be subjugated but how actual relations of subjugation manufacture subjects. But these are not the alienated subjectivities of critical theory as the multiplicities, differences, specificities, and reversibility of relations of domination are emphasized. Finally, he articulates those local tactics of domination with structures of power as global strategies be they capital, patriarchy, sexuality, or race.

Foucault undertakes a bold gambit: not only does he put power-knowledge-subjectivity in the midst of a perpetual struggle between domination and resistance; he locates ruptures in the edifice of sovereignty by inverting Clausewitz’s famous aphorism. Thus it becomes “politics is a continuation of war by other means.” “War,” as a model for analysing power, is used not to ignore juridical institutions, structures, and practices but to help us see the “blood” the “burning towns and ravaged fields” and the “fury” that facilitates “peace, order, wealth and authority.” This new grid of intelligibility has two effects: war is generalized as a condition of relation; however, it is only ever manifested in specific and singular struggles—this is the particularity which belies the sanguine countenance of sovereign right. Such a perspective in no way denies more generalized class relations flowing from the global strategy of capital; rather, it rejects a unified source of struggle in favour of multidirectional fronts (and thus rather complicating the tasks of political economists of com-

munication). Indeed, his real object of critique is the liberal-bourgeois theory of sovereignty, with its abstract universal subject and social contract.

The lectures offer insight into the debate that would later emerge with Habermas. For Foucault, all communication is strategic and instrumental within a particular composition of relations; the universalistic discourse of communicative reason can only be expressed in the realm of sovereign subjects. To explicate this, he turns to genealogy, his emerging methodology of resistance: "It is a way of playing local, discontinuous, disqualified, or nonlegitimized knowledges off against the unitary theoretical instance that claims to be able to filter them, organize them into a hierarchy, organize them in the name of a true body of knowledge, in the name of the rights of a science that is in the hands of the few" (p. 9). Here there are clear connections to 'subaltern studies.' He deploys his genealogy to further problematize the universal truth and central authority of sovereign power via sources both expected (Diggers and Levellers) and unexpected (Comte de Boulainvilliers). The latter, an early eighteenth century "aristocratic reactionary" cuts a fascinating figure of resistance, demonstrating the polyvalent nature of counterhistory.

It will be interesting to political economists to learn that Boulainvilliers initiated a form of historicism that Marx would later credit as the conceptual source of what he called class struggle. The Comte, a lover of Spinoza and admirer of Mohammed, was an early writer of "race wars", not predicated on modern racism, but on the Frankish invasion and Gallic capitulation of the fifth century and the intervening millennium-plus of a complex relations of forces that resulted in the particular rights of sovereignty against which Boulainvilliers struggled. War, as a grid of intelligibility, and expressed in counter-history, is something the State sought in vain to contain by homogenizing, normalizing, classifying, and centralizing (cf. Encyclopédie, and the related "ideologues" as subjectivities of resistance).

Such conjectural analysis seems particularly pertinent in this time when war is increasingly being mobilized as a geopolitical strategy; furthermore, the "barbarian invasion" of which Boulainvilliers writes bears an uncomfortable resemblance to the "war on terror" that has been thrust upon us by particular sovereign powers: "[the barbarian is] always the man who stalks the frontiers of States...He does not make his entrance into history by founding a society, but by penetrating a civilization, setting it ablaze and destroying it" (p. 195). It is this grid of intelligibility—polyvalent counter-histories—that sovereign power must guard against, disassemble and capture. For Boulainvilliers, war helped us understand the composition of force that constituted the imposition of sovereign right; for Foucault, war is the ground on which "truth" and "knowledge" are wielded as strategic weapons; for the emerging biopolitical state war becomes that which "defends" society from threats born of and in its own body. From SARS to al-Qaeda to the Bush administration—to the manner in which we can see and speak of those via the commercial mediascape—there is much of relevance in *Society Must be Defended* for the communication scholar.

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