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Cool Heads and Hot Hearts

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into interpreting the texts. Interestingly, both Jon Binnie and Hilary Radner illuminate the relationship between sexuality and economics in their articles. While Radner highlights the links between sexuality and consumer culture, Binnie calls for further analysis of the interaction between sexuality, globalization and neoliberalism. Desiree Lewis provides an empirically informed analysis of how gender, sexuality, nationalism and citizenship intersect in contemporary South Africa. Paul Boyce also uses empirical insights from an Indian context to support his insightful account of the relationship between sexuality, subjectivity and representation.

All the contributors highlight the significance of institutionalized heterosexuality in contemporary society. Indeed, this was one of both Foucault and Rich's key insights – that heterosexuality was not simply a personal identity, but rather occupied a hegemonic normative space that affected every sphere of life. Regardless of whether you are most engaged by Rich's political passion or Foucault's trailblazing methodology, what seems clear from this symposium is that contemporary work on sexualities continues to be characterized by writing that can inspire individual epiphanies, draw insightful connections between different spheres of everyday life, and relate particular relationships to wider global concerns and debates. In this sense, subsequent generations of scholars continue the work of Rich and Foucault.

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Cool Heads and Hot Hearts

I regularly teach both *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1 (Foucault, 1981) and 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' (Rich, 1980) to undergraduate and graduate students in introductory courses to gender and sexuality studies. In my lectures, I do what I'm sure everyone else who teaches the texts does: present them as significant contributions to the development of our thinking about gender and sexuality. I discuss the texts' intellectual history, and I explain their impact. I am enthusiastic about both works, but over the years I have noticed that students inevitably engage quite differently with them. Foucault they like. They find his book difficult, but stimulating. Rich, on the other hand, they either dismiss, or they treat as an historical artifact – something to scrutinize with respect, perhaps, but not with involvement.

Even though I am far from in agreement with much in Rich's article, this response has always bothered me. Of course I realize that there are a

number of fairly obvious factors that might explain why students engage with the texts in the ways they do. One is that Foucault is more famous, and most students will at least have heard his name before they read the book. Because his name carries more intellectual cachet, they understandably are inclined to invest more in his work. Another reason for the different reactions could be that Foucault's intervention is a book, whereas Rich's is an article. There is something to be said for that, but on the other hand my students also read other articles – such as Gayle Rubin's 'The Traffic in Women' and 'Thinking Sex', and Monique Wittig's 'The Straight Mind' – which stimulate them much more than Rich's article does. Yet another reason could be that Rich's article is explicitly tied to a particular political movement, namely lesbian feminism – a movement that had all but expired before many of the students we teach today were even born. *The History of Sexuality* is famously uninterested in displaying its political alliances, and this ambiguity can make it seem more 'theoretical' than Rich's text – despite the fact that it is easy to argue that Foucault's book is just as political as Rich's article, and Rich's article is just as theoretical as Foucault's book. That Foucault's writing is dense and full of oblique references and unstated expectations about a reader's background knowledge also consolidates its status as theoretical, especially in gender and sexuality studies, where textual impenetrability has come to connote profundity. And finally, of course, there is the possibility that my students treat the two texts differently because I as a teacher perhaps unknowingly present them quite differently, and they pick up on my biases.

So all those possibilities exist as reasons why my students seem to find much more sustenance in Foucault's book than in Rich's article. At the same time though, I wonder whether there might be something in the texts themselves that invites different styles of engagement.

Both *The History of Sexuality* and 'Compulsory Heterosexuality' are indisputably polemical texts. But they are polemical in very different ways. Rich is clearly channeling what she, in a later preface to the article, referred to as 'the depth of women's rage and fear regarding sexuality' (1993: 228), Her tone is earnest. She marshals the authority of confrontational feminist scholars like Catherine MacKinnon and Kathleen Barry; she tallies brutalities. Foucault's tone, in stark contrast, is twinkling. His book begins like a bedtime tale: 'For a time now, the story goes . . .' his opening sentence purrs. He lets us settle in comfortably for two paragraphs before the shadow appears on the horizon: 'But twilight soon fell upon this bright day'. Feminist Rich holds up her fist and solicits our anger. Avuncular Foucault extends his hand and invites us to accompany him on a journey.

The prose in which the two texts are written is also quite distinct. Rich's writing is measured and reasoning. She discloses her own dismay

at discovering that even ostensibly progressive feminist work ignores lesbians and the structural conditions of its own production. She explains carefully why feminist analysis would be ‘more accurate, more powerful, more truly a force for change’ if it ‘dealt with lesbian existence as a reality and a source of knowledge and power available to women, or with the institution of heterosexuality itself as a beachhead of male dominance’ (1980: 633). So Rich wants to teach and raise the consciousness of her reader. Foucault wants to seduce his. His book about the history of sexuality is, itself, sexy. The images he creates are flushly erotic – they are images of connection, touch, embrace and arousal. His sentences both describe seductions, and enact them: ‘The power which thus took charge of sexuality set about contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled moments. It wrapped the body in its sexual embrace’ (1981: 44). Or how about this:

At issue is not a movement bent on pushing rude sex back into some obscure and inaccessible region, but on the contrary, a process that spreads it over the surface of things and bodies, arouses it, draws it out and bids it speak, implants it in reality and enjoins it to tell the truth: an entire glittering sexual array, reflected in a myriad of discourses, the obstination of powers, and the interplay of knowledge and pleasure. (1981: 72)

I don’t know how others feel reading lines like those, but if a couple of candles and bottle of wine were thrown in with them, then Michel, *chouette*, I’d be yours forever.

Now by pointing out stylistic differences like these, I am proposing ways to account for differing receptions of these texts. I am not suggesting that Rich and Foucault are representative of larger trends (such as ‘feminism’ and ‘poststructuralism’) and of course I am not arguing that feminist writing is plodding and poststructuralists are all charismatic charmers. There are plenty of dazzling feminist texts from the era – Wittig, I think, consistently dazzles, and whatever one may think of MacKinnon’s politics, she certainly knows how to grab a reader – although perhaps ‘pummel’ is the *mot juste* in her case. Most poststructuralist writing, on the other hand, is so bloated with clubby references, and is so smugly pleased with itself, that it reads like tofu tastes – it may nourish, but its enjoyment factor is nil.

The differences in tone and style that emerge when one examines Rich’s and Foucault’s texts together extend to the way they portray the central problem that the two works explore. That difference is this: Rich tells us we are wrong because we are wrong; Foucault tells us we are wrong because we are right. Heterosexuality isn’t natural, says Rich, and we’re wrong to think it is. Foucault, in contrast, once again, soothes more than he lectures. We do talk more about sexuality than people used to, he

agrees. We're right to think we do. But we're wrong to think that talking about sex and feeling empowered by doing so means that we are 'liberated'. On the contrary, he informs us – in wanting to talk about sex and know more about it, we merely bind ourselves ever more tightly to 'the deployment of sexuality that has lifted up from deep within us a sort of mirage in which we think we see ourselves reflected – the dark shimmer of sex' (p. 157).

The counterintuitive nature of Foucault's claims is another part of their appeal, especially because they are wrapped in such plush prose. The smooth collusion he creates with his reader dulls his text's sting. My sense is that many students encountering *The History of Sexuality* for the first time do feel stung – not by Foucault, but by their startled realization that their commonsense understandings of things they take for granted are actually historical novelties. A remarkable and enduring feature of Foucault's book is that it still regularly provokes epiphanies. It recasts students' ways of seeing the world and it opens their eyes to their own investment in what they come to understand are politically-saturated social structures. (Another book that I see still has astonishing power to do this is de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*). I have no doubt that Rich's text had similar power when it was published – we wouldn't be discussing it in *Sexualities* today if it hadn't. However, in the almost 30 years that have passed since its publication, many of its central arguments, such as the idea of compulsory heterosexuality, have been theoretically superceded. Or else they have passed into popular consciousness (after Ellen DeGeneres, Rosie O'Donnell, k.d. lang, *The L-word* and any number of other popular manifestations, the fact of 'lesbian existence' is generally recognized, if not always applauded, by most) or they've been discarded altogether (Rich's idea of a 'lesbian continuum' never really took off among either lesbians or straight feminists).

I think the fact that Foucault historicizes his material and presents our current preoccupations as ones that have changed and will change is another reason – perhaps the single most important one – why his book retains an immediacy that Rich's article lacks. An insurmountable theoretical and political obstacle facing anyone who teaches or reads Rich's article is the author's conviction that the lesbian continuum is trans-historical and trans-cultural, and that therefore, women's relationships with one another, in some important way, are always the same. The examples she gives stretch between 'the impudent intimate girl friendships of eight or nine year old girls' to 'the banding together of those women of the twelfth and fifteenth centuries known as Beguines' to 'the secret sororities and economic networks reported among African women' to 'the more celebrated 'Lesbians' of the women's school around Sappho of the seventh century B.C.' (1980: 651). It is possible to contextualize this

understanding of lesbianism – one way I do this in teaching is by screening the scene from the 1979 documentary *Town Bloody Hall* where *Lesbian Nation* author Jill Johnson delivers a riveting speech about how all women are lesbians and then hilariously defies moderator Norman Mailer's shouts that she shut up by making out with her girlfriends onstage in front of hundreds of flabbergasted New Yorkers – but it is hard to extract from it any viable theoretical or political guidelines.

It is also hard to recuperate Rich's then-dominant lesbian-feminist view of men as universally, if not necessarily 'naturally', bad. Particularly problematic for today's students – at least for the progressive sort I see at a school like NYU – is her equation of all men with the patriarchy that she regards as being so unequivocally brutal towards all women, and her complete neglect of gay men, or transpersons. Historically speaking, again, neither of these features of Rich's text are surprising. She wrote 'Compulsory Heterosexuality' at a time when lesbian separatism was still being advocated as the politically consistent lifestyle for wimmin, and when gay men were regarded by many politically active lesbians as (at best) wolves in sheep's clothing who cried over discrimination but whose real gripe was that their sexuality disqualified them from the same patriarchal privileges as their straight brothers, or (at worst) as more egregious than straight men because even though straight men hated and oppressed women, at least they maintained some kind of investment in them. So once more, Rich's views on matters like those are comprehensible, but that doesn't make them fruitful. As for transpeople, her general argument about heterosexuality being the creation of men, and her use of the expression 'false consciousness' (1980: 647) to describe heterosexual women's attachment to males, suggest that had she mentioned transsexualism, her opinion about it would probably not have been very different from that of her feminist contemporary Janice Raymond – whose toxic polemic *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* was published a year before Rich's essay.

One might charge Foucault with similar kinds of omissions, and he has been excoriated for not paying enough attention to women, especially after the publication of volumes 2 and 3 of the *History of Sexuality* series. Now that the dust around that issue has settled, however, it seems clear that although Foucault wasn't particularly interested *in* women, his work has been remarkably productive for the study *of* women; indeed it has become canonical in gender studies and it anchors the analyses of many of the leading feminist and queer scholars of our time. Volume 1 of the series does offer a groundbreaking analysis of the hystericization of women's bodies and of the husband–wife axis as one of anchor points of the deployment of sexuality. Although Foucault doesn't discuss the subjective experiences of women (or men) in the book, he does

provide a supple framework for understanding gendered subjectivity, one that has been and continues to be elaborated by scholars of gender and sexuality.

So in the end I agree with my students who continue to find Foucault's book to be an extraordinarily fertile text. But I also differ with the ones who think Rich's article has little to say to them. For all of its dated politics and its historical ingenuousness, Rich deserves more credit than today's students seem wont to give her. Her article is one of the crucial links between feminism and queer theory, and for that reason alone, it deserves to be read carefully and often. I'm sure I'm not the only reader of this journal who is increasingly exasperated by otherwise intelligent students who divide the history of gender and sexuality studies and activism into BB and AB (Before and After Butler) epochs, and who are convinced that before the coming of the messiah in 1990, feminists were deluded, racist essentialists who unfortunately just didn't 'get' gender. Butler herself is always scrupulous about acknowledging her sources of inspiration, and even though all Rich's article gets in *Gender Trouble* is a brief gloss in a footnote, the fault of this misconception is not hers. The fault, it seems to me, is the way that gender and sexuality studies tend to be discussed. Articles like Rich's are often regarded as museum pieces, which is fine except that viewing them only in that way blanches them of the passion they express and used to elicit. I do think that if 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' is a compelling example of how we did think, *The History of Sexuality* remains an unsurpassed example of how we might think. But Foucault isn't angry, and Rich is. And although both a cool head and a hot heart are ideally what, together, propel us along in our research and teaching, one might wonder if the field of gender and sexuality studies hasn't lost something valuable when the hottest hearts we have are mostly to be found in the writings that people treat as relics.

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Arguments, Citations, Traces: Rich and Foucault and the Problem of Heterosexuality

By any measure, in the decades since the publication of Rich's essay 'Compulsory Heterosexuality' and Foucault's first book on the history of sexuality, Foucault has been taken up and utilized to a far greater degree than Rich. The collected literature in sexualities shows thousands more citations to Foucault's work than to Rich's essay by scholars writing in the traditions of cultural studies and/or queer theory and by virtually every young scholar working in the broad area of sexualities. References to Rich are absolutely and comparatively scarce; even those directly pondering heterosexuality, rarely refer to her essay. I wondered about the intentions of those who commissioned this symposium; why focus on such seemingly incompatible 'landmark' writers. But then, the same madness which seemed to overcome the *Sexualities* staff overtook me, who is at least momentarily obsessed with how the contributions of Rich and Foucault, but especially 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', has fared.

Foucault and Rich came to their specific writings on sexuality through different intellectual and political trajectories; they addressed different audiences, and expressed different intentions, which set the terms for their reception. Rich, already known as a political poet and essayist, was more directly engaged in political struggle at that time than Foucault, already known as a philosopher. Rich is writing to feminist scholars in a climate of intense political struggle, a poet in a context of a spirited, challenging, energized feminist movement, looking for historical and analytical tools. Major feminist intellectuals and activists challenged the essay as soon as it was published, rightly linking it with other writings of radical feminists, and