

What Does It Matter Who Is Speaking? Census, Censor, Address

Thomas L. Dumm
Political Science
Amherst College Amherst, MA 01002
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Introduction

I want to thank Tom Keenan for the invitation -- it affords me the opportunity to visit with some very good friends who I first met at Bard a number of summers ago now, who I have come to count among the people whose intelligence and spirit I admire most. It also pleases me to think that Tom has joined you in your enterprise. I relish the chance to speak here especially because in a sense this talk is an attempt to think aloud about a project, the outline of which is still vague to me. The friendly venue encourages me. So in advance I deeply appreciate your patience in listening.

I must say that I find the idea of censorship to be repellant -- a fetter on the free imagination as I have been taught to think of it and as I suspect that most of you have been taught as well. However, I also think of censorship as one of those tricky categories, and not only in the sense of thinking about words that wound, or hate crime, or other terrible things that we associate with irresponsible speech, the sort of speech that the ACLU, for example, will (quite properly, I think) tell us is at the heart of the First Amendment protection of speech, precisely because it is the sort of speech that we don't want to hear. While this familiar protection is part of the American landscape of thinking about censorship, today I hope for us to conceive of censorship as an activity that doesn't only repress speech, but shapes it. This is a dangerous idea, I know, and I hope to approach it cautiously. I

want to pursue this idea along a couple of indirect avenues, but let me begin by trying to explain why I am interested in the question that forms the title of this talk.

Foucault

In early 1968, Michel Foucault wrote a response to a question posed by the editors of the journal *Esprit*. Like many others who had been swept up in the discussions and controversies concerning the appearance of *The Order of Things* in 1966, the editors of *Esprit* worried about the consequences of what they characterized as "a thought which introduces discontinuity and the constraints of system into the history of the mind." Foucault seemed to be offering a choice between absolute quiescence to the contemporary order of things or a complete reliance on an exterior violence to overthrow that order. The editors wanted to know if Foucault really was limiting the choices for political participation to passivity or violence.

Foucault's response moves beyond the immediate crisis of the politics of 1968. In explaining himself, Foucault anticipated a subsequent thought concerning the relationship of discourse to power he was shortly after to express in the introduction to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, a work that he claimed has as one of its purposes the creation a labyrinth in which he may be able, if not to disappear, to lose a measure of identity:

"What, do you imagine that I would take so much trouble and so much pleasure in writing, do you think that I would keep so persistently to my task, if I were not preparing -- with a rather shaky hand -- a labyrinth into which I can venture, in which I can move my discourse, opening up underground passages, forcing it to go far from itself, finding overhangs that reduce and transform its itinerary, in which I can lose myself and appear at last to eyes that I will never have to meet again. I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face."

He rephrased this desire in *The Order of Discourse*, his inaugural

lecture at the College de France the following year, as a preference "to be enveloped by speech, carried away well beyond all possible beginnings, rather than have to begin it myself." Foucault wasn't simply being shy. What concerned him is the historicity of discourse, and the loss of a beginning, the erasure of a trail that would trace back to an origin, whether mytho-poetic, legal, or biographical, so as to contain or otherwise mark the infinite openness of desire. But it is not this contrast between law and desire that is of immediate import when he responded to the editors of *Esprit*.

Among other things, in his response he asks the question I want to ponder today: In each sentence that you pronounce -- and very precisely in the one that you are busy writing at this moment, you who have been so intent, for so many pages, on answering a question in which you felt yourself personally concerned and who are going to sign this text with your name -- in every sentence there reigns the nameless law, the blank indifference: "What [does it] matter who is speaking; someone has said: what [does it] matter who is speaking?"

Why does this question concern me so much? One way of thinking about it would be to relate Foucault's concern to comparable concerns expressed by some other thinkers to whom I have been increasingly attracted as imagined companions of Foucault, or at least, as compatible spirits, namely, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Stanley Cavell, and Ann Lauterbach. I dare to name Ann Lauterbach, large and present here. That she is a poet gives me pause, because the sort of acknowledgement that flows from the status of poetry means for me that in her writing of poetry and prose she approaches this question from an angle both obvious and mysterious to us: her words come back to me in alienated majesty. When, for instance, she says, "These old-fashioned contingencies shamed us/but the new had no agenda, no secret plan or past," at one moment in her recent grouping of poems, "If In Time," and then much later in the same grouping, says, "A genetic stroke of luck is not to have this receptor./Yet another instruction, one we still cannot read.", I imagine her words as journeying to the

most obscure and hidden levels of "the nameless law, the blank indifference" that Foucault discerns as at the heart of a politics of discourse, a place where body and word are one, though not yet. Lauterbach shapes this suspension as something we still cannot read, echoing the "new yet unapproachable" America of Emerson.

I believe that when Foucault was struggling with the question of the matter of who is speaking, he was worried about the same something that worried Emerson and that worries Cavell and Lauterbach. What Foucault announced as his aim (in a passage toward the end of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*), "to cleanse [the history of thought] of all transcendental narcissism; it had to be freed from that circle of lost origin, and rediscovered where it had been imprisoned;"(203), or, a few pages later, to show that "the role of such a discourse is not to dissipate oblivion" but "to make differences,"(205) he can be seen as gathering together a series of questions so as to enable us, in Cavell's phrase, to live our skepticism, or, in Emerson's method, to found by finding, to see that around every circle another may be drawn and not despair by that fact but be inspirited by it, or, to bring this digression to a close, to think about discourse in a way that tracks Cavell's description of Emerson's essay "Experience," to write an essay (a reckoning) about the conditions of the very possibility of writing an essay (a measure both limited and infinite), and (most controversially, I'd guess, in that I may be departing from Cavell's self-understanding in making him rhyme with Foucault), to comprehend that task as that of making differences, not overcoming them.

Is there a way that censorship participates in the task of making differences? Or is censorship that which arrests that process? Maybe it does both. The question of censorship may be a question of what it means to address. Of the concerns I bring here today, I want to take up this question -- "What does it matter who is speaking?" -- as well as its ironic rejoinder in the form of a subordinate clause -- "someone has said" -- on yet another register, as way into thinking about a kind or form of address. The question of address resides within the domain of censorship, in

that who and how we think about both the act of addressing and destination of an address are usually matters of state regulation. But I want to ask how it is possible to think about this matter from outside of or beyond the specificity of the state, especially when we understand the state as a domain specific to the modern order we more or less inhabit.

In this sense the question suggests to me an epistemological stance slightly skeptical of Louis Althusser's theorizing of the interpellation of the subject in reference to what he called Ideological State Apparatuses. Crucial to the creation of the subject out of individuals is the moment of interpellation, that moment when one is hailed (and nine out of ten times knows that one is hailed. And yet that very moment is paradoxical, or more precisely, fabulous, (to use a term I learned best from Tom Keenan), because the individual and the subject already are hailed, already are subjects of ideology, for Althusser. For Althusser there is no gap, no moment of anonymous being, no space where one may repair, no unknowable (as yet), but a great and burdensome retrospection.

Such is not the case for Foucault. Althusser's inquiry into the force of interpellation and the constitution of the subject has, for Foucault, a double, expressed as a concern for understanding how the person who addresses may be constituted through speech as a subject. Someone speaks to me, and in speaking becomes a subject. This formula presents to us a different aspect of the constitution of the self to consider. We might look to structures of address deployed through cultural media, through technological means of communication, and through the agencies of governmentality as they shape the self. Any of these means for the organization and deployment of discourses may operate so as to preclude alternative imaginations, all of them may contribute to the establishment and destruction of a variety of real and imagined sites where identities may be contested, any of them might form the grounding of a censorship of self, and each of them might be more or less associated with arbitrary and violent lines of exclusion and inclusion, truth and falsity, reason and madness,

and male and female (as though any or all of the distributions of meaning inspired by these supposed opposites are capable of exhausting our imaginative possibilities). Or, to translate this inquiry into terms I find attractive for their associations with a politics of the ordinary, we might say that to ask what it matters who is speaking is a way to link the constitutive and amending roles of discourse to us subjects who bear the worlds of words through which we live.

At another, associated moment in Foucault's work, in a lecture on the subject of governmentality in 1978, he outlines a series of related sites of governance that he suggests underwent profound transformations more or less around the sixteenth century. He notes that government as a general problem becomes the discourse through which are generated an extraordinarily diverse set of questions. He writes,

"How to govern oneself, how to be governed, how to govern others, how to become the best possible governor -- all of these problems, in their multiplicity and intensity, seem to me to be characteristic of the sixteenth century, which lies, to put it schematically, at the crossroads of two processes: the one which, shattering the structures of feudalism, leads to the establishment of the great territorial, administrative and colonial states; and that totally different movement which, with the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, raises the issue of how one must be spiritually ruled and led on this earth in order to achieve eternal salvation."

In this passage Foucault is describing the expansion of a specific kind of rationality peculiar to governance and its dissemination in the face of the obstacles presented by the opposing projects of sovereign power. He suggests that sovereignty is a power too abstract to manage things -- which is the predominant demand of government as modernity emerges -- yet that it still needs to be responded to because of its own pervasive character and symbolic power over the subjects of nations -- a power which persists into modernity even as, and perhaps even because the idea of God becomes problematic. He uses the term

governmentality to describe the discourse associated with a series of shifts in the locus of power relationships. For example, the practical discourse concerning economy shifts from the location of family to that of populations. Another example: the old order that so completely relied on sovereignty to organize its meaning and establish the limits of its power comes to rely as well on disciplinary apparatuses, and sovereignty itself migrates from the King's Two Bodies to the micro regulations governing posture and diet. In the interstices of power, governmentality comes to describe the means and ends of these dramatic shifts in what Foucault elsewhere describes as rituals of truth, strategies for the control and dispersal of populations through normalization.

This question of populations is one of the great themes in Foucault's work, from around the time of the writing of *Discipline and Punish* through *The Will to Know* (Volume One of *The History of Sexuality*), a period we might associate with his increasing interest in practices of freedom. The clearest link between these two projects concerns the emergence of specific discursive practices that apply to individuating disciplines of self -- what we may call the behavioral underpinning of liberal individualism -- and the governmental and corporate administrations of populations in the related fields of statistics, demography and eugenics. For Foucault, these two different but connected projects are preliminarily realized in the appearance of what he calls "the confessing animal," a being who comes to seek out a true sexuality, and who eventually develops the political order of modernity that Foucault claims in the conclusion of *The Will to Know* is capable of putting at risk entire populations in the name of politics.

Address and Censor

This dramatic shift in the relationship of representation to truth, first sketched in *The Order of Discourse*, is also, I want to suggest, intimately related to a genealogy of censorship and address. I do not wish to belabor the obvious, but only to highlight what seems to be an important detail: the fact that there is a very old and sturdy

link between the counting function of the census in ancient Roman times and the eventual emergence of populations as an elemental object of the will to truth. This link may be discontinuous, but it reflects an uncanny connection between ancient and modern censorship. We might note that the first practice of office of censor in ancient Rome was that of providing an accounting of the census, a counting of the members of tribes. Indeed, it is worth pausing for a moment to think about the role of the censor in ancient Rome.

The Roman censor existed until 22 B.C. when its duties, having become so central to governance, became directly administered by the Emperor. Supposedly established by Servius Tullius (5th king of Rome), the Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities informs us that it became an appointed office when the consuls took over in 443 B.C. A patrician's office at first, later the Senate allowed for plebeians to be appointed to it. Established to provide a census of citizens and their property, over time it came to assume control over the morals and conduct of citizens, eventually becoming responsible as well for the administration of the finances of the state and the construction and placement of public buildings.

How did the one function of counting or marking come to encompass the morals of the people? The registration of property (primarily for tax purposes) and the use of the penalty of lustration, or removal from the rights of citizenship for those who failed to register, seems to have gradually expanded in the range of notations that the censors could make. Eventually the censors began to make judgments, beyond the reach of positive law, concerning the morality of those citizens counted in the lustrums, the assessments of citizens and properties taken every fourth year. In the *regimen morum* the censors would determine how far the citizens had gone in fulfilling his duties to the state. "In this manner," the authors of the Dictionary tells us, "the censors gradually became possessed of a complete superintendence over the whole public and private life of every citizen." The *regimen morum* became the most important branch of the censors' duties, and the *Notatio*, or *Nota*, became a feared punishment, carrying

with it the penalty of loss of citizenship and the continued obligation to pay taxes. Its other effect was like that of public opinion -- indeed the notes of the censors sometimes paralleled the punishments of criminal courts, though the effects of their nota could be lifted by succeeding censors in the next lustrum, or by a lex.

Much later, in the period we identify with early modernity, the period of the birth of the book, it falls to the office of censor to regulate directly the production of words. This more direct control of production still reflected the censor's ancient role of counter of wealth and property. The early individuating function of the census eventually became an exemplary power of governmentality, especially of the hygienic function of the police as it emerges as a force in the early days of capitalism. It makes its own contribution to the formation of new sites of human being, where there emerges both the disciplinary orders of modernity and the possibility of new contestations of freedom. For Foucault, this concern for freedom may best be understood as a series of practical exercises entailing the building and modification of spaces, the conjoining of unlike spaces, and the elaboration of practices in accord with and in resistance to the play of the great forces of governmentality, giving expression to the will to truth. These modern practices of disciplined freedom seem to me to echo and dramatically amplify (however distorted and faintly) the ancient censor's governmental function.

We may speculatively distinguish between (at least) two large domains of what we may now call the function of the censor that are relevant to thinking about the matter of who is speaking. The modern counting of populations includes the detailed description of Others, situating them in places within (or outside of) categories of normal and abnormal, distributed around averages, compared and reduced to their similarities to and deviations from other Others. The description of categories and groups of others in the third person does not address them, but provides an alienating effect concerning them, even or especially when such subjects recognize that it is they themselves who are being discussed. The

the censor in this case establishes a norm around which resistance by subjects to the dominant discourse organizes, as marginalized identities stake a claim to be recognized other than as objects, other than as third persons, and instead as subjects possessed of some sort of existence that is not third person. This area of is the large domain of much of our concern with censorship as it operates in the field of gender, an imaginary place where the description of the absent Other reduces and frames that Other, limits and confines the subject spoken of to the outside. Here the concern with who is speaking has to do with an identity between who speaks and what that subject might say about someone.

But there is another domain of censorship that is perhaps less often comprehended as an arena of censorial concern. This domain is where another kind of work is done, that of establishing an identification between who speaks and what that subject might have to say to someone. A censor must be concerned about what people say to each other as well as what is said about others. If one is speaking about someone, one is often also speaking to someone or an indeterminate group of someones. This function is embedded in the very act of speaking, and the matter of who is speaking in this case concerns what powers of prohibition and interdiction are enacted when a speaking subject addresses a second person.

This is a strangely neglected power of the census -- it works to connect language and place through the bodies of a population by how it numbers and marks the second person as a destination of discourse. The powers of communication that we may associate with the clarification of meaning and the reduction of the distance between speaker and listener are more usually described as freeing kinds of action. For instance, in his efforts to establish the possibility for the performance of ideal speech acts, Jürgen Habermas stakes a claim to engaging in a liberatory project or what he once dared to call completing the project of modernity. But we from the perspective that emphasizes the marking project of language we may see in his project the operation of the censor, in that the proliferation of regulations and conditions that will

determine the reasons underlying ideal speech acts are themselves laws that prohibit and confine the use of language between and among those who are designated as speakers and listeners (I too often imagine these as disembodied brains engaging in some kind of sci-fi telepathy of perfect understanding).

The power of the marking of the second person might be illuminated by a brief reflection on the meanings of the word "address." (OED) "Address" is a variation on "dress," adopted in English from the French in the 13th century. "Dress" and "direct" have the same root, and as a verb the word's first meaning is to make a thing straight or right, to stand straight, or to right what is wrong, as in "to redress." Its connection to putting on clothes is clear as well, in that it also means "to prepare oneself with the proper attire." "Address" also means to make straight or direct the course of something. In a contemporary usage, to address is also to send to a location, as in the use of email. As a noun, "address" is also that location or place, a site made into an address by being marked and hence located. We may notice something both familiar and peculiar -- the address is not an historically neutral site, but a contested location, a real place where contesting imaginations struggle to determine what is of import and what is not, a "heterotopia" to deploy yet another term Foucault coined. Fernand Braudel and others have noted that the project of modernization and spectacular growth of the great cities of Europe in the period between the English and French revolutions entailed the numbering and naming of street addresses. When the idea of addressing the streets of London was first proposed by Parliament, serious debate concerning the possible violation of subjects' right to the sanctity of home ensued -- an argument we might recognize as being over the right to privacy, though it is only, I think, in retrospect that we might call it that. But the functioning of addresses is not simply bound to the paradox of privacy and communication, of bodies and their location in space. As the address evolves and is elaborated, first into the telephone exchange, and more recently into the email address, the question of who is being addressed undergoes a radical shift.

We might note the force of the telephone address in shifting the register of meaning of who is addressed by reference to Avital Ronell's exposition of the infamous call that Heidegger accepted from the storm-trooper in her study of electric communication, *The Telephone Book*. And we might note how the email address initially dissolves the question of who is addressed by recourse to Samira Kawash's meditation on @, in an essay entitled "@, or Being Online." Ronell notes the complicatedly miserable politics of Heidegger's entanglement with the Nazis by focusing our attention on the fact that he accepted a telephone call. In a passage that seems to perversely (I mean that term non-pejoratively) amplify Althusser's insight, she notes the violence of interpellation. "The call," she writes,

. . . tears into us with the authority of a suddenness, a resolute event which can neither be subjected to a will nor to a string of predictable determinations. The call, erupting as a kind of violence perpetuated against a destinal projection, is thus essentially out of control, arriving only to mark the out-of-handedness that befalls a planning "we ourselves" ("we ourselves have neither planned nor voluntarily performed, nor have we ever done so").

The call comes to us over the telephone, and we as subjects are connected by it to the voice at the other end. When the telephone rings, a subject is forced either to pick it up or let it ring, to answer or not. Another subject might pick it up instead, take a message, perhaps, but this act transforms the one mode of address into another. The sound of the ringing is an aural intrusion, wordless, but not silent, licensed by a prior permission the receiver has given to have a telephone address. This permission, in the manner of technical innovation, becomes over time less explicit a condition of the telephonic address as the network of exchanges becomes more ubiquitous in a given society and hence more integrated into the fabric of necessity. The call inscribes a subject as a receiver, as someone who is addressed, prior to the content of any message that is received. This telephonic act of addressing contributes to the accretion of detail by which the modern subject comes to know who he or she is, it allows that person to become capable of simulating a discursive unity and integrity -- hello, we

say, and the caller might say, "Is this Tom Dumm?" Yes, we answer, this is he, and we allow ourselves to be engaged by the terms of telephonic address. To scramble Emerson, we are reassured that we are real because someone has treated us as though we are. Minimal but unified, we are now subject to being censored, because we have confirmed an identity, we have admitted who we are. While the censor can operate without our admission, the power of the censor is most profound when the subject who is identified accedes to that identification. That minimal acknowledgement does a lot of work to assure that our papers are in order. Hang up the phone, get an unlisted number, sure, but the wire comes to the location of the telephone, in Ronell's case on Heidegger's desk in the Rector's office, a place in the interior of the building of the German mind, his material dwelling of being, the deepest location of the self we might be able to address. What does this mean for wireless communication?

We might locate the operation of a censor in the self-identification of the receiver. In seeming contrast, consider the email address. Kawash writes concerning the symbol @, which, though spoken as "at," is effectively a break with prior terms of address precisely because it designates a non-geographic location:

It is not simply a place or location that is at stake in @. If we suspend our Aristotelian presuppositions, @ may suggest an alternative relation of address in which not only place, but also the body or subject that is assumed to correlate with place, comes into question. . . The email address violates the law of the proper by evading the opposition and apparent fixity of person and post. What are the possible consequences of such a violation? Either we must insist on the sanctity and certainty of the law by finding a way to make the email address commensurable with the proper relation between thing and place, or we must entertain the possibility that the law of the proper is not a law after all. . . What is at stake is not only our understanding of place and person, but the very possibility, necessity, and naturalness of that relation between place and person that we commonly take to be the very foundation of the social order: property.

Kawash is concerned that the reclaiming of this indeterminate address through the reiteration of the law of the proper, which evolves as the law of property enunciated by John Locke and ever after in the liberal dictum of self-possession. To the extent that @ becomes "at" -- a representative expression of the law of the proper -- the law of property reasserts itself. Regardless of the plurality of addresses through which we "come online" we will also come to be re-fixed to that law through a reclaiming of the disciplinary self, as the ensemble of regulations gradually confine the entries and exits to cyberspace. This self as private property is subject to censorship to the extent that it depends upon its address to determine who it is.

In this etymologically ironical sense, we might say that we are all slaves to fashion, regardless of the timeliness or untimeliness of our meditations, because we are as we are addressed, which is to say, we are as we are dressed, made straight, directed. Our subjection to the terms of address is representative of our subjection to the modern will to truth. In an etymological sense, to be true is to be straight. The form our question seems to take, in proper Foucaultian fashion, is "What does it matter who is addressed?" But the question I began to speak to you about seems to have been changed into its Althusserian opposite, namely, "What does it matter who is being spoken to?" And it seems to matter a lot, that to be spoken to can be too close to being spoken of, that the subject spoken to participates in a form of self-censorship, the acceptance of identity itself being a form of censorial resignation.

But if a key question remains "What does it matter who is speaking?" then we need to ask "What does it matter who is addressing?" We might provide this answer: that the matter of who is addressing concerns not only the location of the respective persons who address and are addressed, but the enormous ensemble of forces that flow between them, signalling to them who they are to themselves and to each other, and how the terms of address overreach their targets, spilling over into more indefinite, and ultimately uncensored because uncountable worlds of words.

That said, who we are and how we are shaped as subjects are largely determined, not by recourse to an absolutely free and authentic being hiding behind those words, but by the quality of the practices of freedom that we improvise in the shadow of the censor, and the problematic materiality of our speech, the iterations that shape the matter of our bodies, in Judith Butler's phrasing, or more directly, to repeat Ann Lauterbach, "yet another instruction, one we cannot read."

The censor might be called the agent or register that counts who is speaking. Whatever institution or group it is that helps shape the practices of the production of discourse, not only by the overt prohibitions that are placed on what is allowed and prohibited in speech, but in the positive regulations and encouragements that emerge from the flow of discourse once we stand up to be counted, whatever that is and wherever it appears may be termed a censor. In this sense, the censor may be that entity in all of us that inspires our demand for a recognition of the identity of another, that forces us to claim that we know who is speaking, that reduces the permission we give ourselves to resign ourselves to an indefinite language of turning, troping, moving toward an impersonal place, that forces us to abandon our anonymity. The censor may be that entity that attractively assures us that the truth resides in the true, in that which is straightened and definite, in the transparent and perfectly clear. Even in that sense, the censor is to be fought, I think, creatively, poetically perhaps.

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