Critical and Effective Histories



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Critical and Effective Histories

Foucault's Methods and Historical Sociology

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This book places Foucault's methodologies against central currents in social theory and philosophy in order to provide a guide to doing historical sociology in particular and social sciences more generally. It is written for several reasons. First, it seeks to make Foucault's contribution comprehensible to a wide range of professional and non-professional readers. Second, it rescues the originality and usefulness of Foucault's work, and his critical project from both the welter of ill-informed criticism and the obfuscation of sympathetic commentators. Third, it embodies a conviction that Foucault's approaches could inform the metamorphosis of sociology into an effective, open-ended, multi-focused, relevant discipline, capable of problematising the grand frameworks and assumptions of earlier social theory. Finally, it demonstrates that Foucault's methods provide the necessary condition for any state-of-the-art social research today. The book thus addresses the many formulations of Foucault's methodological position and seeks to establish its relation to such figures as Nietzsche, Kant, Weber, Elias, Habermas, Giddens and the Annales and Frankfurt Schools. Futhermore, it explores the itnerconnected substantive themes of Foucault's work: truth, knowledge and rationality; power, domination and government; and the self and ethical practice. The book is less a commentary on Foucault than a use of Foucault's methods to chart an original position on the condition of social science today. It is directed not only to readers interested in Foucault's legacy but to any social scientis or student working at the cutting edge of contemporary research and to the non-professional audience concerned with the central, ethical, political, and theoretical problems of our time.

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