

Foucault: The Faux Radical

Gabriel Rockhill

The Radical Recuperator

Ptolemy constructed an inordinately complex model of the universe in order to make all of the empirical data conform to a central, organizing false assumption, namely, that the earth was at the center. Michel Foucault, as we shall see, made a similar contribution to contemporary social science.

After decades of working on and out of the Foucauldian heritage, which originally attracted me—like so many others—due to its apparent materialist rigor, ostensible radical historicism, and purported political trenchancy, it has become increasingly clear to me over the years that the entire organizing framework of his histories is fundamentally flawed.¹ He has, like Ptolemy, constructed a complex orrery, with many intricate and beautifully detailed parts that function in terms of an impressive internal logic, but whose very purpose is to develop a model of the world by excluding in advance, or significantly downplaying, its most fundamental feature: global capitalism, with all of its component parts, including imperialism, colonialism, class struggle, ecological destruction, the gendered division of labor and domestic slavery, racialized exploitation and oppression, and so forth.

By rejecting the Copernican revolution undertaken by Marxism, which demonstrated through materialist analysis that capitalism is a totalizing system and a central driving force behind the organization of the modern world, Foucault put himself in the position of not being able to adequately explain, in materialist terms, *why* exactly the systems he attempted to describe had come into existence, *what* their precise function was within the social totality, or *how* they could be transformed. Attached as he was to a worldview hostile to the explanatory and transformative power of historical materialism, he could only, at best, add additional orbits or objects to his orrery, in the hopes that the cult of complexification would both lure and confuse intellectuals, thereby distracting them from the profound lack of what Michael Parenti calls a radical analysis.

One of the reasons for this is that, like many of his fellow French theorists, Foucault was animated by an intense drive to differentiate his work from that of prior forms of knowledge, as well as from the research of his competitors on the so-called marketplace of ideas. His scholarly writings thus place a very high priority on idiosyncratic explanations, conceptual novelties, and neologisms. Rather than drawing on and contributing to the further development of collective traditions of knowledge production, brand *Foucault* puts forth novel histories that are unique to his individual vision of the past and marketable as such.

While it is certainly true that these include various elements from material history, and that he has borrowed and adapted many of his most profound insights from the Marxist tradition, these

are always combined into unique conceptual configurations that bear his singular imprimatur. An *episteme*, for instance, is presented as a much more refined, i.e. idealist, way of discussing *ideology*. *Power* is introduced as a more urbane—because nebulous and unmoored from class struggle—way of describing what Louis Althusser called *the materialist conception of ideology*. *Archeology* and *genealogy* seek to contest the territory occupied by *historical materialism*, in part by reducing the complex histories of Marxism to a crass caricature.² The discursive practice of *critique* grandstands as a petty-bourgeois moral authority uniquely capable of saving us from the thoughtless plunge into *revolutionary theory and practice*.

If it were widely recognized that Foucault was an instrumentalized intellectual whose capitalist theoretical practice seamlessly coalesced with the needs of the global theory industry, at a moment when a premium was placed on promoting French theorists who turned their backs on the Red Menace, then much of this article would be redundant. However, Foucault is often understood to be a radical for having purportedly questioned the very foundations of Western civilization and challenged its dominant historical myths regarding the development of reason, truth, science, medicine, punishment, sexuality, and so forth. What is more, those who present themselves as Foucauldian, at least within an academic setting, are sometimes perceived to be not only radical but much more radical than many, if not all, of their predecessors (which is due, in no small part, to their criticisms of a strawman they call “Marx”).

This, then, is the contradiction that I would like to elucidate, which is by no means unique to Foucault. It is the contradiction of the *radical recuperator*, meaning the intellectual who appears radical in certain circles but whose primary social function is to recuperate truly radical critique *within* the extant system, thereby policing the left border of critique. What interests me first and foremost, then, is how Foucault’s work—like that of other anti-communist French theorists, but often with more political panache and historical flair than Derrida, Deleuze, Lacan, and co.³—has played an important role in a much larger historical reconfiguration: the great ideological realignment of the Western intelligentsia, which took a gradual but decisive step to the right by distancing itself from anti-capitalist revolutionary politics. In order to see how this process unfolded in the case of Foucault, which of course involved myriad forces and was nowise due to him alone, it will be helpful to lay out and contextualize the evolution of his mercurial politics. This will allow us to bring to the fore a clear pattern and identify the man behind the many masks.

Aristocratic Radicalism

In his early years, when most of the French intelligentsia was Marxist, Foucault earned the reputation of being a “violent anti-communist” according to his biographer Didier Eribon.⁴ This was in the wake of WWII when the Soviet Union had defeated Nazism, and communism enjoyed extremely wide support in France. His immediate historical context was thus one in which the Right had been overwhelmingly discredited due to its Nazi collaboration, and the anti-capitalist Left was at a highpoint because of the success of its world-historical battle against fascism. It is true that in his student years Foucault, who had grown up in a somewhat conservative upper middle-class family, was briefly swept up in this postwar leftist wave. He even adhered for a few

months, under the influence of Althusser, to the French Communist Party. However, his involvement, according to another of his biographers, David Macey, was widely recognized as non-committal and noted for its lack of seriousness. Foucault himself later described his political position at the time with the oxymoronic expression of 'Nietzschean Marxism.' Nietzsche was ferociously anti-Marxist, of course, and he repeatedly defended the natural superiority of the master race, while maligning those who sought to overcome social and economic inequalities.

Although some of Foucault's early work bears the imprint of his hesitant and circumspect engagement with Marxism, and particularly the influence of Althusser, through the course of the 1960s he came out very strongly against the Marxist tradition. Prior to 1968, according to Bernard Gendron, "he had the reputation of being condescendingly apolitical, a ferocious critic of the French Communist Party [...], a Gaullist technocrat, and a denier of the power of human agency."⁵ In *The Order of Things* (1966), which catapulted him into the limelight, he proclaimed that Marxism, far from introducing any real rupture in history or proposing a radical reversal, emerged seamlessly *within*—and was the result of—the same epistemological configuration as bourgeois economics. Their apparent opposition, from a materialist point of view, was only a surface illusion for Foucault. In a classic idealist inversion, historical materialism was thereby integrated into a system of ideas that was given the status of prime mover. Moreover, Foucault added, in an ex-cathedra pronouncement devoid of any material evidence, that Marxism was like a fish in water in the 19th century, but everywhere else "it stops breathing."⁶ In short, Marxism was a living theory that died as soon as it succeeded in materially changing the world through the anti-capitalist revolutions of the 20th century. The point, it seems, was to interpret the world, not to change it, and the flight into praxis required a recall to intellectual order.

It is not surprising that Foucault's reactionary and idealist position provoked a major public debate with two of the most visible Marxist intellectuals in France at the time: Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. The author of *The Order of Things* flatly declared that Sartre, as a Marxist, was a man of the 19th century whose attempt—like a fish out of water—to think the 20th century was "magnificent and pathetic."⁷ Indulging in one of his signature oracular pronouncements, he went so far as to label him "the last Marxist."⁸ Sartre and Beauvoir returned fire, explaining that Foucault was the last barrier that the bourgeoisie could erect against Marxism: unable to refute its materialist account of history after numerous attempts, it resorted—through the figure of Foucault—to simply eliminating it by peremptorily consigning it to the dustbin of history.

Whereas Marxist intellectuals like Sartre and Beauvoir were internationalist and invested in anticolonial struggles, Foucault blissfully ignored the revolutionary independence movements that were raging at his doorstep, and he took little or no interest in the global history of imperialism (although he unwaveringly supported Israel).⁹ Instead, he maintained, nearly without exception, a Eurocentric framework of analysis. "Ignoring the imperial context of his own theories," Edward Said appropriately noted, "Foucault seems actually to represent an irresistible colonizing movement that paradoxically fortifies the prestige of both the lonely individual scholar and the system that contains him."¹⁰

To take what is perhaps the most flagrant example, Foucault ‘missed’ one of the major events of his generation because he did not throw his support behind the struggle for Algerian independence.¹¹ Although he claimed in at least one interview that this was because he was abroad at the time (as if this would preclude someone from supporting a movement), he actually returned to France in 1960, whereas the war did not come to an end until 1962. This tendency to retroactively and opportunistically depict his political sympathies as having been in line with struggles that he did not openly support at the time comes up more than once in his biographies, and it was characteristic of his post-1968 repositioning as we will see. During the French state’s terrorist repression of the Algerian liberation movement, Foucault had actually, in the words of Macey, taken “a broadly positive view of the general’s [de Gaulle] handling of the Algerian situation and of the subsequent process of decolonization.”¹²

Given Foucault’s general dismissal of anti-capitalist and anti-colonial struggles, as well as his reputation, according to Eribon and others, of supporting de Gaulle and being an elite operator within the power networks of France’s most prestigious institutions, it might seem somewhat surprising that he later came to be identified as a militant leftist. In fact, Francine Pariente, Foucault’s assistant from 1962 to 1966, is on record as saying she never managed to believe his sudden shift to the Left.¹³ Historically speaking, much of this had to do with 1968 and the false analogy established in its wake between the most prominent thinkers of the 1960s and the events that rocked their generation. While it is true that Foucault’s work was highly visible in the years leading up to 1968, there is of course no evidence that it positively contributed to the uprising in any significant way. Cornelius Castoriadis flatly proclaimed that “Foucault did not hide from his reactionary positions until 1968.”¹⁴ As a matter of fact, Foucault had served on the governmental commission that wrote the Gaullist university reforms, which were widely recognized as one of the principal sparks for the student revolt. He wrote several of the preparatory reports for the commission and showed no clear sign of opposition to the reforms he helped formulate.¹⁵ The fact that he did not get involved in the movement or acts of solidarity (since he was mainly abroad), or even express his public support for it at the time, should thus come as no surprise: if Foucault was on any side of the barricades in 1968, it was on the side fortified by the Gaullist state that he dutifully served.

It is true, however, that the late 1960s had a radicalizing effect on the author of *The Order of Things*, beginning with the Tunisian student movement in 1967, and that this partially explains his public image as a leftist. As he himself would later claim on numerous occasions, this moment was his political wake-up call, and he was impressed by the vibrant Marxism of the Tunisian students, whom he discretely supported.¹⁶ When he returned to France in the wake of the 1968 revolt, he showed signs of being generally sympathetic to the Maoists, “without sharing their belief in cultural revolution.”¹⁷ As he moved swiftly to the left to adapt to the new political climate, he came to participate in university occupations and public mobilizations, in part in order to quickly secure the requisite street credentials according to his biographers.

In the early 1970s, Foucault co-founded and spearheaded the *Groupe d’Information sur les Prisons* (GIP), which aimed at exposing the conditions of prisons by gathering and disseminating information from those directly involved with them (rather than speaking in their place). It

functioned, in the words of member Gilles Deleuze, “as a group that tried to combat the resurgence of Marxism,” but it was not otherwise characterized by a specific ideology or political line (members included Christians, Maoists and ‘nonaligned’ individuals).¹⁸ Although the GIP expressed its support for George Jackson, Field Marshall of the Black Panther Party, by publishing an important pamphlet in 1971 on his assassination in prison, Foucault had curiously extolled the BPP in his private correspondence for having developed “a strategic analysis freed from the Marxist theory of society” (the BPP was, however, Marxist).¹⁹ Joy James and Angela Davis have both pointedly taken Foucault to task for his lack of understanding of the U.S. prison system, as well as his Eurocentrism and his erasure of racial and gendered violence, torture, and terror in the modern prison.²⁰

Foucault would conceptualize his work at the time as being that of a specific intellectual who mobilized his particular expertise for local power struggles in the field of knowledge and discourse, rather than a universal intellectual—like Sartre and other Marxists—who purported to be able to have access to truth and a systemic account of reality. The latter orientation, he regularly suggested, abiding by one of the most widespread and unproven idealist analogies of the time, was a totalizing intellectual project that was somehow akin to the practice of ‘totalitarianism.’ For idealists, the very act of *thinking* the social totality is itself a *practice* of totalizing, and hence ‘totalitarian,’ because ideas are the prime movers of history (and you can use them to free associate between words that sound similar).

To avoid this supposedly bad way of thinking, Foucault openly embraced academic specialization, the intellectual Taylorism that is integral to institutionalized knowledge production under capital. He also encouraged intellectuals to focus on the anonymous, decentralized ‘microphysics of power’ in their local contexts and thereby abandon the project of elucidating and fighting against the macrophysics of power operative in global class struggle. In this way, and with remarkably few exceptions, he gave *carte blanche* to the major imperial projects of his lifetime. One need only compare his so-called ‘history of the present’ to the ones written by anti-imperialist intellectuals like William Blum, Michael Parenti or Walter Rodney to clearly see this.

The period of the late 1960s and early 1970s nonetheless constituted the high-water mark for Foucault’s *engagement*. He was involved in numerous public actions, signed petitions, publicly or privately supported specific struggles, and so forth. Although he “never became a member of any established political organization,” and he did not stake out a clear and consistent political position in terms of the dominant ideologies on the Left, his desultory politics tended to gravitate toward the Maoist intellectual circles, which also had anarchist, liberal and libertarian elements.²¹ He did not, however, become a Marxist, and most of his concerns—very much like liberals—were with specific social issues, individual cases, and the morally ‘intolerable,’ rather than with a systemic critique that was embedded in an internationalist framework oriented toward collective social transformation.

Foucault generally ignored the ecological and feminist movements, which grew rapidly in the wake of 1968, as did the gay liberation movement. While he was sympathetic to the latter and supported it in various ways, he was suspicious of the militant young *Front Homosexuel d’Action*

Révolutionnaire (FHAR), which aimed at subverting the bourgeois and hetero-patriarchal state. Foucault feared that FHAR's activism could lead to new forms of ghettoization, and he expressed his support for the older 'homophile' organization, *Arcadie*, by accepting an invitation to speak at their congress in 1979. According to one of FHAR's prominent members, Guy Hocquenghem, *Arcadie* was a fairly bourgeois establishment that was a members-only club and placed great emphasis on respectful discretion. Macey interprets Foucault's decision to speak at their congress as a deliberate stance in favor of their more conservative approach and against FHAR's militancy.

Through the course of the 1970s and early 1980s, Foucault's mercurial political orientation moved further and further away from what had been a vaguely leftist center of gravity. His evolution was not dissimilar, in many ways, to that of André Glucksmann, who was one of his closest and most regular political collaborators during this period. After operating in elite conservative academic networks, and then becoming briefly enmeshed in or close to the Maoist intellectual circles of the late 1960s, they both came to embrace the 'anti-totalitarian' critique of communism and engaged in the pro-Western support of 'dissident politics' in the East. Glucksmann and other *nouveaux philosophes* drew heavily on Foucault's work and lionized it as an anti-Marxist framework of analysis. Foucault vociferously praised them in return, writing in particular a panegyric to Glucksmann's anti-communist screed, *Les Maîtres penseurs*, in which he expressed his support for the idea that Hitler and Stalin had jointly introduced a new form of holocaust (discretely omitting the Red Army's world-historical defeat of the Nazi war machine).²²

Glucksmann's virulent anti-communism, much like Foucault's, merged with an inchoate plebian populism and a metaphysics of the marginalized. International class struggle receded from consciousness and was replaced by an abstract battle between purportedly totalitarian forces of evil and the pristine moral excellence of what they both called 'the pleb.' The latter, Foucault openly admitted, did not correspond to any "sociological reality" but was rather a *je ne sais quoi*—also found within the bourgeoisie—that escapes power relations.²³

It should come as no surprise that the *nouveaux philosophes* were identified as important assets by the Central Intelligence Agency, and so was Foucault.²⁴ On the one hand, they made a major contribution to the demolition of Marxism in France and undertook a massive propaganda war against actually existing socialism. In particular, they aggressively contributed to the media spectacles organized around so-called political dissidents from the East, who were celebrated and promoted by the U.S. national security state.²⁵ On the other hand, they directed nearly all of their critical energies against the supposed evils in the East and paid scant attention to—if they did not openly seek to justify them as 'humanitarian interventions'—the activities of the major imperial power of the postwar era, the United States, as it went about attempting to overthrow more than 50 foreign governments. Both of these orientations were, of course, perfectly in line with the CIA's world war on communism, which was directly responsible for the death of at least 6 million people in 3,000 major operations and 10,000 minor operations between 1947 and 1987 (none of which, to my knowledge, were ever so much as mentioned by the most well-known theorist of power relations).²⁶

By the late 1970s, the fickle Foucault had come out as a staunch opponent to all forms of actually existing socialism. In a telling interview in 1977, he provided a long list of socialist countries that, in his opinion, provided no glimmer of hope or sign of a useful orientation, including the USSR, Cuba, China and Vietnam. This led him to the grandiose and categorical conclusion that “the important tradition of socialism is to be fundamentally called into question, since *everything that this socialist tradition has produced in history is to be condemned.*”²⁷ The irony of this pontification on global history should not be lost on us: a self-proclaimed specific intellectual, who declared that scholars should only intervene in areas where they had actual expertise, had no problem announcing the death of socialism, even though none of his historical or philosophic work engaged in any serious way with any of this history or its relevant geographic regions. Perhaps he simply forgot to mention the colonial geography undergirding the idea of the specific intellectual: while the ‘history of the present’ in the West is infinitely intricate and requires expert knowledge, specific European intellectuals can make wild, categorical proclamations with no real knowledge base when it comes to the rest of the world.

It is particularly telling in this regard that Foucault’s desultory ‘radical’ politics found a new object of interest in yet another area, outside of Europe, where he had no expertise: Iran. He appeared, to some, to rally once again to the cause of revolutionary politics when he came out in strong support of the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79. However, the reason for his support was not that it began as an anti-imperialist struggle against a CIA puppet government. In fact, he does not even mention this in his voluminous writings on the subject. Instead, he was intrigued by what he refers to as a revolution that parted ways with two central tenets of the Marxist tradition (though he provided no materialist analysis of the Marxist forces on the ground in Iran): class struggle and the revolutionary vanguard. Drawing on François Furet, the rabidly anti-Marxist historian whom he regularly praised, and engaging in a not-so-subtle form of Orientalism, Foucault claimed that this ‘backward’ nation was giving birth to a spiritualist politics that had been part of Europe’s past, but without the birth pains of modernization. He was soundly criticized for his views and his general lack of knowledge of the situation, and he discretely stopped publishing journalistic exposés on contemporary politics.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, Foucault’s relatively brief infatuation with leftist politics had turned back into utter disgust and dismissal. Already in 1975, he retorted to a demonstrator who asked him if he would be willing to speak to their group about Marx: “Don’t talk to me about Marx any more. I never want to hear of that gentleman again... I’m completely through with Marx.”²⁸ Like the increasingly reactionary Glucksman, he came to be more and more fascinated with neoliberalism, which he revealingly described in his 1978-79 lectures as based on the clearly valuable—in his mind—idea of “a society in which there is an optimization of systems of difference, in which the field is left open to fluctuating processes, in which minority individuals and practices are tolerated.”²⁹ Unlike all of the rigorous Marxist research on neoliberalism, Foucault directs our attention primarily to its ideological elements, which he valorizes as a purportedly different way of thinking politics, and not to its imperialist and colonial character as a global project of super exploitation and intensified repression.

At the same time, he explicitly distanced himself from the student and worker movements, asserting that he was a non-active rebel invested in “silence” and “total abstention.”³⁰ Like so many other intellectuals of his generation seduced by the ethical turn, Foucault moved away from concrete political struggles and toward a nebulous form of individualist, lifestyle anarchism, or even simple libertarianism, focused on the ‘care of self.’ He questioned the organization of liberation movements, like feminism and gay liberation, that were subordinated to “ideals and specific objectives.”³¹ Describing these movements as forming private and exclusionary clubs, he drew the following conclusion: “True liberation means knowing oneself [*La véritable libération signifie se connaître soi-même*] and can often not be realized by the intermediary of a group, whichever one it may be.”³² If individual enlightenment is the apotheosis of liberation, and collective action is foreclosed, then the armchair intellectual has succeeded in orchestrating a decisive discursive coup by defining their isolated petty-bourgeois activity as liberation itself. *Vive la contre-révolution!*

As if this wasn’t enough, Foucault would go on to join the chorus of anti-Marxist intellectuals like Furet and Hannah Arendt by indulging in the reductive and simplistic blackmail of the gulag, claiming that *any* attempt to radically transform the system of socioeconomic relations through collective political action would inevitably lead to the most horrific of consequences.³³ In one of his most widely read essays from 1984, he wrote:

This historical ontology of ourselves must turn away from all projects that claim to be global and radical. In fact, we know from experience that the claim to escape from the system of contemporary reality so as to provide overall programs for another society, another way of thinking, another culture, another vision of the world, has actually only led us to reproduce the most dangerous traditions.³⁴

Eschewing the struggle for real, material social change, Foucault developed, instead, an individual, discursive practice of critique. He inscribed this in a Eurocentric tradition that he traced back to a defender of enlightened despotism (Kant), and that included an aristocratic enemy of the masses (Nietzsche) and an unrepentant Nazi (Heidegger), but excluded Marx. In the case of the progenitor of this tradition, the critical attitude of the Enlightenment, as Foucault understands it, amounted to ‘daring to know’ through reason and discourse, while always obeying the dictates of the social order as they were imposed by the monarch and his army. Nietzsche, who served in many ways as the paragon for Foucault’s preferred form of critique, was not only anti-Marxist, but he was also against socialism, democracy and any political project that sought to give power to the masses. As Domenico Losurdo has explained in detail, Nietzsche was a self-proclaimed ‘radical aristocrat’ whose identification of reason with domination—much like Foucault’s—served as a bulwark against the rational and scientific critique of class, racial, gender and sexual hierarchies.³⁵

The Man behind the Many Masks

Foucault indulged throughout his career in the petty-bourgeois intellectual game of self-fictionalization, capriciously embracing and rejecting various labels and positions, as if they were so many masks to be worn or taken off, but with no identifiable face behind them. The subjective, at least in his case, or rather his mind, trumped the objective. Many of his commentators have celebrated this oxymoronic idea of a *sui generis* subject, acting as if their *maestro*—unlike his objects of analysis—could never really be pinned down because he was always outwitting the reductive intellectuals who thought that his whimsical tergiversations followed identifiable patterns that could be historically situated.

There is reason to believe though, as both of his major biographers point out in numerous instances, that the face behind the masks was one of a political opportunist and petty-bourgeois careerist. In reaction to the postwar communist surge, he briefly tried on a Marxist mask, but not before impishly drawing Nietzsche's misplaced mustache on it. In the early years of the reactionary Fifth Republic, he was drawn into Gaullism and became overtly anticommunist as his academic career flourished and he collaborated with the government. However, in the wake of the insurgencies of the late 1960s, he quickly recognized that the stage set had been altered, and he appropriately undertook a hasty costume change. By the mid-1970s, when reactionary anti-communism returned with a vengeance in the guise most notably of the *nouveaux philosophes*, who became an incredible media sensation, Foucault the shape-shifter saw a new opportunity to reinvent himself as his career was taking off in the anti-communist American academy, which unsurprisingly put him on an enormous pedestal. This is not to suggest, of course, that he might not have had some of his own subjective reasons for changing his opinions on certain matters. However, there is a clear pattern behind the supposed playfulness. Like other French theorists, but with his own unique cachet, Foucault was a radical recuperator whose fame in the global theory industry is proportional to his chameleonic ability to appear radical while recuperating critical theory within the pro-capitalist camp.

In the end, if one has any doubts regarding the social function of Foucault's work within his historical conjuncture, one only has to look at its material political consequences. Whereas the Marxist tradition has contributed to innumerable liberation struggles and revolutions, the Foucauldian heritage has not produced a single one. However, it has spawned a very powerful cottage industry of anti-communist academics intent on conserving the intricacies of their master's orrery while cultivating an image of radicality in order to do away, once and for all, with revolutionary theory and practice.

Notes:

¹ I have elsewhere demonstrated in detail some of the fundamental problems in Foucault's work, particularly in his purportedly materialist histories, and I have done much the same for other writings in the Foucauldian tradition, such as those of Jacques Rancière. Regarding Foucault, see for instance Gabriel Rockhill, "Foucault, Genealogy, Counter-History," *Theory & Event* 23:1 (January 2020): 85-119; Gabriel Rockhill, "Comment penser le temps présent? De l'ontologie de l'actualité à l'ontologie sans l'être," *Rue Descartes* 75 (2012/3): 114-126; Gabriel Rockhill, *Interventions in Contemporary Thought: History, Politics, Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017); Gabriel Rockhill, *Logique de l'histoire: Pour une analytique des pratiques philosophiques* (Paris: Éditions Hermann, 2010). For my critiques of Rancière, see *Interventions in Contemporary Thought and Radical History & the Politics of*

Art (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). For recent criticisms of Judith Butler, whose work and political position emerges out of the Foucauldian—as well as the Derridian-Lévinasian—heritage, see Jared Ijams, “Judith Butler’s Impotent Politics of Nonviolence,” *Cosmonaut* (May 26, 2020): <<https://bit.ly/3h58TVz>> and Ben Norton, “Postmodern Philosopher Judith Butler Repeatedly Donated to ‘Top Cop’ Kamela Harris” (December 18, 2019): <<https://bit.ly/2CIYHsq>>.

² Nicos Poulantzas has provided one of the best critical accounts of Foucault’s reductive caricatures of the Marxist tradition in *State, Power, Socialism*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 2014).

³ Given Foucault’s apparent dedication to materialist history and political activism, particularly when compared to other French theorists, it is arguable that he is more dangerous because he is, in many ways, the most radical of the recuperators.

⁴ Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), 237. All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

⁵ Bernard Gendron, “Foucault’s 1968,” in *The Long 1968: Revisions and New Perspectives*, eds. Daniel J. Sherman, Ruud van Dijk, Jasmine Alinder, A. Aneesh (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 23.

⁶ Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1966), 276.

⁷ Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits I: 1954-1969* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1994), 542.

⁸ *Ibid.* 542.

⁹ According to David Macey, Foucault’s “pro-Israeli sentiments were as unswerving as his dislike for the PCF” (David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault: A Biography*. London: Verso, 2019, 40).

¹⁰ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 278.

¹¹ See Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits IV: 1980-1988* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1994), 58-59.

¹² Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, 84.

¹³ See Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, 132.

¹⁴ Cornelius Castoriadis, *La Montée de l’insignifiance* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996), 35.

¹⁵ In addition to his biography of Foucault, see the interview with Didier Eribon on the television show “Apostrophes”: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLA2Xklj1kU&t=362s>>.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Foucault, *Dits et écrits IV*, 78-81.

¹⁷ Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, 263.

¹⁸ Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 289.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits I: 1954-1975* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2001), 44. Since this claim is from October 1968, it is possible that Foucault was exposed to some of the BPP’s early work that was less explicitly Marxist. However, when he visited Attica in 1972, in the wake of the prison rebellion and subsequent violent repression, he oddly chastised communists for being so beholden to the bourgeois ideology of criminality that they refused to organize the incarcerated unless they were ‘political prisoners’ (“Michel Foucault on Attica: An Interview,” *Telos* 19 (1974): 154-161). Jackson, whose assassination was seen as a spark for the Attica revolt, was a communist who had been doing the exact opposite of what Foucault claimed. These types of misrepresentations are, unfortunately, rather frequent in Foucault’s work. I have carefully documented his egregious misinterpretations of Descartes, Kant and Nietzsche in the works cited in note 1. Brady Thomas Heiner has provided an analysis of Foucault’s relationship to the BPP that, while misrecognizing or downplaying the profound gap between the French intellectual and Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries, does provide some helpful information: “Foucault and the Black Panthers,” *City* 11:3 (December 2007): 313-356.

²⁰ See Joy James, ed., *The Angela Y. Davis Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1998) and Joy James, *Resisting State Violence: Radicalism, Gender and Race in U.S. Culture* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1996).

²¹ Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, 217.

²² On Foucault’s relationship to the *nouveaux philosophes*, see Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004); Peter Dews, “The ‘New Philosophers’ and the End of Leftism,” in *Radical Philosophy Reader*, eds. Roy Edgley and Richard Osborne (London: Verso Books, 1985), 361-384; Peter Dews, “The *Nouvelle Philosophie* and Foucault,” *Economy and Society* 8:2 (May 1979): 127-171.

²³ Foucault, *Dits et écrits IV*, 421.

²⁴ See Gabriel Rockhill, "The CIA Reads French Theory: On the Intellectual Labor of Dismantling the Cultural Left," *Los Angeles Review of Books* (February 28, 2017): <<http://thephilosophicalsalon.com/the-cia-reads-french-theory-on-the-intellectual-labor-of-dismantling-the-cultural-left/>>.

²⁵ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, whose rightwing critique of the U.S.S.R. served as the gold standard for Glucksmann and Foucault, was welcomed in the West by Hienrich Böll and the CIA networks he was involved with in Germany (see Hans-Rüdiger Minow's 2006 documentary for ARTE, *Quand la CIA infiltre la culture*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58QTcf_mFag>).

²⁶ These numbers were calculated by the Association for Responsible Dissent, a group composed of 14 former CIA officers. John Stockwell, one of its founding members, discusses their findings here: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RD8OOyoavZM>>. Also see his book *The Praetorian Guard: The U.S. Role in the New World Order* (Boston: South End Press, 1991).

²⁷ Foucault, *Dits et écrits III*, 398 (my emphasis).

²⁸ Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, 348-9.

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 259-260. The best book on Foucault's relationship to neoliberalism is Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent, eds., *Foucault and Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016). Also see Daniel Zamora, "How Michel Foucault Got Neoliberalism So Wrong," *Jacobin* (September 6, 2019): <<https://bit.ly/3kEqSUN>>.

³⁰ Foucault, *Dits et écrits III*, 670.

³¹ Ibid. 677.

³² Ibid. 678.

³³ It bears recalling that, according to a 2016 report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 6.6 million people are under correctional supervision in the United States (<https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/press/cpus16pr.pdf>). At the end of the Great Purges, the total incarcerated population in the gulag climbed to 2 million, but more than half of all inmates were freed when Stalin died in 1953. Soviet prisons, moreover, were not death camps, and most inmates returned to society, at a rate of 20 to 40 percent of the prison population each year according to archive records. Michael Parenti has provided one of the most rigorous historical accounts of the gulag, which is a welcome antidote to the insipid scare tactics commonly used to circumvent sober analysis, in *Blackshirts & Reds: Rational Fascism & the Overthrow of Communism* (San Francisco: City Lights Bookstore, 1997), 76-86.

³⁴ Foucault, *Dits et écrits IV*, 575.

³⁵ See Domenico Losurdo, *Nietzsche, the Aristocratic Rebel*, trans. Gregor Benton (Leiden: Brill, 2019).