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# Introduction: Foucault and the United States

Aurélie Godet and Élodie Edwards-Grossi

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## Foucault in the United States

- 1 In 1975, Michel Foucault made his first trip to the University of California, Berkeley campus, where he met members of the French and philosophy departments. Although only fragments of these public interventions have survived, it seems that Foucault's visit aroused great interest, not only among professors who had organized this first series of lectures, but also among students. This caused great displeasure to Foucault himself, who was unaccustomed to such demonstrations of overflowing enthusiasm on the benches of his lecture halls. The following anecdote, recounted by biographer James Miller, exemplifies the way academic audiences responded to his presence. Invited to lecture at Berkeley yet another time on October 20, 1980, Foucault faced a horde of students who rushed to either Zellerbach Hall, one of the largest halls on campus, or Wheeler Auditorium, where the lecture was broadcast live. When he started, some of them had been waiting for an hour already. Police forces were called in to bring back order and an overwhelmed Foucault asked Hubert Dreyfus, the professor in charge of introducing him, to make an announcement to dissuade students from staying. Dreyfus then stood up and warned the audience of the technicality of Foucault's approach: "Michel Foucault says this is a very technical lecture, and difficult, and, I think, he wants to imply, boring; and he suggests that it would be better for everyone to leave *now*" (Miller 327). Dreyfus's words hardly had the desired effect: on the contrary, the promise of esoteric and obscure remarks from the French thinker only strengthened his appeal at Berkeley, where he ended up lecturing on numerous occasions between 1981 and 1983.
- 2 Such fervor begs the question of whether there has been a singular affinity between Foucault's work and the United States. American historian Michel Behrent recently argued that enthusiasm for Foucault may have been higher across the Atlantic due to a

different understanding of his thought: while there was “a French Foucault, fond of surrealism, obsessed with death, madness, and transgression, fascinated by Sade, Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot,” there came to be a “mostly American” Foucault, “who offers us a toolbox to free ourselves from disciplinary and normalizing powers.” For Behrent, “this second Foucault seems, in the long run, to have prevailed over the first” as there is a trend toward “becoming American” in his work, or “at least its reception.” Behrent goes on to hypothesize that “Americans may be the ones who have not only appreciated his thought the most, but have understood it the best,” thus claiming a very particular, quasi-exceptional adherence to Foucauldian concepts among US academics (81).<sup>1</sup>

## Explaining Euphoria: Structural and Contextual Factors

- 3 Before offering too hasty an answer, however, we should eschew essentialism and wonder whether it is possible to trace the modalities of diffusion and reception of Foucault’s writings in the United States, as well as their structural causes. In *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, François Cusset outlines some answers, arguing that the reception of Foucault and French authors under the umbrella name of “French Theory” was due to several factors. According to him, “the American adventure with French theory has its deepest roots in a history that is itself too old, chaotic, and multiple to trace its contours in only a few pages—much less to exhaust all those contextual factors” (17).

- 4 Cusset thus evokes three founding moments that must be retraced to understand the extent of the fervor encountered by these authors in the American context:

There are three histories that must be evoked, however succinctly. The first is that of French artistic and intellectual exiles in the United States between 1940 and 1945, who constitute less an origin than a prefiguration; the second is the history of the three great French intellectual exports from the period immediately following the war (Surrealism, Sartrean existentialism, and the historical investigations of the *Annales* group); and the third is that of an inaugural date, the conference held at Johns Hopkins University in October 1966, which—retrospectively—became something of a founding event. This last will provide an opportunity to touch on some of the broader American paradigms that began to undergo a crisis in the 1960s, in order to understand how the reading of French authors could represent a desired alternative, the only means by which to reconcile an oppositional approach and a faith in the future and to reestablish links with a certain American tradition of freedom [...]. (17-18)

François Cusset refers here to the symposium organized by Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, from October 18 to 22, 1966, and financed partly with the support of the Ford Foundation, which brought together several French intellectuals who were particularly prominent at the time, including Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, René Girard, Jean Hyppolite, Lucien Goldmann, Charles Morazé, Georges Poulet, Tzvetan Todorov, and Jean-Pierre Vernant.

- 5 However, other structural factors must also be considered: let us recall the creation of academic journals such as *Social Text*, founded by Stanley Aronowitz and Fredric Jameson at Duke University, which by 1979 had published and circulated in the US academic field texts by Foucault, Michel de Certeau, Edward Said, and Cornel West. Finally, as sociologist Michèle Lamont relates, one must turn to the analysis of academic citations from the 1970s to the 1980s to understand how these texts took on a

particular ascendancy, not only in the field of French studies and philosophy, but also, more broadly, in the humanities and social sciences in the United States. While Derrida was enjoying a resurgence of citations in US-based literary scholarship, his influence was waning during the same period in France, which shows that his work was experienced quite differently on either side of the Atlantic, during the same time period (Cusset 76-77). Lamont's analysis of the quartet formed by Barthes, Lacan, Foucault, and Althusser shows that they were cited exponentially in many disciplinary fields from the 1980s (Lamont; Lamont and Witten).

- 6 The modalities by which these authors' works gained momentum outside their original field of expertise is not the only structural factor to explain the success of Foucault's work in the United States. Cusset explains, for example, that the label "French Theory" greatly facilitated the importation of these authors, while sometimes erasing their individual specificities, which accentuated the possibility of being quoted and read by a large public: "Across the Atlantic, however, their writings grouped together under the label of French theory, would be considered above all from the perspective of literary studies and sifted through the literary filter" (76). As Justine Lutzel argues, the omission of disciplinary markers even propelled a reception based on misunderstanding rather than a commonality of approaches (58).
- 7 Sociologists Andrew Abbott and Étienne Ollion's quantitative study of citation models of Europe-based authors by US sociologists from 2003 further exemplifies the trend: behind Bourdieu (who gets 955 citations), Weber (592), Durkheim (510), and Giddens (488), Foucault gets 470 citations, after becoming "prominent in US sociology in the 1990s" and being "cited in 30 pieces a year ever since" (350). As Abbott and Ollion demonstrate, this trend mostly has to do with French and European authors being perceived as prolific social theorists in the United States, therefore covering several disciplines, such as anthropology, philosophy, and sociology.
- 8 Moreover, the arrival of these authors on several campuses in the United States had created a climate of emulation between the various institutions, seeking to capitalize on the arrival of French philosophers in order to promote their uniqueness and academic prestige: "The battle over the privilege of 'showcasing' on their territories such thinkers as Derrida or Foucault at conferences created oppositions between, for example, Berkeley, Buffalo, and New York University (for Foucault) or Yale, Cornell, and Irvine (for Derrida)" (Cusset 77).
- 9 Finally, we can also hypothesize that the reception of Foucault's work in the United States was conditioned, in large part, by his timely arrival, after the effervescence of the student left-wing movements of the 1960s and 1970s: "This metamorphosis of the student rebellion, which was losing its luster also because of the brutal repressions of the 1970s, was one of the sociological factors determining the reception, and the *détournement*, of French theory" (Cusset 54-55).

### Foucault and US Historians: A Missed Encounter?

- 10 Not all academic fields assimilated Foucault at the same time, however. In a pioneering article from 1987, Allan Megill showed how the reception of Foucault by historians, both in France and the United States, could be regarded as a "problem," as Foucault himself was never fully accepted in "disciplinary history," not being "an accredited member of the guild" (117, 127). For example, historian Andrew Scull's review of

Foucault's books such as *Madness and Civilization*, stands as a vivid example of how Foucault's works were not met with euphoria by US historians, but with "mixed-to-negative" reactions (57). Writing his review in 1990, after the release an English translation of *Madness and Civilization*, Scull depicted the book as "resting on the shakiest of scholarly foundations and riddled with errors of fact and interpretation" (58). Pointing that Foucault only worked with two main historical sources when documenting the "English and Irish poor law policy in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries" (58), Scull therefore gave way to the arguments that Foucault is, unlike professional historians, "unconcerned with historical detail of time or place or with rigorous documentation" (57). Referring ironically to the "Foucauldian cult," Scull even hypothesized that Foucault's positive reception in the United States was due to "the ignorance of an audience unacquainted with the subtleties of continental scholarship," protecting Foucault at all costs (58). Other social scientists, such as anthropologist Clifford Geertz and historian Peter Gay, similarly "condemn[ed] Foucault for a lack of empirical research and for his 'evasive' formulas" (Cusset 95). However, as Megill noted, not all of Foucault's books were as negatively received by historians as *Madness and Civilization*. Megill showed that his books on prisons, sexuality, and madness that had to do with social history were overall better received by historians than his other books, thus showing Foucault's partial legacy in the United States amongst history departments (122). For example, Megill remarks, most historians were not familiar with *Les mots et les choses*, because they did not know very well the works of the "three H's: Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger," and likewise *L'archéologie du savoir* was but little cited, being "more abstract and less historical" (127). Initially, while the *Annales* editors in France liked his book, other French historians ignored him starting in the 1960s (126). Thus, Megill shows, between 1973 and 1981, only 24 of 192 essays on Foucault were by historians (128), writing either in French (e.g., renowned scholars such as Robert Mandrou, Vincent Labeyrie, Paul Veyne) or in English (Gordon Wright, Hayden White, George Huppert), thus proving that Foucault's work was much more interesting to scholars in the arts and humanities than to those in the social sciences, such as historians (141).

## Found in Translation: How Foucault's Own US Experiences Influenced his Writing

- 11 Finally, we must also consider whether Foucault's own US experience influenced his writings. In many instances, Foucault could be described as an "engaged intellectual," who participated in activist projects such as the Groupe d'information sur les prisons (GIP) in France and was sensitive to the writings of the Black Panthers Party (BPP) (Demers). Having made various research trips in his life, one can hypothesize that Foucault had a particular relationship with the foreign countries he visited. Even though he kept returning to Paris, Foucault was remarkably eager to understand the specific political and cultural issues of the countries he visited. It was in Japan, for example, that he experienced the limits of Western rationality (Lazreg). In California, he observed the emergence of countercultures, which led him, in part, to problematize the practices of subjectivation. For example, he started using the term "devices" (*dispositifs* in French) in his writings from the end of the 1970s to refer to "material operators of power" (*opérateurs matériels du pouvoir*), just after setting foot at UC Berkeley, at a time when the Free Speech Movement and such militant groups as the

Black Panther Party formed in the Bay Area in the vicinity of San Francisco (Revel 24). If Foucault's writings were re-used to produce new reflections on the practices of power, which also resulted in the institutionalization of new disciplines and new knowledge, known as "studies" (ethnic, gender, cultural, etc.) on US campuses, it is likely that his texts underwent many transformations following his successive stays in California.

## Putting Foucault to Work in American Studies

- 12 Despite his quasi "celebrity status" in California in the 1970s and his sustained interest in US politics—though Paul Veyne wryly noted that he "never knew him to take a principled stand on [...] American imperialism" (118)—Foucault rarely referred to the United States in his lectures or writings. This may be due to the fact that he consistently questioned the need for national histories or that his objective was never to make empirical statements about what people in various countries thought or did, but rather to delineate the general mode of thinking (*episteme*) that lay behind this diverse range of beliefs and practices. Indeed, though the publication of *Surveiller et punir* in 1975 might have given the impression that his approach was increasingly concerned with social phenomena, Foucault insisted in 1979 that he was not a social scientist. When asked, for instance, if his study of discipline might be related to Erving Goffman's work on asylums, he stated: "I am not trying to do the same thing as Goffman. He is mainly interested in the functioning of a special type of institution: the total institution—the asylum, the school, the prison" (Foucault, 1994b 802).<sup>2</sup> Foucault's "main concern [was] not society, it [was] true/false discourse," he later specified (1994c 852).

### The Proverbial "Toolbox"

- 13 Foucault's near silence on US social and historical phenomena has not prevented sociologists, historians, and political scientists from applying his concepts to a wide range of processes and institutions associated with the United States, including imperialism, plantation slavery, segregation, mass surveillance, mass incarceration, gender assignation, environmental degradation or destruction, mental asylums, hospitals, schools, the family, the workplace, etc. Nor has it prevented them from using the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976)—in which Foucault discussed the various ways in which mechanisms of social, political, and even personal resistance to power can emerge—as a guidebook when analyzing issues of indiscipline in the United States.
- 14 Foucault himself encouraged such poaching. In a 1975 interview with *Le Nouvel Observateur*, he claimed that his works should "be used by the greatest number of people" and that his writings provided "instruments that they [can] later use in their fields as they wish, whether they are psychiatrists, psychologists, doctors, educators, or anything else" (1975b 54). The same year, he likened his books to "portable toolboxes" (1994a 720). Taking him at his word, historian Patricia O'Brien has concluded that "[p]erhaps the best use of Foucault's work [...] is not to try to find a theory where there is none or to impose fixed boundaries where there is plasticity, but to deform his work, to make it groan and protest" (46).

- 15 Compiling the names of all American studies scholars who, like O'Brien, have been influenced by Foucault would exceed this introduction's modest ambitions. In the next section, we offer a partial, idiosyncratic list of North American and European specialists of the United States whose engagement with the French philosopher has been particularly strong or noteworthy. Beyond their distinct disciplinary backgrounds, they have all used Foucault as a starting point (and, occasionally, a foil) for their own theories or empirical investigations of US social phenomena.

## Viewing US Social Phenomena through a Foucauldian Lens

- 16 Regarding the influence of Foucault on (post)colonial theory, François Cusset noted in 2008:

Foucault's and Deleuze's comments on the abstract "universalism" of colonizers, or on Western culture as a conquering one, are often brought in for backup to an argument. [...] De Certeau's critiques of the notion of one-way history, and Foucault's analyses of historic continuity as a discursive narrative, have allowed postcolonial thinkers to extract a narrative for the colonized people from the dominant historical framework, a Western "myth," and to create the starting point for another conception of history, a counterhistory (143).

Ann Laura Stoler has been one of the many proponents of this "counterhistory." A professor of anthropology and historical studies at the New School for Social Research in New York City, she has published widely on the politics of knowledge, colonial governance, racial epistemologies, and ethnography of the archives. In 1995, she asked two main questions in her book *Race and the Education of Desire*: why did scholars of colonialism largely ignore volume 1 of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, in which issues of sexuality and power were discussed at length? Conversely, why was Foucault's history of the European sexual discourse so unconcerned with the colonial context? She proceeded to challenge Foucault's vision of the West and his marginalization of empire, while also recognizing that Foucault's little-known 1976 Collège de France lectures contained a suggestive, albeit allusive, treatment of the relationship between biopower, bourgeois sexuality, and what he identified as "racisms of the state" (Stoler, 1995 60). On that basis, she came to the conclusion that Foucault's insights needed to be extended rather than discarded.

- 17 In 2006, Stoler edited a collection entitled *Haunted by Empire* that looked at the intimate frontiers of North American colonial empires, i.e. "the social and cultural space where racial classifications were defined and defied, where relations between colonizer and colonized could powerfully confound or confirm the strictures of governance and the categories of rule" (2006 24). In her long introduction to the volume, she repeatedly utilized Foucauldian concepts ("regimes of truth" and "biopolitics," especially) to frame her own efforts to connect the large-scale dynamics of colonial rule in North America and the intimate domains of implementation. To her, Foucault's thought could help remedy the glaring absence of the sphere of intimacy from postcolonial studies, an absence that, Amy Kaplan argued, "reproduces American exceptionalism from without" by treating it as a phenomenon distinct from imperial expansion instead of a direct product of the latter (qtd in Stoler, 2006 60).
- 18 Besides the study of colonial projects in North America, scholars have drawn on Foucault's oeuvre to analyze a variety of US phenomena and institutions, including:



(a) gender identification processes, (b) surveillance, (c) neoliberal governmentality, and (d) the prison system.

- 19 (a) Like many western nations, the United States has been shaped by the mythification of gender differences. Foucault's engagement with this issue has had a significant impact on the evolution of US feminist thought. According to Cusset:

The English translation of *La Volonté de savoir* (*The Will to Knowledge*) was published in 1978 [...] and it can even be considered the invisible key to American feminism of the 1980s. By [...] analyzing sexuality as a discursive formation and apparatus of subjectification [...] the book completed the task of marginalizing "progressive" feminism, paving the way for criticism of all forms of sexual discourse. (151)

In other words, essentialist humanism and its dominant vs. oppressed categories were replaced by social constructionism, i.e. an approach whose aim was to uncover the mechanisms of gender norms as they were constructed over time.

- 20 In *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, University of California professor Judith Butler borrowed from Foucault's approach and suggested applying a genealogical method to the issue of sexual difference. She argued that femininity and virility were constructs that continually evolved, and described gender as a fundamentally dialogic performance. She also adhered to Foucault's view that, in subjectification, submission could not be divorced from resistance. Her work helped elucidate, for instance, the complex semiotics of drag performances in the United States.

- 21 (b) In 2000, William Staples—now professor emeritus of sociology at the University of Kansas—used Foucault's theory of disciplinary power to analyze contemporary trends in surveillance practices in the United States. He provided an arresting catalogue of technologies routinely used for monitoring people and of the "meticulous rituals of power" (2000 3) that they entailed. Surveillance in the United States, he argued, is meticulous because it is methodical, thorough, and precise. It is ritualistic because it happens repeatedly and is accepted routinely in an impersonal manner. It is powerful because it disciplines people in a strangely democratic manner—social control in the culture of surveillance is not top-down, but rather involves everyone as watchers as well as watched. Staples commented on the "pornography of the self" that this bodily invasiveness encourages (1997 95).

- 22 (c) In 2006, Henry Giroux—Professor of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University, Canada—also put Foucault to use when analyzing the post-Katrina New Orleans "biopolitical scene" and, more specifically, the ways in which post-disaster planning often seemed to be predicated on the belief that a significant percentage of the city's population was simply expendable. Although biopolitical projects had long existed in the United States and had long been built upon race, gender, sexuality, class, and other exclusions, as well as state violence, Giroux contended that the new "biopolitics of disposability" was distinguished by diminishing state support for the disadvantaged and assumptions about the permanence of racial and class hierarchies. Not only did the state and other institutions enact violence by treating certain human beings as disposable, but they also justified themselves by marking those same populations as dangerous and, therefore, unworthy of state protection.<sup>3</sup>

- 23 Though Staples and Giroux made important contributions to our understanding of surveillance and neoliberal governmentality in the United States, the main limitation of their books was their narrow focus on Foucault's theory of power. In addition to sovereign power and disciplinary power, Foucault considered biopower to be what

makes human life and activity calculable and subject to knowledge-power as an agent of transformation. By only seeing discipline in terms of negative social control effects, Staples and Giroux ignored Foucault's important argument that disciplinary power can also be positive and productive by contributing to health, welfare, and well-being as well as to discipline and social control.

- 24 A more nuanced utilization of Foucault's concepts can be found in the works of sociologist Bo Paulle, author of *Toxic Schools: High Poverty Schooling in New York and Amsterdam* (2013). In his study of Guiding Rage Into Power (GRIP), a rehabilitation program originally developed in San Quentin State Prison, Paulle offered two possible readings of this "re-socializing" initiative, one based on "the dominant Foucault" (2017 474) the other on a lesser-known version of the philosopher. He admitted that people may initially see GRIP as yet another intervention intent on disciplining and managing the poor. By imposing normalized subjectivities, encouraging the internalization of increasingly pervasive (self-)supervision, and drawing straight lines from childhood traumas to adult acts of violence, GRIP seemed to validate Foucault's reflections on the seemingly unstoppable spread of body-based practices stealthily crushing spaces of meaningful resistance by superimposing prescriptive notions of selfhood. Yet, he insisted, we should not discard the possibility that some rehabilitation programs may more accurately be seen through the lens of another Foucault, "the pragmatic, openly normative, and at times downright prescriptive methodologist" (2017 474) to be found in the third volume of *The History of Sexuality*, entitled *The Care of the Self* (1986). In the most important parts of this book, Foucault argued that the intensely self-disciplining techniques of ancient Greek and Roman philosophers could help practitioners develop the tools to discern (and then resist) harmful emotions and thoughts, thus laying the ground for the asceticism (*askesis*) that he saw as key to learning "the art of living" (Foucault, 1986 44).
- 25 Paulle's detailed examination of the GRIP curriculum and classroom emphasized the similarities between the program's emphasis on self-correcting practices—taking responsibility for one's crime and its impact on victims through body-based techniques and related teachings that can increase one's self-knowledge and one's self-mastery—and Foucault's hope that people might in the future be changed through more critical and more "therapeutic" relations to themselves:

This work [...] should have the form of a steady screening of representations: examining them, monitoring them, sorting them out. More than an exercise done at regular intervals, it is a constant attitude that one must take towards oneself. [...] This relation to the self that constitutes the end of the conversion and the final goal of the practice of the self [...] is often conceived in the juridical model of possession: one "belongs to himself," one is "his own master." [...] But [...] the relation to self is also defined as a concrete relationship enabling one to delight in oneself. (Foucault, 1986 65)

## Contents of this Edited Dossier

- 26 As this partial survey shows, putting Foucault to use in American studies involves a variety of practices, from what may be described as "selective engagement" to in-depth absorption in the philosopher's complex, evolving thought.
- 27 The topic of Foucault's legacy for American studies was one that we first explored at the 2019 annual meeting of the French Association for American Studies (AFEAS) in

Toulouse. Élodie Edwards-Grossi had just co-organized a one-day conference entitled “Towards a History of Louisiana State Institutions Along Class, Racial and Gender Lines” at Tulane University, in New Orleans—an event that inevitably summoned Foucault’s ghost—and Aurélie Godet had just reviewed an edited collection on Foucault’s seminal visit to the Münsterlingen psychiatric asylum in 1954 (complete with a pre-Lenten “mad parade”) for the *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*.

- 28 Encouraging feedback from panel participants and attendees convinced us to turn these exchanges into a thematic dossier for *Transatlantica* and to reach out to other potential contributors. The result, which was almost three years in the making, is a set of four articles by scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds (history, cultural studies, visual studies), along with an interview. Taken together (and beyond their formal and thematic differences), these contributions testify to the multiple ways academics studying the United States are “putting Foucault to work.” They also bring to light the cross-pollination of French philosophy and US activist movements and countercultures.
- 29 The dossier starts with an essay by Auréliane Narvaez on the gradual suppression of deism and freethought in the early American republic. To Narvaez, an associate professor of US history at Université Paris Nanterre, this backlash against “religious infidelity” from orthodox and evangelical Protestantism can best be explained by using the Foucauldian concepts of governmentality and biopolitics. Indeed, much like the modern nation states evoked by Foucault in his 1977-1978 lectures at the Collège de France (2007 1), Protestant churches and organizations in New England as well as Pennsylvania succeeded in managing large groups of humans by encoding certain bodily and mental norms into their social practices. Through a combination of pamphlets, satirical cartoons, educational manuals, and novels, they created a general climate in which citizens of the United States came to equate religious skepticism with anarchy, criminality, monstrosity, even insanity. Narvaez’s detailed analysis of the visual and textual material that targeted freethinker Frances Wright further shows how the equation of religious and sexual infidelity “contributed to the development of a biopolitics of femininity and womanhood that presented freethought and the critique of religion as synonymous with licentiousness and moral depravity.” Her conclusion that the gradual internalization of such norms was perhaps the greatest factor in the ultimate hegemony of Protestantism in the United States is a welcome corrective to the recurrent affirmation of an inevitable, *sui generis* affinity of Protestantism with modernity.
- 30 In “Unmasking Currents: Thinking Power and War with Foucault and the Black Panthers,” Jason Demers, an assistant professor of cultural studies and politics at the University of Regina, Canada, challenges both the idea that Foucault’s thought was a French isolate and the claim that his writings or lectures on prison and war appropriated Black Panther philosophy without giving BPP co-founder Huey Newton due credit. Dismissing a causal-chronological relationship between Newton’s writings and Foucault’s shift from archeology to genealogy as well as his theorization of politics as war in the 1970s, Demers convincingly argues that the BPP was just one among many “masked sources” for some of Foucault’s future work on European juridical forms as a mask for power relations. To be sure, the BPP played a crucial role in the development of the prison liberation movement precisely when Foucault was beginning to study and write about prisons. However, Demers reminds us that Newton and Foucault were, in

fact, channeling common intellectual undercurrents (Nietzsche, Clausewitz); that Newton's thought was itself inspired by Frantz Fanon's writings on his experiences of anti-Black racism in France; and that violent state suppression of people's struggles was by no means an exclusively American phenomenon. Foucault and the Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons (GIP) (1970-1972) did consider the prison liberation movement in the United States and the 1971 Attica uprising important movements, but they mostly relayed these events to push a localized agenda: reform of the French penal system. In the end, Demers prefers to depict Foucault as an "amplifier" of activist voices in the United States and elsewhere: "[R]ather than arguing that Foucault modeled his activism after an ideal espoused by Newton, it would be more accurate to acknowledge a confluence in the global circulation of activist models between northern Africa, western Europe, Latin America, and the United States." In that sense, he corroborates Marianne Debouzy's intuition in "The Influence of American Political Dissent on the French New Left" that "it is difficult to distinguish American influence from other influences and not to confuse parallel phenomena with influences" (66).

- 31 The next article reminds us that engagement with Foucault's thought in the United States has long existed outside the proverbial "ivory tower" of academia. Robert Morris's series of ink drawings entitled "In the Realm of the Carceral," for instance, was explicitly meant to convey on paper Foucault's prison world (Lejeune). In such a context, art and theory directly influenced each other, transcending differences in semiotic and symbolic registers. In other instances, the affinity between art and theory has been brought to light by art critics, who have unearthed traces of Foucauldian concepts in certain works and have fleshed out unconscious connections between artists and the philosopher. Martine Beugnet's approach in "Re-viewing Foucault: The Disciplinary Gaze in Harun Farocki's *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts*, *Lockup 360*, and Fiona Tan's *Correction*" demonstrates the fruitfulness of such a mediating stance. A professor of visual studies at Université Paris-Cité, she provides a detailed, subtle exegesis of three documentary works that take the US prison system as their topic and span the art-to-entertainment continuum. More specifically, she analyzes the extent to which they all engage (whether intentionally or not) with Foucault's analysis of Jeremy Bentham's architectural model for penitentiary sites—the Panopticon—in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977). After reminding us that the United States has the highest per-capita incarceration rate internationally and that Bentham's design still features on many American penitentiary sites alongside "the standard concrete blocks interspersed with watchtowers," Beugnet directs our attention to the "penal optics"—the combination of panoptic gaze and voyeurism—that documentary works on the US prison system either exemplify or foreground. She argues that, despite their many differences, the virtual reality program *Lockup 360* (MSNBC, 2015) and the video installation works *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts* (Harun Farocki, 2000) and *Correction* (Fiona Tan, 2004) all comment on the spectator's involvement in their structures of seeing. By putting viewers in a position in which they turn into efficient relays of visual control, these works point to the simultaneous democratization and invisibilization of surveillance. Yet, for all their sensationalism, documentary works like *Lockup 360* can be also useful in that they keep alive the debate on the conditions and meaning of internment by offering an opportunity to look at images of a rarely seen reality—that of high-security facilities—and offering penal subjects the opportunity to "withstand" the gaze and maybe force alternative ways of seeing on the beholder. We are thus

reminded once more of Michel Foucault's writings on the equivocal and reversible nature of power relations (as opposed to the more congealed relations of domination).

- 32 In "La Taupe et le serpent. Discipline et contrôle dans les tribunaux pour enfants aux États-Unis (XX<sup>e</sup>-XXI<sup>e</sup> siècles)," historian Guillaume Périssol prolongs Foucault's analysis of Ancien Régime disciplinary processes in *Discipline and Punish* by focusing on the twentieth-century shift from incarceration to probation in the US penal system. His thesis, which relies on archival work conducted in the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Archives and a careful examination of the proceedings of various penal and psychiatric organizations, is that a new episteme of control has now replaced the sovereign punishment paradigm, and that the origins of this change can be traced to the transformations of juvenile justice between the late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. Starting with the establishment of the first juvenile court in Chicago in 1899, juvenile justice increasingly turned to probation, benevolence, "love" even, as its new *modi operandi*. This willingness to explore new solutions to delinquency largely owed to the contemporaneous romance of Americans with psychological expertise and quickly spread to the rest of the judicial system. Indeed, Périssol argues, by the end of the twentieth century, the ideology of (more or less benevolent) control had spread through the entire social landscape of the United States. Additionally, while public opinion and academic scholarship have rightly zeroed in on mass incarceration in the United States, "mass probation" may be a better descriptor of the current US disciplinary regime, in which surveillance and provisional freedom have largely outpaced, though not displaced, imprisonment. In a striking conclusion, Périssol suggests that the Deleuzian metaphor of the snake's coils is more apt than that of the mole's burrow (i.e., the enclosed spaces studied by Foucault) to describe the current disciplinary regime of the United States (Deleuze 140 *sqq.*).
- 33 Gilles Deleuze's "totemic approach" (Pettman) to issues of power and control reminds us that animals have long been embraced by continental philosophy, from Isaiah Berlin's fox and hedgehog to Friedrich Nietzsche's "animal philosophy" (Lemm), to Michel Foucault's own "sperm whale" (Terrel), to Donna Haraway's "companion species." In a recent, award-winning book titled *Capture: American Pursuits and the Making of a New Animal Condition*, Antoine Traisnel, associate professor of English and comparative literature at the University of Michigan, showed how animals (and their supposed elusiveness, fragility, and precariousness) served as a way to think about "Modern man" in the nineteenth-century United States. Referencing Foucault's theorization of biopower in *The History of Sexuality*, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, and *The Order of Things*, he argued that "the making of capture as the new animal condition" in the nineteenth-century "U.S. settler territory" was "inextricable from the making of the new nation—the construction of a hegemonic American identity and iconography" (3-4). For this dossier, he agreed to sit down for an interview that covered a variety of topics, including: the applicability of Foucault's thought to a reflection on the animal condition; the possible translation of his concepts into the American context; possible reasons for Foucault's relative silence on issues of race and ecology; the epistemological value of the concept of "geopower" as well as its genealogy; ongoing debates about the chronology of the anthropocene; recent examples of neoliberal governmentality applied to "Earth" or "the planet"; the antithetical narrative of ecocentrism and its limitations; the integration of "non-human," sentient beings in the debate over the current environmental crisis; and, finally, the centrality of new forms of inter-human solidarities to address global environmental challenges. The lively conversation that

ensued via email in December 2020 emphasizes once more the usefulness of “thinking with Foucault” in American studies and the productive ways in which contemporary scholars apply the philosopher’s concepts to answer new scholarly concerns.

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## NOTES

1. Original quotation: "Descombes remarqua qu'il existe deux Foucault : un Foucault français, féru de surréalisme, obsédé par la mort, la folie et la transgression, fasciné par Sade, Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot ; et un Foucault anglo-saxon – surtout américain – qui nous offre une boîte à outils pour nous affranchir des pouvoirs disciplinaires et normalisateurs. Le constat est certainement juste, à une nuance près : ce deuxième Foucault semble, à terme, prévaloir sur le premier. Il y a, pourrait-on dire, un « devenir américain » de la pensée foucauldienne, du moins de sa réception. Se pourrait-il que ce soit [sic] les Américains qui aient non seulement le plus apprécié, mais le mieux compris sa pensée ?"

2. All translations of quotations from *Dits et écrits* are ours.

3. In *Necropolitics*, Achille Mbembe recently extended these reflections on the lethal afterlife of sovereign power to the whole world.

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