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Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy - Revue de la philosophie française et de langue française, Vol XXXIII, No 1/2 (2025) pp 198-204.

Vol XXXIII, No 1/2 (2025)
ISSN 1936-6280 (print)
ISSN 2155-1162 (online)
DOI 10.5195/jffp/2025.1111
<http://www.jffp.org>



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Why Brazil? That is, why did Foucault make several trips to Brazil over the span of some ten years? After all, he had not published scholarly work related to Brazilian history or culture, nor was his work especially focused on the Western hemisphere or issues that would lead a scholar to turn their interests to Brazil, issues such as slavery or imperialism. Although it does not definitively answer the question (indeed, this question may be impossible to definitively answer), *Foucault in Brazil* offers readers a variety of intriguing responses to this question. In my remarks here today, I'll focus on two.

Marcelo Hoffman deftly traces the significance of Foucault's five visits to Brazil during the decade spanning 1965-1976 in order to show how Brazil mattered for Foucault's thought and to show how Foucault's interventions in Brazilian cultural and political life continue to matter for us today. I want to develop two related themes that emerge from Hoffman's analysis: how Foucault understood the Brazilian authoritarian security state and how his engagement with this state provides us a model for how to engage with this type of state. After briefly explaining what I mean by characterizing Brazil as "an authoritarian security state," I review Foucault's various engagements in Brazil as presented by Hoffman. I conclude by briefly comparing Foucault's engagement in Brazil in terms of his intellectual *praxis* and his complicated relationship with Marx's thought. In addition to showing us how and why Foucault's engagement with Brazil matters, Hoffman's work contributes to a reassessment of Foucault. Once thought of as a cool intellectual who eschewed intellectual engagement (this was thought to be one of the key ways he distinguished himself from Jean-Paul Sartre), Hoffman presents us with a very different Foucault, one engaged in various social movements in way that brings him in closer proximity to the Sartrean engaged intellectual. For Hoffman this reconsideration of Foucault's role as an intellectual engaged with contemporary political debates entails a reconsideration of his relationship with Marx.

Navigating an Authoritarian Security State

Foucault made five visits to Brazil between 1965-1977, and all of these visits occurred while Brazil was governed by a military dictatorship which came to power as the result of a coup in March 1964 and lasted for twenty years.¹ He first visited during October 1965, next in May and June 1973, with the final three visits during October and November 1974, 1975, and 1976 (Hoffman, 3). The regime became increasingly repressive in the years following a wave of protests in 1968. Hoffman details how the dictatorship's Institutional Act No. 5 or AI-5 sanctioned the violent repression of these demonstrations and political dissent more generally. These repressive years in Brazil came to be known as the "years of lead" and were characterized by widespread political torture and the state-sanctioned assassination of political dissidents. Here is how a member of the opposition, economist Edmilson Costa, characterizes these years of political terror:

Between December 13, 1968 and October 13, 1978, when the discretionary act was repealed, the country lived the Years of Lead with an openly fascist military dictatorship; suppression of liberties; the imprisonment, torture and killing of opponents; stripping of political rights of those whom the dictatorship considered inconvenient to the regime; revocation of direct elections for president, governors and mayors of the capitals; widespread censorship and the building of an espionage network that spanned all sectors of public administration, schools, universities and public places. At the same time, the process of conservative modernization established by iron and fire an economic model of predatory accumulation that accelerated the country's economic growth, expanded industrialization, developed capitalism in the countryside, but resulted in true social apartheid with brutal concentration of income, which would deepen even in democratic periods.²

Indeed this coup and the ensuing military dictatorship provided a blueprint for the overthrow of democratically-elected governments throughout Latin America, and the effects of this coup continue to be felt today, with President Bolsonaro promising to reinstate the measures found in AI-5.

Within the political context of this repressive regime, Foucault's visits take on a special urgency. Unlike his later visits to Iran where his task is to publicize the events of the Iranian Revolution to a European audience, his task here is both to speak to and with intellectual audiences in Brazil. The challenge will be how to do this in a way that does not antagonize the government and endanger his interlocutors in Brazil but also present himself in such a way so as not to lend legitimacy to the military regime.

Clearly Brazil's military dictatorship governed through fear. But how can we claim that Brazil under this dictatorship was an authoritarian security state? If the goal of the security state is to free those it governs from fear, then

how can we say that a state governed through fear is a “security state”? But of course the goal of the security state is emphatically *not* to free those it governs from fear, even though its representatives often appeal to this ideal when seeking to justify the security state. Instead, the goal of security, as John T. Hamilton and Frédéric Gros have recently argued, is *care*. Foucault was also interested in security, understood as a particular form of care that he would later come to call *governmentality*. Perhaps one source of his account of governmentality (care for individuals and populations through the management of risk) was his experience in Brazil. Care becomes the justification for terrorizing those in the state who are not deemed worthy of care for various reasons, most commonly because they are outsiders or because they have forfeited basic rights through criminal activity.

Drawing upon German philosophical and literary traditions, Hamilton provides a philological interpretation grounded in Heidegger’s appropriation of the Myth of Care in *Being and Time*, tracing its meaning back to the Greeks and then forward through the Middle Ages and then on to the moderns. From this philological approach, we can see how security becomes a guiding concern in the West. Hamilton reminds us that Foucault plays a role in this story too, showing us how security works to constitute the population as its object. “For Foucault, who is interested in examining varying political technologies of power, security becomes a crucial concept, wherein the *population* becomes the privileged object of governance, as opposed to *territory* or *the people*.”³ Gros relies more on the work of Foucault, emphasizing the role that self-regulation plays in his critique of neoliberalism in *Birth of Biopolitics* and the concept of biopower. The Physiocrats of the late eighteenth century envisioned markets that would, like living organisms, regulate themselves. Government’s role was to provide the conditions that would make these markets regulate themselves naturally.

But these reflections on populations and markets, biopower and security all lie in Foucault’s future. During his visits to Brazil in the early 1970s, Foucault’s concerns were on surveillance and discipline. Unlike security, whose target is the population, the target of disciplinary power is the individual; disciplinary techniques seek to normalize the individual through, for example, the organization of space in institutions such as the army barracks, the hospital, and the school. Indeed, these various disciplinary apparatuses were developed by Brazil’s military regime into distinct technologies of surveillance and discipline in the service of terror.

Brazil and Foucault’s Intellectual *Praxis*

Foucault takes his time responding directly to this situation in Brazil. His initial visit in 1965 was marked by his reticence. He was the noted author of the surprise bestseller *The Order of Things*, and did not speak out against the regime directly; he let his lectures speak indirectly about his attitude toward

the regime. “Truth and Juridical Forms” are perhaps his most well-known lectures of the several delivered during his visits to Brazil, and these lectures “dealt at length with the inquiry, torture, surveillance, the police, and imprisonment in Europe” (10). Hoffman relates the effects that Foucault’s lectures had on his fellow intellectuals and students in Brazil. “Merely bringing up[these practices and institutions was a provocative move in Brazil, precisely because they were also obvious features of political repression under the dictatorship. Any talk of torture, above all from a foreigner was prone to arouse the sensitivities of Brazilian authorities, who publicly and emphatically denied the existence of torture” (10). In “Truth and Juridical Forms,” he displaces his indirect critique of the regime by placing it in Europe, but apparently neither the government nor his interlocutors were fooled.

In addition to the lectures’ contents, the places he lectured proved to be provocative, for he delivered his lectures in universities that were sites of critique and resistance to the military regime. During these early years, the military junta began to undertake military police inquiries or IPMs, and members of his audience perceived his analysis of inquiry in these lectures as a reference to this practice (Hoffman, 11). In the first months after the coup, a special commission welcomed by the university president carried out IPMs against various professors at the University of São Paulo.

By the early 1970s, Foucault began to overcome his reticence for various reasons. The main reason is that he became more politicized as he sought to put his thought into practice through work with organizations such as the GIP. Hoffman cites this as a reason, and claims that his political transformation stemmed from his time in Tunisia. Tunisia was a turning point both in terms of Foucault’s political activism and the trajectory of his writing, which informed one another. Foucault states: “That’s what Tunisia was for me: it compelled me to join the political debate. It wasn’t May 68 in France but March ‘68, in a country in the third world” (Hoffman, 21, citing *Power*, 79). Hoffman summarizes Foucault’s experience in Tunisia to show how he returned to Brazil prepared to draw on his own experience sheltering students in his home and being subjected to what Daniel Defert has characterized as “torture” at the hands of police in Tunisia (Hoffman, 22). Hoffman draws various parallels between his experience in Tunisia and his experience in Brazil. “In Tunisia as in Brazil, Foucault was in what he described as a ‘third world’ country surrounded by radical students who were undergoing severe political repression, including subjection to torture, for their protests against an authoritarian regime. In Tunisia as in Brazil, he adopted a stance of solidarity with these students that provoked state authorities to take action against him. Foucault even suspected that he was under surveillance in both countries. Third, the severity of the political repression of students in Tunisia left a profound impression on Foucault that may well have compelled him to be much more cautious about his political actions among students and

professors in Brazil” (Hoffman, 22). Foucault drew on his experience in Tunisia to make sense of his experience in Brazil, not least of which was his first-hand experience of torture at the hands of Tunisian authorities.

He draws on this experience in the most well-known lectures delivered during his Brazil visits, “Truth and Juridical Forms,” where he marks this distinction between thought and practice early in the lectures. The relationship between truth and juridical forms is grounded in a distinction between internal and external histories of truth. An “internal history of truth that rectifies itself according to its own principles of regulation: it’s the history of truth as it is constructed in or on the basis of the history of the sciences.” (Power, 4). Foucault contrasts these internally coherent **systems** of scientific truth with various juridical **practices** of truth: “On the other hand, it seems to me that there are in society (or at least in our societies) other places where truth is formed, where a certain number of games are defined—games through which one sees certain forms of subjectivity, certain object domains, certain types of knowledge come into being—and that, consequently, one can on that basis construct an external, exterior history of truth” (Power, 4). He begins the lectures by paying homage to Nietzsche for his denial of the timeless subject understood as the ground of truth—the Cartesian/Kantian subject but also (at least on some readings that Foucault rejects) the Marxist subject. Nietzsche shows how this stable subject is instead the product of various games of power and truth. “It is toward this radical critique of the human subject by history that we should direct our efforts” (Power, 3).

Foucault thus opposes Nietzsche’s genealogies of truth and the subject to the approach of “academic Marxism” which clings to a traditional conception of the subject as the unified ground of experience. Instead, Foucault proposes that we “show the historical construction of a subject through discourse understood as consisting of a set of strategies which are part of social practices” (Power, 4). Although this is a scathing critique, it is not the outright rejection of Marxism that many readers mistakenly attribute to Foucault. Hoffman shows how Foucault’s complex relationship with Marxism demands to be reconsidered precisely because of his visits to Brazil.

Hoffman traces the contours of Foucault’s sustained engagement with Marx’s thought so that we might rethink the conventional wisdom found in, for example the work of Eric Paras (*Foucault 2.0*) that Foucault made a decisive break with Marxist thought. Hoffman reminds us that Paras dates this break with Marxism precisely to September 1975. While it is true that Foucault responded indignantly to a request by a student protester that he speak on Marx to his group that he was “finished with Marx” (cited by Hoffman 111). On Paras’ flawed account, this shift indicates a move away from Marxist thought toward neoliberalism. According to Hoffman, the break with Marx was not nearly so clean. Indeed, Stuart Elden has shown how Foucault appropriated Marx’s *Capital*, specifically his account of cooperation, to show

how the collective productive power of labor could exceed the sum of its individual parts (D&P, 163, cited by Hoffman, 110).

Still, there was a shift in his relationship with Marx's thought after *Discipline and Punish*. He critiques the Marxism's economic focus and pretensions to scientific rigor in the opening lecture "*Society Must Be Defended*," but this critique is consistent with his critique of academic Marxism in "*Truth and Juridical Forms*," but his efforts to account for social strife in terms of a struggle between races rather than a struggle between classes reveals a more fundamental difference with Marx's thought (Hoffman, 112).

Hoffman argues that this apparently decisive shift away from Marx and towards biopower is more ambiguous. Citing "*The Meshes of Power*" delivered in Salvador during October 1976, in which Foucault states that we can find accounts of the "positive mechanisms" of power in Bentham and "obviously" in Marx (Hoffman, 113). He is contrasting his positive account of power and rejecting the repressive account found in psychoanalysis. In "*The Meshes of Power*" he elaborates on Marx, claiming that in *Capital* Marx shows how power is plural with effects across society and that these powers "are constitutive of state apparatuses; they are productive rather than simply prohibitive; and finally, they can be understood from a technical rather than a juridical standpoint" (Hoffman, 113). Clearly Marx had either changed his mind about Marx between 1975 and 1976 or his rejection of Marx had always been more equivocal than scholars such as Eric Paras claimed.

Again we see the importance of the location where Foucault is lecturing in shaping what he says. These lectures were delivered in Salvador, in the northeastern state of Bahia. Traditionally the Northeast had been the home of elite slaveholding families of Brazil, and Hoffman discusses how in the 1920s descendants of the declining families articulated a politics of nostalgia which was countered in the 1930s by a Marxist movement that conceived of the Northeast as a site for revolution. "They detected the seeds of a revolutionary future in all of the poverty, misery, injustice, and suffering of the Northeast" (Hoffman, 116). Despite their fundamental opposition, what the traditionalists and Marxists had in common was their politics of victimization. His This provided the political and historical context for "*The Meshes of Power*" and Foucault's positive remarks on Marx's *Capital*. Nevertheless Foucault's local host, Roberto Machado claims that the role of Marx was not essential to his lectures in Salvador. According to Machado, "Foucault did not inhabit Marx's language so much as make Marx inhabit Foucault's language for the sake of facilitating better communication with Marxist audiences. In other words, Foucault presented his own general ideas about power through Marx so that they could be more intelligible and acceptable to those audiences" (Hoffman 120).

Hoffman rejects Machado's interpretation of the role of Marx in these 1976 lectures. Foucault was not simply telling his audiences what he thought

they would want to hear, nor was his discussion of Marx merely a rhetorical flourish. Instead Hoffman finds it more likely that Foucault did not have the time in these lectures to develop an account of his relationship with Marx's thought more fully. What we see in these lectures is Foucault continuing to struggle with how his own thought relates to Marxist thought, and we see him expressing his solidarity with his Marxist audiences in Salvador. Just as the concepts he analyzes in "Truth and Juridical Forms" represented a coded critique of Brazil's military government, his reconsideration of Marx in his Salvador lectures are an effort to identify with the opposition. After all, as Hoffman points out, Foucault could have simply appealed to Bentham's account of power's productive effects to counter the repressive hypothesis. "To suddenly turn to Marx was therefore a way for Foucault to strategically occupy and channel a language of the opposition that had a powerful resonance among the students and professors who surrounded him. It was a coded but easily recognizable way for Foucault to convey his solidarity with those struggling against the dictatorship" (Hoffman, 121). Certainly his audience saw it this way, particularly the anarchist students in the audience, who quickly proceeded to publish "The Meshes of Power" in an anarchist journal.

I began with the basic question of why Foucault returned to Brazil on five separate occasions between 1965 and 1976. The dilemma he faces here is real: how to express his solidarity with those resisting the authoritarian Brazilian government without making their precarious situation worse. His attempt to resolve this dilemma through his choice of topics and the coded language in his lectures, which amounted to an indirect critique of the government. I hope to have also shown the richness of Hoffman's account of Foucault's time in Brazil. His book should be read by anyone interested in Foucault's intellectual development, particularly those interested in how Foucault sought to bring together his philosophical work with his intellectual *praxis*.

¹ Marcelo Hoffman, *Foucault in Brazil: Dictatorship, Resistance, and Solidarity* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2024), 3. Hereafter cited parenthetically as Hoffman.

² Edmilson Costa, "Remembering the Years of Lead Under Brazil's Military Rule: AI-5 Never Again!" <https://www.liberationschool.org/remembering-the-years-of-lead-under-brazils-military-rule-ai-5-never-again/#:~:text=Between%20December%2013%2C%201968%20and%20October%2013%2C%201978%2C,of%20public%20administration%2C%20schools%2C%20universities%20and%20public%20places> Retrieved May 15, 2024.

³ John T. Hamilton, *Security: Politics, Humanity, and the Philology of Care* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 41.