Revisiting Marcuse with Foucault: 
An Essay on Liberation Meets 
The History of Sexuality

While the rituals by which I affirm my links to the New Left of the 1960s have become fewer and further apart, one has remained constant. Every year since 1975, when I began teaching history at Boston College, I have assigned a book by Marcuse. In recent years, it has been exclusively An Essay on Liberation, which has the advantages of brevity, accessibility, and of being addressed to and about part of a college-age generation—mine—which is also that of many of my students’ parents.

That I find myself in that sense in the book must have a lot to do with why I have fixed on it for use in a course. I probably like to teach it, in other words, because in vivid ways it reminds me who I am, or have been. Or better, it reminds me who I have aspired/desired/fancied myself to be: a certain sort of 1960s New Leftist student-then-academic visible through the cluster of forms and styles (personal, intellectual, social, sartorial, cultural, political) through which I have given meanings to my life for several decades. Actually, although An Essay on Liberation has been my choice, any of Marcuse's books would have worked, since what excited me so much about them is that each one made me want to be like its author: to think as wonderfully strangely as he could, to write such books, and to live, experience, and practice the ideals I found in them—the polymorphous perversity, the Great Refusal, the new sensibility, and the biological basis for socialism. It is no wonder that teaching An Essay on Liberation became so significant a ritual in my life.

But if annual reckoning with that text has been the most enduring sign of my ties to the New Left, Marcuse and his book have not gone unchallenged. For over the past four years, in my course on twentieth-century European intellectual history, I have assigned Michel Foucault’s History of Sexuality, vol. 1, alongside Marcuse’s Essay on Liberation, presenting
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them as counterpoised interpretations of the sexual politics of the sixties, specifically of 1968. Initially, I imagined this merely as pedagogically appealing: for my students, an interesting, potentially lively confrontation between a humanist Marxist and an antihumanist, a Freudian and an anti-Freudian, and so on.

It soon emerged, however, that more was involved. My ritual, I found, was being transformed from one primarily of keeping a faith to one of inner conflict. My students were soon stuck with a teacher suffering from vertigo brought on by the experience of being caught between conflicting, Marcusean versus Foucauldian, discourses. Never having been a structuralist, indeed, having been a foot soldier for the humanist (Lukács-Gramsci-Frankfurt School inspired) Marxist critique of structuralism and Althusser, I was belatedly discovering poststructuralism—and losing my immunity to it. As Marcuse had in the mid-1960s, so now Foucault, with his own dark, passionately critical, combative, sensual writing and his unerring capacity to disturb, was getting under my skin.

I have, in other words, been revisiting Marcuse with Foucault, specifically, revisiting *An Essay on Liberation* with *The History of Sexuality*. This essay is a report on some of what was found. Not the least important was a signifier, "myself." When I began to grapple with Marcuse and Foucault, my focus was on the differences between the two, the political-historical-epistemological ruptures—not least the fault-lines between modernism and postmodernism—that so sharply separate them. *An Essay on Liberation*, it should be noted, was published in 1969. It was promptly and widely recognized as the manifesto of the explosions of 1968, especially of the antirepressive, left-Freudian sexual politics that figured so largely in those explosions. Marcuse's smallest book, *An Essay on Liberation*, made its author's name big because of its links to a remarkable social upheaval. *The History of Sexuality* was published in 1976, by which time Marcuse's impact had waned while Foucault's had waxed. That shift had in turn been partly a result of the defeat and dissolution of the movements of the sixties. Foucault's *History* is indeed one of the great critiques, a kind of gay science, of the sexual politics of the New Left.

As the revisiting continued, however, I eventually found "myself" in the sense that I noticed how the differences between Marcuse's *Essay on Liberation* and Foucault's *History of Sexuality* also represent differ-
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ences—New Left/post-New Left—within me, the commentator. The self I found when I found myself was a self divided. This was useful in turn, for it enabled me to notice that there are differences not only between the two texts but inside each of them as well. Marcuse's Essay, for example, has its Foucauldian possibilities while Foucault's History has its Marcusean, New Left markings. I want, then, to push, squeeze, and rub these two books against but also into each other because they are pushing, rubbing, and squeezing me into and against myself. This may be the case—I certainly hope it is—for others of you as well.

Preliminary Disclaimers

In what follows, I suggest that Foucault's History of Sexuality is a critical, and also a gay, dialogue with the New Left of the 1960s. I believe there is evidence in the text for thinking about it in these terms, but I do magnify the evidence with the tools of intuition and projection. I think this is a useful approach but definitely not the only one. I am also aware that in discussing Marcuse and Foucault as I do, I run the risk of flattening the differences between them.

More insistent and consistent followers of Foucault, for example, could argue that, far from being friendly to poststructuralism, I undercut it by normalizing it—that I erase what is really subversive and strange in Foucault by reducing his work to its alleged links to the familiar and more acceptable, that is, to the New Left. Similarly, one more loyal to Marcuse than I am might criticize me for diluting and denigrating Marcuse's position by tying it to the trendy and finally conformist poststructuralist bandwagon. Up to a point, I appreciate and accept both criticisms, although I would not agree that the New Left is simply familiar and acceptable or that poststructuralism is simply trendy and conformist. Beyond a certain point, though, it seems to me that the more strict Marcusean and the more strict Foucauldian positions slide into a place that is at least as odd as my own.

First, both criticisms fail to acknowledge the hybrid character of Marcuse's and Foucault's thinking. Second, both criticisms presuppose the very sort of essentialism—that, for example, Foucault's position finally has an essence, that essence being essentially different from the essence of
Marcuse's position—of which each theorist is quite critical. Finally, both criticisms seem to presuppose the purist's fear of miscegenation and hybridity—the fear that, in matters of theory, the mulatto, the "mixed" marriage, the bisexual, is contaminated. This is a fear worth overcoming. A postfinal caveat: My goal is not to generate a synthesis of Marcuse and Foucault but rather to deal with a midlife crisis, a symptom of which is the division between Marcuse and Foucault that is inside me, giving me both pain and pleasure.

One could also object that my approach compares a political, occasional, highly conjunctural Marcuse essay with a major Foucault work of theory. In this respect, it is Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1955) that should be studied in relation to Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. The point is taken. My response is that Foucault's book is also very much an occasional text in the sense that it is *occasioned by* 1968, by the collapse of the hopes and expectations voiced in Marcuse's *Essay on Liberation* and shared in many ways by Foucault himself, at least by some of his selves or subject positions. And it is the relations between the texts and 1968 that interest me here.

Such an interest does not, I hope, entail a reduction of either text to its occasion, its situation. Indeed, being linked to a situation, a historical moment, is in any case not merely a limit. On the contrary, part of the greatness of *An Essay on Liberation* stems precisely from its immersion in the flow of 1968: from its attempt to link itself directly to the most utopian possibilities of a social movement, borrowing from it while offering it a language that, at the time, seemed adequate to its desires. And this from a thinker known and often reviled by Leftists and reformers for his pessimism.

Similarly, much of the greatness of *The History of Sexuality* stems from its position as an analysis of a defeat and a dissolution of that liberationist movement. In this sense, Foucault's book can be thought of in connection with such works as Marx's *Capital*, Antonio Gramsci's discussion of hegemony in the 1920s, Leon Trotsky's *Revolution Betrayed*, Wilhelm Reich's *Mass Psychology of Fascism* in the 1930s, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in the 1940s, and even Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* in 1964. That is, Foucault's *History* is one of those rare and astonishing works that manages to push an account of a failure of a specific revolutionary project so
intensively that it reaches the level of a radically new conception of past, present, and future. It embodies what Russell Jacoby has called the “dialectic of defeat”: the radical possibilities of disillusionment. The sad point, which *The History of Sexuality* puts in bold relief, is that for great advances in critical social theory, nothing serves better than a revolution that failed or failed to occur.

Foucault’s *Gauchisme*

It is time to turn to the two books themselves and to consider, first, the question of the New Left. From the opening pages to his book’s end, Foucault makes clear that he is not only in a critical discussion with Reich and Marcuse—that is, with a certain tradition of Leftist sexual politics—but also through that tradition, in a critical exchange with 1968 and its legacies. As Foucault writes at the close of the next to last chapter, “This whole ‘antirepressive’ struggle [and he is referring to the left-Freudian theorists here] represented nothing more but nothing less—and its importance is undeniable—than a tactical shift and reversal in the great deployment of sexuality.” But, he continues, one cannot “expect this critique [Reich’s explicitly, Marcuse’s implicitly] to be a grid for the history of that deployment.” “Nor the basis,” Foucault concludes—and here he extends his critique from the theorists of antirepressive sexual politics to the social movement that found its voice, and itself, in that theory—“for a movement to dismantle it.”

Yet Foucault’s critique of the New Left version of the “repressive hypothesis” and his seemingly un-Foucauldian (because hopeful) suggestion of a movement to dismantle the deployment of sexuality are themselves more closely linked than is often noticed to the New Left, to 1968, and to a tradition of *gauchisme* that was revived in that year. Such critics as Alex Callinicos and Christopher Norris have not, for example, glimpsed the extent to which Foucault’s work generally and his *History of Sexuality* in particular are not so much a departure from political engagement itself as a critique of the New Left, of 1968, from within. For Foucault’s perspective is linked to, even as it departs from, the New Left’s own anticentralist Left rather than to the segment of its intellectuals who,
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in disillusion over dissolution, opted for either despair or the political right.

To borrow a phrase, if not quite the intended meaning, from David Halperin, Foucault’s politics seem neither despairing nor disillusioned but, rather, queer. That is, even as I want to link his political offerings to a Western gauchiste heritage and to the New Left of the 1960s, Foucault stretches, breaks with, and transforms those heritages. By gauchisme I mean the anticentralist outlook historically associated with anarchism and workers councils or soviets, that was revived and recast in the 1960s and was influenced in that period by, among other works, Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* and his *One-Dimensional Man*. Foucault’s critique of 1968 should be seen as gauchiste—and New Leftist—to the extent that it notices and highlights the presence of power in the liberationist movement itself and is a critique of that power’s operations within the movement.

Especially pertinent here are the several pages in the chapter on “Method” in *The History of Sexuality* outlining a number of propositions regarding power. These pages offer some theses that are original and distinctively Foucault’s and are extensions of impulses rooted in the New Left. “Relations of power,” he writes, “are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are immanent in the latter.” Power relations, in other words, are not outside anything.

This is, of course, now a somewhat familiar Foucauldian theme. As expressed in *The History of Sexuality*, the theses concerning power not being external to any relations can be read as having had as its most important addressee the New Left and 1968. In many respects, Foucault’s book is a fairly direct rejoinder to Marcuse’s *Essay on Liberation*. The second is that Foucault’s book, like Marcuse’s, was shaped by the political/cultural atmosphere of the movements of the sixties. In referring to that political/cultural atmosphere, I mean it to include the New Left movements’ rejections of the preceding Stalinist atmosphere. Foucault had known both; so had Marcuse.

My final point is that Foucault’s theses, coming as I suggest they do from the New Left, are also a break with it. That is not to say Foucault broke with critique and resistance to power. It is only to say that the division between Foucault and Marcuse, between Foucault and the New Left,
is deep and not really bridgeable. Since that division is also “not in a position of exteriority with respect” to myself but is inside me, it is no wonder that I am having difficulties.

If this makes some sense, then the same may be true of the following. When Foucault stresses that power relations are not in positions external to other (apparently nonpower) relations, he is reminding the New—and old—Left of unsettling things. That, for example, power relations are as operative in the revolution and the revolutionaries as they are in the state and the police. And that power relations are not outside the bodies/minds of those who oppose power. And that when power is thought of as being located only “out there” in capital, bourgeois property, and the state, that very way of thinking is itself entwined in power relations; it is, indeed, a vital mechanism of sustaining the invisibility of power’s position of interiority.

In the same section of The History of Sexuality, Foucault writes that “the representation of power has remained under the spell of monarchy. In political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king.” In my view, this is addressed to the general reader and, with special emphasis, to the New Left. Part of the impulse for The History of Sexuality was its author’s conviction that especially but not only in its sexual politics the New Left had fatally fancied itself outside power. This, I believe, is Foucault’s gauchisme en procès, his Leftism in transformation. To see where he took it, the frame of discussion needs to be expanded.

Foucault, of course, sought to generate “a different theory of power” and of resistances to it. It is in connection with the issue of resistances to power that Foucault specifically and critically invokes (and partially misreads) Marcuse. “Points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal [Marcuse’s well-known term, which I think he uses first in Eros and Civilization in his discussion of Narcissus’s refusal of the regime of instrumentalized sex], no soul of revolt, [no] source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary.” Here Foucault carries gauchisme and the New Left onto new terrain, where the historic idea of revolution itself is put into question. For the “plurality of resistances” he proposes as an alternative to the Great Refusal is the point at which his Leftism becomes “queer politics.” Foucault’s History discloses not only what is often called his “micropoli-
tics” but also a kind of antipolitical politics of “mobile and transitory points of resistance.” These points of resistance, he writes, “furrow across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds.”

Two observations are in order. One is that Foucault partly misrepresents Marcuse’s notion of “Great Refusal.” It is an ambivalent idea in Marcuse’s work. On the one hand, his usages of the notion are not far from Foucault’s supposedly contrasting idea of a plurality of resistances, since the Great Refusal actually refers to highly specific acts by individuals and small groups whom Marcuse views precisely as “mobile and transitory points of resistance.” On the other hand, there is the Hegelian-Marxist implication of Marcuse’s Great Refusal—the implication that already present within those microresistances is the jumbo synthesis of Great Refusal as “The Revolution.” This latent part of Marcuse’s Great Refusal is the part Foucault highlights. And as I read Foucault here, he is also attributing that master narrative of the revolution to 1968 as a whole.

The second observation regarding Foucault’s critique is this: While I find it apt, I also find that it elides the indebtedness of his own critique to the sixties movements he criticizes. For it was those movements themselves that had already begun to generate in practice the idea of a “plural- ity of resistances.” Again, although Foucault sets himself polemically apart from the New Left, he can also be seen as working through its contradictions from within.

Plural Resistances: Foucault and Marcuse

“It is doubtless,” Foucault writes, “the strategic codification of these points of resistance that makes revolution possible.” Then Foucault makes a striking statement but says it so quietly and matter-of-factly that one can easily miss the point. He initially appears to be on the verge of something uncharacteristic, namely, putting forward a vision of revolution. Instead, he does something characteristic. He proposes that the operation by which revolution emerges from a strategic codification of points of resistance is not liberation but something “somewhat similar to the way in which the state relies on the institutional integration of power relationships.” I take Foucault to mean that when the revolution comes
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into being by codifying mobile points of resistance to power, it carries out operations similar to those carried out by the state. A quiet but firm adieu à la révolution, n'est-ce pas? This is, fairly precisely, a New Left and a post–New Left critique of the New Left’s drive toward revolution.

But it is also more than that. In this connection, I want to focus on a specific dimension of the notion of The History of Sexuality as the gay science of 1968 and the notion of his politics as being queer. Again, the publication date is significant. For 1976 situates the book not only in the wake of the defeat and break-up of the sixties movements but in the first waves of a birth. The History of Sexuality is not simply post–New Left; it is also post-Stonewall. In 1969, partly inspired by the models of black and New Left resistances swirling around them, gay men fought off a police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a well-known gay bar in lower Manhattan. Such raids had been regular. Only the resistance was new. The event has become a symbol of the emergence of gay liberation in this country and elsewhere in the West. I suggest that Foucault’s book is part of this process.

More specifically, I propose that The History of Sexuality can be read as a gay critique of the historic heterosexism and homophobia of the Left, including that of both the New Left of the 1960s and the Reichean branch of the Freudian Left. I cannot fully prove this and am ready to accept the charge that my proposal reads into rather than from Foucault. Yet his book is certainly a critique of the widely presumed normalness and normativity of heterosexuality. What I read into this is that the critique is in part energized by its author’s sense that heterosexuality was considered normative and obligatory also—even particularly—in the New Left, which thought of itself as subversive and liberatory in its sexual politics.

If one could accept this hypothesis, at least for exploratory purposes, then Marcuse, specifically his Eros and Civilization, becomes especially relevant. His 1955 “philosophical inquiry into Freud” was more than an exception to homophobia on the Left: During the late sixties and early seventies, Marcuse’s Eros was retrieved and developed as a fertile and informing text of an emergent and sometimes hesitant gay liberation movement.

Paul Robinson’s Freudian Left of 1969 is one of several indications of how, in the years just before and after publication of Foucault’s History,
Marcuse's version of the "whole antirepressive struggle" had special meanings for gays in a New Left that was not prone to let them speak. Although he was not yet writing as an openly gay historian, Robinson's account of the work of Geza Roheim, Wilhelm Reich, and Marcuse can now be seen as part of an effort by gay New Left intellectuals to theorize their sexuality. Signaling the important (and previously little regarded) place occupied by the figure of the homosexual in *Eros and Civilization*, Robinson stressed that Marcuse moved beyond liberal tolerance to an affirmation of homosexual persons. They are, in fact, the bearers of the repressed polymorphous perverse sexuality and natural bisexuality that haunts the dominant, genitally organized, patriarchal family, which reproduces heterosexuality. "In a certain sense," Robinson proposed, "the social function of the homosexual [in *Eros*] was analogous to that of the critical philosopher."  

The year 1971 saw the publication of Dennis Altman's *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*, which made explicit the significance of Marcuse for gay liberation. Noting, in pre-Foucauldian fashion (in his subsequent work, Altman would go on to bring Marcuse and Foucault into connection with each other), that "Western societies are remarkable for their strong repression of sexuality," Altman indicated that his discussion of this matter was "particularly indebted to Marcuse for his exploration of the concepts of repression and liberation." Along with Norman O. Brown, whose *Life against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* had also appeared in 1955, Marcuse, Altman writes, has "reminded us . . . that any real theory of sexual liberation must take into account the essentially polymorphous and bisexual needs of the human being." Recently, Jonathan Dollimore's *Sexual Dissidence* recalls the significance of Marcuse and Brown in the formation of gay liberation theorizing before Foucault.  

Paul Robinson's desire-filled insight into connections between homosexuals and critical theorists is suggestive regarding another dimension of the Marcuse/Foucault relation. This dimension concerns the ground, if any, on which critical theory and its bearers, critical theorists, might be standing. For Marcuse, the Hegelian-Marxist critical theory itself is a historically determinate negation of late capitalist society, grounded in the dialectical unfolding of reason as reality. Even when, as in the recent era, critical theory no longer has its classical foundation in the proletariat, it
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is nevertheless still not based merely on an ethical, or subjective, postulate. It thus avoids the unfortunate fate of being, in Hegelian terms, a case of the “beautiful soul.” This is evident in all of Marcuse’s works, not least *An Essay on Liberation*. There, as elsewhere, critical theory, endangered and beleaguered as it may be due to the severing of its historic ties to a systemically revolutionary class, is nonetheless presented as being linked to History, to what poststructuralists call a master narrative.

Foucault’s view is different, and in this regard, Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* is very helpful. She suggests that Foucault’s preface to the diaries of the hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin may contain a quite different approach to the origins and grounds of critical theorizing. The genealogical critique of the reified categories of sex, she writes, is, in Foucault, “the inadvertent consequence of sexual practices that cannot be accounted for within the medicolegal discourse of a naturalized heterosexuality.” Herculine Barbin, Butler adds, “is not an ‘identity,’ but the sexual impossibility of an identity.”

These observations help illumine Foucault’s approach to the question of the foundations of critical theory and its representatives. As I see it, for Foucault, the site from which critique is set in motion is not something big, such as the revolutionary class, nor something immanent in history. It is, rather, something small, marginal; precisely something that does not fit into the larger picture. Genealogical critique of normal sexuality is an “inadvertent consequence,” an eccentricity. In Marcuse, critique is attached to the underlying mainstream; in Foucault, it is not a mainstream that is prized but a marginality.

Butler’s *Gender Trouble* offers another suggestion that refers back to Robinson’s linkage of the homosexual and the critical theorist. Foucault, she proposes, idealizes Herculine Barbin’s “happy limbo of a non-identity”; indeed, he identifies with her/him. Butler proceeds perceptively to criticize Foucault for reproducing the lapse and erasure originally made by the doctors who had tried to explain Herculine Barbin. Like them, Foucault, according to Butler, fails to note the lesbian possibilities of the puzzling body and experience in question.

Before concluding with several words on the presently almost unavoidable theme of identity, I have two related comments on the matter of the foundations of critical theory and theorists. The first concerns sexual difference and gender in Marcuse and Foucault, both of whose writings have
been critically embraced (at different stages) by women for feminism. What Butler observes about Foucault can be transposed to Marcuse’s enthusiasm, in *An Essay on Liberation*, for the expressions of androgyny and unmanly gentleness in the late 1960s counterculture, as well as to the delicate, almost effeminate sensuality of his pages on Narcissus in *Eros and Civilization*. Although I cannot yet fully develop the idea, I propose that there are affinities between the (admittedly small) gender-mixed aspects of Marcuse’s and Foucault’s work and the anti-authoritarian *gauchisme* of their respective politics. The related thought I do want to develop is that there is a proximity mediating the distance between Marcuse and Foucault on the issue of the grounds and bearers of critique. For in Marcuse, there is an interesting because quite un-Hegelian, un-Marxist, and fairly Foucauldian tendency to value the margins and the marginalities when speaking of the bearers of critique: homosexuals and other sexual nonconformists, avant-garde artists, racial minorities, youth revolters, bohemians, critical intellectuals without audiences, and the like. In this respect, too, he and Foucault are closer than first glance suggests.

But Marcuse was, after all, a Hegelian-Marxist, very much influenced by Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness*. Having noted this, it is worth adding that Marcuse and Foucault are both in important respects Heideggerians. Marcuse’s Hegelian-Marxism was always somewhat at odds with itself. In *An Essay on Liberation*, for example, there is a lively battle between a kind of demasculinizing *gauchisme* and a kind of Lukácsian-Leninism, that is, a privileging of theory and theorists. Much less of the latter appears in Foucault, although parallel tendencies and tensions do arise in his work as well.

One also finds in Foucault—and rarely if at all in Marcuse—a hostility to intellect (and implicitly to intellectuals). This impulse in Foucault has connections both to a certain anti-intellectual tradition with a particular profile among French intellectuals going back to Proudhon and subsequently to Georges Sorel, Charles Maurras, and others, and to hostility to intellectuals in *gauchisme* from Roberto Michels early in this century through Daniel Cohn-Bendit in 1968. But in Foucault, anti-intellectual impulses—which I find in his disdain for the “immense verbosity” and “giant mill of speech” to which the medical intellectuals subject the body—seem to stem from a kind of naturalism of the body, as if it might
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have an integrity outside discourse and beyond the deforming reach of intellect.

I want to pursue this through its links to the matter of utopianism in Marcuse and Foucault. Marcuse, of course, is renowned as a utopian theorist. In *An Essay on Liberation* he calls for a move from Marx to Fourier, from realism to surrealism. On the other hand, it was Marcuse’s consistent conviction that such a move was precisely not utopian. In his view, the “advanced industrial societies” had pushed material development to the point of having rendered obsolete (that is, having *made realizable*) the utopian (that is, the purportedly unrealizable) elements of utopian theories, including his own theorizing about the historical-erotic prospects of “nonrepressive desublimation.”

As he is in his other works, so in *The History of Sexuality* Foucault is a critic of utopian theorizing generally and in particular of Marcuse’s antirepressive sexual utopianism. But as Judith Butler observes, in both his preface to *Herculine Barbin* and *The History of Sexuality*, one can glimpse a tendency toward what she calls a “sentimental indulgence in the very emancipatory discourse his analysis . . . was meant to replace.” That is, she discovers in Foucault “a kind of anti-emancipatory call for sexual freedom” and rightly terms this a “constitutive contradiction” in and of his work.

This recalls my suggestion that an implicit metaphysics of the body can be gleaned from *The History of Sexuality*. Butler locates Foucault’s almost hidden sexual utopianism in his idealization of Herculine Barbin’s “intersexed body” and in the references in his *History* to the innocent and bucolic pleasures of intergenerational sexual relations between the mentally simple farmhand and the young girl in the village of Lapcourt in the 1860s. Foucault even speaks there in most un-Foucauldian terms of the “timeless gestures” and “barely furtive pleasures” as if they existed outside or before the onset of what he terms “a whole machinery for speechifying, analyzing, and investigating”; that is, before the onset of a regulative sexuality. Foucault, too, in other words, offers an emancipatory sexual politics and at least elements of a sexual utopianism. According to it, Butler suggests, the genealogical overthrow of “sex,” as it has been discursively produced, results in “the release of a primary sexual multiplicity,” a “happy limbo of [sexual] non-identity”—notions that are “not so far afield from the psychoanalytic postulation of primary polymor-
phousness or Marcuse's notion of an original and creative bisexual Eros subsequently repressed by an instrumentalist culture.”

Readers can also discern utopian moments in Foucault's occasional but each time pointed use of the phrase, “one day, perhaps.” I have located only two such uses in The History of Sexuality, but one appears in the book's dramatic closing sentences. There Foucault writes that “we need to consider the possibility that one day, perhaps in a different economy of bodies and pleasures”—with the “one day, perhaps,” containing the utopian longing—“people will no longer quite understand how the ruses of sexuality, and the power that sustains its organization, were able to subject us to that austere monarchy of sex, so that we became dedicated to the endless task of forcing its secret, of exacting the truest of confessions from a shadow.” But as if in hasty retreat from the territory he had just entered, Foucault reasserts the Foucault he wants us to see, closing the book (and the door on utopia he had just opened) with this emphatically post-1968 observation: “The irony of this deployment is in having us believe that our ‘liberation’ is in the balance.” The irony within the irony is that Foucault appears to be, along with Marcuse, one of the “us” who believed.

Conclusion

Having begun with Marcuse and Foucault, I hope to have reached Marcuses and Foucaults. If so, I am at the end but for the question of identity. On this matter, I will not try to explore their identities but will instead remark that Marcuse's Essay and Foucault's History are notable and notably linked in a genre. What I have in mind is not simply the genre of books from the Left dealing with sex and politics but a perhaps less familiar genre of handbooks of sexual-political identities for Left (and not only Left) intellectuals. In a certain but definite sense, these are all works dealing with, in Marcuse's phrase, “a new sensibility,” with political questions being presented as questions of sensibility.

This class of books—and here Marcuse's Eros and Civilization must be included—contains the efforts of two men of the Left, one apparently straight, the other gay, both writing about relations among sex, knowledge, politics, power, and society, and about how and by what sorts of
people and practices, including the practices of their bodies, those relations, which constitute us and our practices, might be transformed. In this respect, while they have roots in the projects of such varied predecessors as Oscar Wilde, Alexandra Kollontai, surrealists, dadaists, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Reichians, and others, the books under discussion are part of a genre that has greatly expanded since 1968.

They entail, I am proposing, politics of identities in the specific sense that they embody the efforts and the desires of their authors to exceed themselves, to contend with themselves as if they were, in Nietzsche's remarkable closing words of Ecce Homo, "Dionysus versus the Crucified"—not as one or the other, but as the contention itself, as the "versus." Gender Trouble, too, is in this genre. In very different ways, these works are, in Butler's phrase, subversions of sexual-political identity as stable, essential, grounded in a natural sex, but they are also works of sexual-political identities and styles through which we, like those who wrote them, make ourselves up. I should, however, speak only for myselfs.

Notes

5. Ibid., 88-89.
6. Ibid., 90-91.
7. Ibid., 95-96.
8. Ibid., 96.
9. Ibid.
11. Ibid., 207-8.
13. Ibid., 58.
18. Ibid., 23.
19. Ibid., 95–96.
20. Ibid., 96.
21. Ibid., 97.
22. Ibid., 96.
24. Ibid.