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Michel Foucault: Biopolitics and Engagement

> „Discipline and Punish corresponded perfectly to the state of mind of a generation that wanted to get the cop and the petty bureaucrat "out of its head," and that saw manifestations of power everywhere: so much so that Foucault's ideas quickly evolved beyond even their author's wishes, and became a vulgate for those fighting against different forms of social control . . . Never had a philosopher so well echoed the ideals and discomforts of a generation: that of '68."[1]
>
> *François Dosse, History of Structuralism*

Through no fault of his own, Michel Foucault missed out on May 1968. When the explosion erupted, he was hundreds of miles away teaching philosophy at the University of Tunis. Nonetheless, the May events had a profound effect on Foucault's intellectual and political trajectory. Foucault himself acknowledged as much, observing that May was the unanticipated "political opening" that gave him the courage to investigate the mechanisms of power operating in Western societies and to "pursue [his] research in the direction of penal theory, prisons, and disciplines."[2]

Before 1968, Foucault's name was still primarily associated with his improbable 1966 bestseller The Order of the Things: the arcane philosophical treatise that famously proclaimed the "death of man." And although he himself rejected the appellation, Foucault was widely regarded as a "superstar of structuralism," a philosophy that famously rejected the powers of reason and human agency to change society for

[1] Francois Dosse, *History of Structuralism* vol. II: *The Sign Sets*, trans. Deboarah Kaufmann (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 253-54.

[2] Michel Foucault, Truth and Power, in: *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings*, Colin Gordon, ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 111.

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the better. By the early 1970s, conversely, Foucault had become the very embodiment of the militant intellectual. It was during this period that the once shy and reserved philosopher fashioned a new public persona: he began shaving his head, donning horn-rimmed glasses, and sporting a trademark white turtleneck, thus creating the iconic look for which he is best remembered today.

The transformation, however, was more than skin deep. Foucault's adventures in radical militancy after May '68 – above all, his almost daily interaction with the Maoists who made up the rank and file of the Prison Information Group (GIP) – laid the groundwork for his extremely influential investigations of power during the 1970s. By working shoulder-to-shoulder with the Gauche Prolétarienne activists, Foucault became "personally involved in his theoretical object of study."[3] As a result, the Maoist focus on the "practice of everyday life" came to determine the methodology of his two best known works from this period, Discipline and Punish and the History of Sexuality. As Jean-Claude Monod observes in Foucault et la police des conduites: "As far as prisons were concerned, with Foucault, the practice of contestation preceded the historical theorization [in Discipline and Punish]."[4] Fellow Prison Information Group activist Michelle Perrot, editor of L'Impossible Prison, similarly asserts that Foucault's GIP engagement during the early 1970s was decisive for the conception of power he developed in subsequent years.[5] And as Gilles Deleuze notes in a seminal review essay of Foucault's prison book:

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[3] Dosse, *History of Structuralism* vol. II, 249; emphasis added.

[4] Jean-Claude Monod, *Foucault et la police des conduites* (Paris: Michalon, 1997), 75.

[5] Michelle Perrot, *La Leçon des ténèbres : Michel Foucault et la prison*, Actes 54 (Summer 1986) ; as Perrot observes with reference to GIP : "more than his other books, *Discipline and Punish* is rooted in an historical present in which Michel Foucault is profoundly implicated" (75). See also *L'Impossible Prison: recherches sur le système pénitentiaire au XIXe siècle*, ed. Michelle Perrot (Paris: Seuil, 1980).

„From 1971 to 1973, under Foucault's auspices, GIP functioned as a group that tried to combat the resurgence of Marxism and the authoritarianism endemic to gauchisme in order to preserve a fundamental relationship between prison struggles and other popular struggles. Discipline and Punish issued from this political experience. . . When in 1975 Foucault returned to a theoretical publication [i.e., Discipline and Punish], to us he seemed to be the first to conceptualize the new understanding of power that we were looking for without knowing either where to find it or how to articulate it . . . It was as though, finally, something new since Marx had burst forth, another theory, another practice of struggle, another mode of organizing strategies."[6]

Foucault himself hinted at this intellectual genealogy when, in the preface to Discipline and Punish, he observed that his conclusions were less informed by history than by contemporary politics. Thus, during these years, the author of Madness and Civilization assiduously combined philosophical passion and political activism, in essence leading the life of a committed militant. While Foucault contributed his name and his support to dozens of causes during this period, it was only to the Gauche Prolétarienne that he offered his full energies as a philosopher-activist, thereby lending the infamous banned Maoist organization considerable prestige. Foucault remained in the Maoist orbit until the Gauche Prolétarienne's precipitous collapse circa 1973. He once observed that GIP was the GP plus "intellectuals."

In order to highlight the originality of his ideas and positions, many critics have viewed his intellectual development during the 1970s as a wholly innovative departure vis-à-vis the reigning Marxist approaches. Yet, a closer examination of Foucault's trajectory as a militant reveals his striking proximity to gauchisme – a political approach that was "leftist" yet opposed to the dogmatic assertions of Marxist orthodoxy. As

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[6] Gilles Deleuze, Ecrivain non: un nouveau cartographe, *Critique* 343 (December 1975), 1208,1212.

one commentator has appositely noted: "Taking gauchiste orthodoxy as his point of departure – more specifically, political slogans borrowed from the Maoist tribe – Foucault invented a new vision, a new language, which he systematized in Discipline and Punish, and which was destined to become a new orthodoxy among politicized laypersons during the second half of the 1970s."[7]

As we have already noted, French intellectuals played only a minor role during the May events. Observing the unfolding revolutionary drama with a mixture of fear and fascination, they were forced to concede that they had been upstaged by the younger generation of student activists. In vain, a few attempted to make their voices heard from the sidelines. Raymond Aron was struck by the fact that all of the protagonists seemed to be playing roles. "I played the role of Tocqueville, which was somewhat silly of course, but others played the role of Saint-Just, Robespierre, or Lenin, which, all things considered, was even more ridiculous."[8]

It is a matter of speculation what kind of role Foucault would have played had he been in Paris. On the one hand, although Foucault was neither a gauchiste nor a communist at the time, his sympathies were surely with the student radicals who were fighting against the rigid institutions of Gaullist France. Even though he never made any public statements in their support, privately, at least, he expressed an admiration for their courage to defy the Gaullist regime.[9] In the second half of May, Foucault was finally able to return to Paris for a few days. There he witnessed a 50,000-strong student-worker rally at the Charléty stadium. Later, he told Nouvel Observateur

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7 Gerard Mauger, Un Nouveau militantisme, *Sociétés & Représentations* (November 1996): 55.

8 Aron, *La Révolution Introuvable*, 33.

9 David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, 206-7. (New York: Pantheon, 1995).

editor Jean Daniel: "they [the students] are not making a revolution; they are a revolution."[10]

On the other hand, Foucault seems to have regarded the students with a healthy dose of contempt appropriate for a man of his generation. Born in 1926, Foucault was not a soixante-huitard. As an adolescent in the 1940s, the formative events in his life were World War II and the German Occupation, not the cold war and decolonization. Although his family remained largely uninvolved in the politics of the Occupation and its aftermath, and although Foucault himself spent most of this period studying diligently for his exams, his daily life, like that of every French citizen, was inevitably structured by the war. While preparing for the entrance exam to the Ecole Normale Supérieure, for example, Foucault was once forced to evacuate his family home in Poitiers in order to avoid the Allied bombing campaigns—his family home was damaged during the raids but not destroyed.[11]

But there was something perhaps more significant than the generation gap that kept Foucault from identifying fully with the student militants. Like the leaders of the Union de Jeunesse Communiste-Marxiste-Léniniste (UJC-ML) who formed the political nucleus of the Gauche Prolétarienne, Foucault was a product of France's most elite institutions and knew little of the "Poverty of Student Life" – to cite the title of Mustapha Khayati's influential Situationist tract – that fueled the '68 student rebellion. In fact, throughout much of the 1950s and 60s, Foucault wasn't even in France. Whereas many of his academic peers had taken up positions at campuses that were later known for their political radicalism, such as Nanterre and the University of Strasbourg, upon passing the agrégation in 1953 Foucault spent much of his early career fleeing his home country, teaching abroad in Germany, Sweden, Poland, and, finally, Tunisia.

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[10] Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, Betsy Wing trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 192.

[11] Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, 15

Exiled in Paradise: Foucault in Tunis

Foucault did not have his first taste of student politics until1968. However, it was not the French enragés but the student radicals in Tunisia that enticed him into political activism. While teaching philosophy in Tunisia in 1967 and 1968, Foucault became involved, unwittingly at first, in the student protests against the authoritarian regime of Habib Bourguiba. A fervent modernizer influenced by the French Jacobin tradition, Bourguiba sought to unite Tunisia under a single political party. One of the linchpins of his secular vision was a new university system in the Western European mode. Foucault had obtained a teaching position at the flagship campus in Tunis where, paradoxically, his students were slowly being introduced to new anti-Western ideas. During the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, pro-Palestinian student demonstrations turned against the Bourguiba government, which was widely perceived to be a puppet of the pro-Zionist West. The conflict peaked in the spring of 1968 at the time of American Vice-President Hubert Humphrey's visit. During the ensuing wave of repression, a number of Foucault's students were viciously beaten and imprisoned.[12]

To Foucault's dismay, these student demonstrations sometimes degenerated into anti-Semitic mobs that burned and looted Jewish homes, shops, and synagogues. A lifelong philo-Semite, Foucault did not hide his abhorrence for the anti-Semitic undertones of the revolt; nor did he deny the legitimacy of the students' struggle against state repression. Foucault was also wary of the Tunisian students' uncritical adoption of popular Marxist slogans. He had resigned from the French Communist Party (in which he was never particularly active) in 1952. The sterile Marxist debates of the 1950s and 1960s, and his own experience living under a Marxist dictatorship in Poland, had "left a rather bad taste in my mouth,"

[12] Ibid., 82.

Foucault recalled. Despite these reservations, Foucault found himself viscerally drawn to the Tunisian students' cause:

> „During those upheavals I was profoundly struck and amazed by those young men and women who exposed themselves to serious risks for the simple fact of having written or distributed a leaflet, or for having incited others to go on strike. Such actions were enough to place at risk one's life, one's freedom, and one's body. And this made a very strong impression on me: for me it was a true political experience."[13]

Foucault helped hide students running from the police; he even allowed them the use of his home to print their tracts. In doing so, he knew that he was risking much more than his professor colleagues back in France. One night, while giving a ride to a student, Foucault was pulled over and savagely beaten by the police. He was convinced that he was under surveillance by the secret police and that his personal phone had been tapped.[14]

If risking "one's life, one's freedom, one's body" was the measure of a "true political experience," then it is not surprising that Foucault was disappointed by the May '68 uprising in Paris. As many commentators have noted, May '68 was more street theater than revolution. Participants on both sides of the barricades were self-consciously playing roles. Fortunately, they were unwilling to take the political confrontation at hand to a higher level. The barricading of the Latin Quarter during the second week of May was clearly a tribute to the Paris Commune of 1871. Yet no one believed the barricades would hold out against a possible military invasion, and no one in power – with the possible exception of de Gaulle, for one brief moment – was seriously planning one. Had movement activists been interested in seizing power after the model of 1848, 1871, or 1917, the students might have laid siege to the Elysée palace or the National Assembly. Instead, they symbolically

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[13] Michel Foucault, *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), 134; emphasis added.

[14] On Foucault's experiences during the Tunisian student revolt, see Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, 183-208.

chose to occupy the Odéon Theater. As Pierre Goldman, a "serious" Marxist who had trained in guerilla warfare in Venezuela prior to 1968, described the point of view of the left-wing hardcore in '68:

> „The students streamed into the streets and the Sorbonne like a twisted and hysterical torrent. In a playful and masturbatory demeanor they satisfied their desire for history. I was shocked that they always spoke out with such visible jubilance. In place of action they substituted the verb. I was shocked that they called for the empowerment of imagination. Their seizure of power was only an imaginary one."[15]

Foucault expressed his relative disappointment with the May revolt in a 1968 interview with an Italian journalist:

> „When I returned to France in November-December 1968, I was quite surprised and amazed - and rather disappointed - when I compared the situation to what I had seen in Tunisia. The struggles, though marked by violence and intense involvement, had never brought with them the same price, the same sacrifices. There's no comparison between the barricades of the Latin Quarter and the risk of doing fifteen years in prison, as was the case in Tunisia."[16]

Foucault rightly insisted on making the distinction between the Gaullist regime, however authoritarian it might have seemed, and the repressive Bourguiba dictatorship in Tunisia – a distinction that the gauchistes' standard "anti-fascist" discourse commonly ignored. Clarifying the reasoning underlying his "existential" preference for the Tunisian student movement, Foucault added:

> „What I mean is this: what on earth is it that can set off in an individual the desire, the capacity, and the possibility of an absolute sacrifice without our being able to recognize or suspect the slightest ambition or desire for power and profit? This is what I

[15] Cited in Régis Debray's tribute to Pierre Goldman, *Les rendez-vous manqués* (Pour Pierre Goldman) (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 124. On Pierre Goldman's life, see Jean-Paul Dollé *L'insoumis: vies et légendes de Pierre Goldman* (Paris: Grasset, 1997).

[16] Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*, 138.

> saw in Tunisia. The necessity for a struggle was clearly evident there on account of the intolerable nature of certain conditions produced by capitalism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism. In a struggle of this kind, the question of direct, existential, I should say physical commitment was implied immediately."[17]

Despite his distaste for Marxism, Foucault was willing to overlook the Tunisian students' allegiance to the Marxist catechism and identify with the life or death, existential nature of their struggle. Thus, whereas Marxism had long since grown academic and sterile in France, "In Tunisia on the contrary, everyone was drawn into Marxism with radical violence and intensity and with a staggeringly powerful thrust. For those young people, Marxism did not represent merely a way of analyzing reality; it was also a kind of moral force, an existential act that left one stupefied."[18]

In France, too, there were at least a handful of radical circles that took Marxist theory very seriously in the summer of 1968. Some of these groups tried in vain to steer the student movement from within. The Trotskyist Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire, a student group that had been instrumental in organizing protests at the Sorbonne, had formed action committees to coordinate activities in the student-controlled areas of the Latin Quarter. As we have seen, the Maoist UJC-ML, simply boycotted the "trap" laid for them by the bourgeoisie; only later would they reevaluate their position when the workers strikes began.[19]

In general, Marxism served as a lingua franca for the entire student movement, not just the political radicals. It was the language the students employed, albeit at times reluctantly, to express their libertarian demands and articulate their utopian vision of an alternative society. Yet, as Alain Touraine argued in his book on the May revolt, Le Communisme utopique,

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[17] Ibid., 136-137.

[18] Ibid. 134.

[19] See Christophe Bourseiller, De mai à décembre 1968: le rendez-vous manqué, 89-103, in *Les Maos: L'histoire folle des gardes rouges francais* (Paris : Plon, 1996), 89-103.

there was a critical disjunction between the students' Marxist rhetoric and the true nature of their revolt. In Touraine's view, the May insurrection was less a revolt against capitalism than it was an uprising against political technocracy. The stakes at issue were less economic than about who had the power to make decisions. In opposition to the technocratic utopian vision of France's economic and political cadres (many of whom were so-called Enarques, or graduates of the Ecole Nationale d'Administration), which reduced all social problems to questions of modernization, adaptation, and integration, during May the students invented a libertarian counter-utopia: "utopian communism." As Touraine aptly observes: "The message of the technocrats who controlled society was adapt yourself, to which the May movement countered express yourself."[20] Just as in the nineteenth century the industrial revolution marked the entry of "work" into the public sphere, May '68 marked the entrance of "everyday life."[21] Suddenly, hierarchy, consumerism, city planning, gender and sexuality, and the nature of human intimacy became legitimate topics of public discussion and political struggle. Resistance to the colonization of everyday life had become an urgent political imperative. As a metaphor and figure, the idea of "Cultural Revolution" was detached from its original Maoist moorings to become the battle cry of a sweeping, grassroots project of social transformation.

Originally, Foucault was unimpressed by the cultural dimension of the May revolt. He had failed to witness firsthand the legendary Sorbonne student commune, animated by music, poetry, drugs, graffiti, and radical democracy. He saw nothing of the student occupations and action committees, nor

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[20] Alain Touraine, *Le mouvement de mai ou le communisme utopique* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 11. See also the influential book by Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendell (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

[21] Discussion with Alain Touraine in: Itinéraires intellectuels des années 1970, *Revue Française d'Histoire des Idées Politiques* 2 (1995): 392-400.

the spontaneous teach-ins and sit-ins that spread to virtually every town and village across the hexagon. Even if he had witnessed this side of the revolt, it is not clear that he would have regarded the student utopia with the same enthusiasm as his colleagues Claude Lefort, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Henri Lefebvre, who famously defended their pupils-turned-activists before the university disciplinary courts and humbly allowed themselves to become their followers. Foucault had held a couple of teaching positions in France before 1968. But by most accounts he wasn't the kind of professor who rubbed shoulders with the students. In his six years as a professor at Clermont-Ferrand, he never lived on site, preferring instead the six-hour rail commute from Paris.

Towards the end of May, de Gaulle orchestrated his improbable return to power. He had weathered the storm, but just barely. The regime's manifest vulnerability further radicalized French youth in May's aftermath. On June 1, throughout the streets of Paris thousands of students chanted "May '68 is only the beginning. We must continue the struggle!"[22] In the months that followed, the student movement forgot about the "poverty of student life," setting their sights instead on the next "May." As the editors of Cahiers de Mai, one of first new student publications to emerge in the post-May period, summarized the predominant student attitude:

> „Should we now feel only bitterness and deception? An extraordinary new époque has just announced itself in France and Europe more broadly. We can see now that a socialist revolution in a highly industrialized society—the conditions hoped for by Marx in other words—is underway. The revolution will transform the face of socialism in the world. During the events of May, the revolutionary fermentation in France produced surprising and unprecedented results. Without haste we must recognize, study, and understand them. They hold a treasure of knowledge and

[22] BDIC (Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine), Mai 68: *Materiaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* (Paris: 1988), 299.

> resources for the working class movement in France and abroad. [May '68] is a war chest for the battles to come."[23]

The "revolution of everyday life" was never entirely suppressed. It continued to survive and prosper within certain elements of the radical student milieu. In the years that followed, as the dream of a political revolution gradually faded, its energy and ideas re-emerged in the new social movements of the early 1970s. Yet, for the most part, Foucault missed out on this "revolution," too – even though it was taking place all around him.

The Exile's Return

Following May '68, Foucault was eager to return to France. Unnerved by the pressures and anxieties of living in an authoritarian state, and intrigued by the new wave of contestation in France, he abandoned his plans to purchase a beach-front home in Tunisia and instead accepted an offer to head the philosophy department at the newly-created "experimental" University at Vincennes. A direct response by the Ministry of Education to the 68er's demands for university reform, Vincennes was a radical experiment in anti-authoritarian education. Professors were elected by their peers and evaluated by their students, rather than by deans or administrators. The curriculum was resolutely interdisciplinary. Perhaps most radical of all, the university was open to candidates from all backgrounds, not just those who had completed the baccalauréat. As René Schérer, one of the first professors elected to the philosophy department, explains: "Vincennes was the 'outside' entering the university and, simultaneously, the university opening itself to the outside."[24]

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[23] Ce qu'on cherche à nous faire oublier, *Cahiers de Mai* 1 (15 June 1968), 3.

[24] René Schérer, *Hospitalités* (Paris: Anthropos, 2004), 95-96.For more on Vincennes, see Charrles Soulié, Le Destin d'une institution

Predictably, and according to the intentions of the Ministry, Vincennes immediately attracted the most radical factions of the French Left. Foucault played a pivotal role, recruiting gauchistes of all stripes for the philosophy department.

Ironically, Foucault had been a politically uncontroversial choice to head the new philosophy department. Since the enormously successful publication of The Order of Things in 1966, Foucault's reputation had grown steadily; hence, his philosophical credentials were never in doubt. More importantly for his appointment, at the time of the May events Foucault had been absent. Nor had he spoken publicly about his political involvements with the Tunisian student movements. Yet while his absence in May '68 made him a safe choice to head the Vincennes philosophy department, by the same token it meant that he would have to establish his revolutionary bona fides among his colleagues and students.

Foucault wasted little time. In January 1969, during the first of many campus battles to come, Foucault had his first lesson in streetfighting. With a small group of Vincennes professors, including his partner Daniel Defert, he helped mount an occupation of one of Vincennes' main buildings. When the riot police arrived with truncheons and tear-gas grenades to evacuate the protestors, Foucault was among the very last to leave. Fearless, he retreated up the staircase, barricading the way behind him and hurling missiles below. As Defert later recalled, Foucault thoroughly enjoyed himself that evening: "[Foucault] was no doubt experiencing a definitely Nietzschean 'joy in destruction'."[25]

The events that sparked this clash remain complicated and confusing. The decision to occupy the university building was made in response to the arrests of dozens of activists at the Sorbonne who had been protesting inadequate financial support.

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d'avant-garde : histoire du département de philosophie de Paris VIII, *Histoire de l'éducation* 77 (January 1998), 47-69.

[25] Cited in Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, 226.

For Foucault and the protesting students, however, the specific cause was merely a pretext. They had planned to disrupt the new university long before it had opened its doors. After this initial battle, a permanent police presence was established on the campus. Yet order was never really restored. Daily protests and riots regularly interrupted classes and the administrative functions of the university. Books disappeared from the library, and buildings and facilities were blighted by vandalism.

Although plagued by political and ideological factionalism, ultimately the Gauche Prolétarienne managed to seize control of the philosophy department and make its presence known across the Vincennes campus. Libertarians and cultural revolutionaries the Gauche Prolétarienne militants were not. In fall 1968, they articulated their ultimate aims unambiguously in their newly-established daily, La Cause du Peuple: "The central and supreme goal of the revolution is the conquest of power by armed struggle . . . This revolutionary principle of Marxism-Leninism is valid everywhere – in China as in other countries."[26]

Although the GP leaders had missed the boat in May, by fall 1968 they had begun to read the changing political situation correctly. Whereas prior to May '68, the UJC-ML (the Gauche Prolétarienne's forerunner) held that the primary goal of student radicals should be the formation of a revolutionary student-worker avant-garde, they now argued that the task of the student militants was not to lead or ally themselves with the workers, but to immerse themselves in their struggles. In the wake of the May uprising, the GP's ouvrièriste message and its model of revolutionary discipline struck a chord with young activists who were disenchanted with the established left, disheartened by the May revolt's failure, yet still intoxicated with the allure of political militancy. Their ranks quickly swelled. France's intellectuals and cultural elites added their support. Maoism's prestige quickly blossomed.

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[26] De nouveau le combat!, *La cause du peuple* 1 (November 1968), 2.

Foucault was profoundly impressed by the gépistes, who seemed to embody the same "ultra" qualities he had admired in his Tunisian students.[27] In a letter to Daniel Defert written a few months after the Cultural Revolution's onset, Foucault admitted he was "very much inspired by what is happening in China" ("Je suis bien passioné par ce qui se passe en Chine.")[28] Above all, he was drawn to the Maoists unique approach to militancy. Although the UJC-ML had been late to join the May movement, it was one of the few student groups that continued to agitate throughout June and July – as though May had never ended. Abandoning the Latin Quarter, the Maoists focused their attention on the politically volatile factories on the outskirts of Paris where the workers had refused to accept the terms of reconciliation offered by Prime Minister Pompidou. Even after the group disbanded, the UJC-ML établis remained in the automobile plants in and around Paris, functioning as autonomous groupes de bases or grassroots groups. As student activism moved "from the amphitheaters to the factories" (to quote the title of a well-known book on the établis), these Maoist cells seemed to embody new possibilities for decentralized, local resistance.[29]

The Maoists' model of revolutionary action quickly became known as "spontanéisme" (spontaneity), a term that was originally applied to the Gauche Prolétarienne by its Marxist-Leninists critics. Whereas following May, Marxist-Leninist groups such as the Trotskyists sought to establish a new revolutionary party, the Maoists favored "direct action." Inspired by the Cultural Revolution, they sought to efface all traces of social distinction: between the "intellectuals" and the "people," as well as between the students and workers. Spontanéisme translated into a kind of philosophical pragmatism.

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[27] James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 177.

[28] Cited in Michel Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits* vol. I, eds. Daniel Defert and Francois Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 59.

[29] Marnix Dressen, *De l'amphi à l'établi: Les étudiants maoïstes à l'usine (1967-1989)* (Paris: Belin, 1999).

They rejected a priori theorizing. Instead, theory was supposed to exist in a dialectical relationship with practice. Ideally, it would emerge from engagement with the struggles of the people; otherwise, it remained of secondary importance and provisional. The Maoists placed their faith in the people's capacities to continually adapt their struggles to new situations.

The GP came to view the Cultural Revolution not as a blueprint for revolution, but as proof that no such blueprints existed. Increasingly, the "real" China ceased to matter. What counted was, according to a Maoist saying, the "China in our heads" (la Chine dans nos têtes). The crucial lesson they claimed to have learned from Mao's example was that each people was essentially different; hence each nation needed to carve out its own path to socialism. Just as Mao had broken with the Soviet Union to help China discover its own path, the French people would have to forge their own way towards socialism. It wasn't the model of Chinese socialism per se that the Maoists sought to emulate. Instead, they aspired to be like Mao, to employ his way of thinking, "Mao Zedong thought," or what some Maoists referred to as la pensée-maotsétung.[30]

Whereas, heretofore, Foucault had kept a safe distance from the fractious French Marxist circles, in spontanéisme he found a means of entering the arena of radical politics and a Marxist philosophy he could abide. Without mentioning the Maoists by name, Foucault expressed his admiration for spontanéisme to a Japanese audience during a talk at the University of Keio in 1970. Despite the fact that this new form of Marxism had been formulated by students and intellectuals, it was in Foucault's view, "anti-theoretical." He characterized the new political movements as being "closer to Rosa Luxemburg than

[30] This term was borrowed from the 9th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1969 where it was coined to replace the term "Maoism" as part of an attempt to put more distance between the Chinese Communist Party's revolutionary philosophy and the person of Mao Zedong. See Pierre Masset, *L'empereur Mao: essai sur le maoïsme* (Paris: Éditions Lethielleux, 1979), 287.

to Lenin: they rely more on the spontaneity of the masses than on theoretical analysis."[31]

Political militancy eventually landed dozens of Maoist activists in French prisons. In May 1970, Interior Minister Raymond Marcellin summarily banned the Gauche Prolétarienne. The government arrested several highly placed GP militants under a new "anti-riot" act that made leaders of a political organization legally responsible for any transgressions perpetrated by the rank-and-file. Other Maoists were arrested for allegedly attempting to "reconstitute a banned organization." Their crime ? Continuing to publish and distribute La Cause du Peuple. In prison the GP activists made contacts with other student radicals and wasted no time "investigating" – i.e., undertaking enquêtes – their new surroundings.

In September 1970 thirty gauchiste prisoners, many of them gépistes, began a hunger strike demanding recognition as "political prisoners" – a designation that had been accorded to certain members of the FLN during the Algerian war. According to this precedent, this status would allow them certain rights and privileges: the right to congregate as a group, the right to communicate with fellow gépistes on the outside, and access to the press. Yet, the gauchistes soon realized the unfairness of arguing for their own superior, "political" status vis-à-vis their fellow detainees – an elitist mind-set that flouted the egalitarian spirit of the post-May period. Were common criminals intrinsically inferior to the Maoist political aristocracy? Wasn't the lot of all prisoners similarly unjust? The gauchistes soon realized that by acceding to the mentality that opposed political prisoners to common criminals, they had implicitly accepted a series of ideologically tainted, bourgeois conceptual dualisms: moral and immoral, good and bad, vice and virtue Very soon the gauchistes' political aim was to coax

[31] Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits* vol. I, 1140.

all inmates to join their strike, since, in a "fascist" judicial system, all prisoners are political prisoners.[32]

The initial hunger strike lasted a month and failed to attract public attention. In January 1971, the Maoists tried again. This time, however, they succeeded insofar as they had convinced dozens of other activists outside the prison walls to join them. Most notably, hunger strikers gathered in the heavily traveled Montparnasse railway station and in a small, adjacent church, the Saint-Bernard Chapel. At this point a number of influential cultural and intellectual luminaries took note. Actors Yves Montand and Simone Signoret, the philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch, and the journalist Maurice Clavel, all dropped by to publicize their solidarity with the strikers. In the National Assembly future president François Mitterrand spoke eloquently on the strikers' behalf, plausibly accusing Guardian of the Seal Pleven of having arrested the Maoist leaders merely to settle old political scores. Mitterrand also brought welcome public attention to the lamentable prison conditions the gauchistes had been unjustly forced to endure.[33]

Extension of the Domain of Struggle: Foucault and the Prison Information Group (GIP)

Foucault was eager to participate in Maoist activism, but he wanted to do so on his own terms. He noticed how the Gauche Prolétarienne had exploited Sartre as its figurehead and spokesperson following the arrest of La Cause du Peuple's editors. Hence, he was reluctant to become just another bit of intellectual window-dressing like the other so-called

[32] See ibid. ("Attica") : "The cultural revolution in its widest sense implies that, at least in a society like ours, you no longer make the division between criminals of common law and political criminals. Common law is politics, it's after all the bourgeois class which, for political reasons and on a basis of its political power, defined what is called common law."

[33] For Mitterrand's intervention, see Grégory Salle, M*ai 68: a-t-il changé la prison française?*, 15.

"democrats." At the time, Serge July and Pierre Victor – using the semi-ridiculous pro-Chinese pseudonym Jean Tse-toung – had formed the Organisation des Prisonniers Politiques (OPP): a support group for the imprisoned Maoists that had been orchestrating the hunger strikes. The gépistes dispatched Judith Miller and Jacques-Alain Miller (Lacan's daughter and son-in-law) – Maoist activists who were Foucault's research assistants in the department of philosophy at Vincennes – to convince the philosopher to abandon his monastic work habits for the sake of political engagement.

But it was Foucault's partner Daniel Defert, a Gauche Prolétarienne militant, who proposed the idea of forming a "popular tribunal" similar to the one Sartre had established at Lens to investigate prison conditions. Foucault suggested instead calling it an "information group." He was concerned that were a formal commission of inquiry established its focus and energies would be directed toward the French state and judiciary system. Thereby, it would immediately become enmeshed in traditional, top-down, juridical conceptions of power. An "information group," conversely, would be less handicapped by conventional political preconceptions. It would offer the distinct advantage of addressing the more subtle, capillary modalities of biopower as Foucault had recently conceived them. Conventional approaches to penality typically bypassed the "materiality of punishment": the everyday violence and humiliation, the judges' callousness, the lawyers' indifference, the obstructionist tactics employed by the prison guards' union (the group that, in essence, ran the penitentiary system on a daily basis), the families' helplessness and shame. It was this "material" aspect of punishment, as meticulously documented in GIP's Enquête-Intolérable (Investigation-Intolerable) publication series, that revulsed French public opinion and that would soon become an object of intense political debate.

More than anyone else, Foucault was keenly aware of the extent to which information could be a political weapon. By the same token, his new insights about the amorphousness of power led to a correlative skepticism about the traditional

French sacralization of the writer's vocation. Henceforth, Foucault no longer wished to be described as a writer and an intellectual, but instead as a "merchant of political instruments" (un marchand d'instruments politiques).[34]

In this way the Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons was conceived.

Initially, Foucault thought of GIP as merely one aspect of a more general confrontation with contemporary society's capacity for disciplining individuals via the mechanisms of "power-knowledge." Thus, in the group's initial press release, in addition to prisons, Foucault cited hospitals, psychiatric institutions, universities, the press and other organs of information as parallel sites where expertise and political oppression enjoyed an unwholesome, symbiotic intimacy. But, soon, the focus on prisons acquired an autonomy and momentum all its own.

On February 8, 1971, the author of Madness and Civilization held a landmark press conference in front of the Saint-Bernard Chapel, where the hunger strikes had begun only few weeks earlier, to launch GIP. According to the manifesto distributed to the press, the organization's goal was to gather information: "to make known what a prison is: who goes there, how, and why, what happens there, what the lives of prisoners are like, and at the same time, what the lives of the guards are like, what the buildings are like, the food, the hygiene, how the prison functions internally, the medical facilities, the workshops; how one gets out of prison and what it means in our society to be an ex-con."[35]

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[34] See Daniel Defert, L'Emergence d'un nouveau front: les prisons, in: Philip Artières et al., *Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons : Archives d'une lutte, 1970-1972* (Paris : Editions de L'IMEC, 2003), 323; see also Gérard Mauger, "Un Nouveau militantisme," *Sociétés & Représentations* (November 1996): 60; and also Gérard Mauger, Un marchand d'instruments politiques ; A propos Michel Foucault, in Gérard Mauger and Louis Pinto, *Lire les sciences sociales*, vol. 3 (1994-96) (Paris : Hermes Science Publications:2000): 123-146.

[35] Foucault, *Dits et Écrits* vol. II, 1043.

Foucault and GIP thus launched Enquête-Intolérable. This soubriquet was an allusion to the unbearable nature of French prison conditions. Unlike the United States, in France outsiders were by law forbidden to set foot in prisons. Hence, to the world outside, the prison's real nature was shrouded in secrecy. The GIP activists circumvented the on-site ban by interviewing former inmates, prison employees, guards, and detainees' relatives. Since family members possessed visitation rights, they had seen the prisons from the inside. Foucault and his fellow militants sifted through hundreds of questionnaires, analyzing the prisoners' grievances, their relatives' complaints, as well as those of prison guards.

One of their more interesting findings concerned the class biases of the French prison life. One investigation found that whereas 80% of the bourgeois prisoners benefited from furloughs, only 32% of the working class inmates enjoyed such privileges. Similarly, 90% of the bourgeois inmates received parole or early release in comparison to 33% of the working class prisoners.[36] The French working class endured a kind of triple jeopardy: (1) their illegalities were more closely monitored; (2) they were more readily imprisoned; and (3) once incarcerated, it became more difficult to leave.

The results were published in a series of widely-distributed pamphlets over the ensuing year and a half. During this time Foucault committed himself body and soul to GIP. His apartment at 285 rue de Vaugirard became the organization's de facto headquarter. Foucault was involved in every one of the group's activities, from the publication of its press releases to addressing envelopes and making phone calls.

Despite GIP's purportedly modest goal of exposing the unbearable conditions of French prisons, Foucault's

[36] See Christophe Soulié, Années 70: Contestation de la prison : information est une arme, *Raison présente* 130 (1999), 25 ; Grégory Salle, Mettre la prison à l'épreuve : Le GIP en guerre contre l' « Intolérable », *Cultures & Conflits*, 55 (2004) :71-96 ; see also, Philippe Artières, Pierre Lascoumes, and Grégory Salle, Prison et résistances politiques: le grondement de la bataille, *Cultures & Conflits* 55 (2004): 5-14.

investigations, like the Maoist enquêtes, ultimately had a more radical political aim. For the point was not to reform the penal system, but to call into question its very foundations. When he introduced GIP to the French public at the February 1971 press conference, Foucault explained that the struggle against the penal system involved not only prisoners, but every member of contemporary French society. For, as he put it, "None of us can be sure of avoiding prison. This is truer today than it has ever been . . . They tell us that the prisons are overpopulated. But what if, instead, the population is over imprisoned?"[37] Instead of "organizing" the prisoners and prison workers as unions and political parties had traditionally done, the GIP sought, in the spirit of Maoist populism, to empower them so that they would be capable of organizing their own resistance to the penal system.

When he assumed the leadership of GIP, Foucault worked carefully to distinguish himself from the model of the

[37] Foucault, *Dits et Écrits* vol. II, 1042. In: The Red Guards of Paris: French Student Maoism of the 1960s, *History of European Ideas* (31) 4, (2005), 472-490, Julian Bourg shows how GIP's enquêtes paradoxically paved the way for a revivification of French civil society: "French Maoist uses of the strategy of the investigation [contributed] unintentionally to an invigoration of civil–social practices. The *Gauche prolétarienne* found itself faced with, not a singular mobilizing working class, but a myriad of social groups: feminists, gay liberationists, high school students, soldiers, immigrants, early ecologists, and so forth. . . . The Maoist method of investigation ran up against the inconvenient fact that the New Left was composed of disparate interests with vaguely commensurate, and sometimes conflicting, liberationist goals. The most noteworthy example of where the Maoist investigation led was the *Groupe d'information* sur les prisons, formed in February 1971 under the inspirational presence of Michel Foucault. Organized on the fringes of the *Gauche prolétarienne*, the prison information group pointed the investigation in new directions, distributing surveys and publicizing information to the general public about the "intolerable" conditions in French prisons. . . . Investigations yielded information, and information itself was a weapon to be used tactically in struggle. . . .The Groupe d'information sur les prisons contributed to the radical shift in 1970s French cultural politics, from Marxism to post-Marxism."

"universal intellectual" as embodied by Sartre. Whereas the universal intellectual embraced a timeless set of transcendent human values, Foucault proposed a new model of engagement: the "specific intellectual."[38] The specific intellectual refuses to stand outside of the webs of power that suffuse modern society. Instead, she tries to work strategically within them. Like the Maoist établi, the specific intellectual fights power by channeling the "local knowledge" of the people who are in direct contact with that power. As Foucault explains: "The masses don't need him [the intellectual] to gain knowledge: they know perfectly well, without illusion; they know far better than he and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves."[39] In Foucault's view, those who set themselves up as repositories of a higher order theoretical truth, as the masses' spokespersons or representatives, are an integral component of a disciplinary society that works to maintain them in a condition of dependency or bondage. They are in essence "agents of the system of power." The intellectual's role is "no longer to place himself 'somewhat ahead and to the side' in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of 'knowledge,' 'truth,' 'consciousness,' and 'discourse.'"[40]

Foucault's new conception of engagement was part of a broader transformation of his intellectual trajectory – one might justly describe it as an "epistemological break." In part, the change had been facilitated by the events of May '68. Yet, to an even greater extent, it was indebted to the gauchiste milieus that flourished in Tthe post-May period.

When The Order of Things appeared, the mainstream press seized on Foucault's celebrated adage concerning the "death of man" as a major cause for concern. Foucault had reiterated

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[38] Foucault, Truth and Power, in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, 1972-1977, 109-133.

[39] Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, Intellectuals and Power, in *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews*, 1961-1984, 75.

[40] Ibid.

this thesis, in a manner shorn of nuance, in a 1966 interview, boldly declaiming: "Our task is to free ourselves definitively from humanism. It is in this sense that my work is political, insofar as, in both the East and the West, all regimes purvey their shoddy wares under the humanist banner."[41] One logical conclusion that political activists drew from Foucault's declaration was that all attempts at political change were condemned in advance to futility. If the paradigm of the "subject" was in fact obsolete, what forces could be relied on to effectuate political change?

Writing in Le Figaro, the novelist François Mauriac – one of Sartre's longstanding foes – declared that Foucault's structuralist antihumanism had succeeded in rendering Sartre's approach more sympathetic[42]Sartre's own journal, Les Temps modernes, followed suit, publishing a review essay indicting "The Cultural Relativism of Michel Foucault."[43] But for Foucault, perhaps the ultimate indignity derived from a now famous scene in Jean-Luc Godard's cult political classic La Chinoise. At one point, the "pro-Chinese" heroine, Véronique (played by Anna Wiazemsky), hurls a battery of rotten tomatoes at The Order of Things, since Foucault's inflexible structuralism seemed to deny prospects for revolutionary political change.

By the same token, the journalist Claude Mauriac recounts his arrival in Paris amid the disorder and chaos of the May student revolt, reflecting that Foucault's controversial dictum had proven correct after all. For didn't The Order of Things prophesy "the geological breakdown of our humanist culture such as it came to pass during May '68?"[44]

In the early 1970s Foucault definitively abandoned the "archaeological" method on which his reputation as a thinker had

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41 Michel Foucault, Interview with Madeleine Chapsal, *La Quinzaine littéraire* (5) 16 May 1966, 15.

42 François Mauriac, "Bloc-Notes," *Le Figaro*, 15 September 1966.

43 Michel Amiot, Le Relativisme culturel de Michel Foucault, *Les Temps modernes* (January 1967).

44 Maurice Clavel, *Ce Que Je Crois* (Paris: Editions Grasset, 1975).

been predicated. In The Order of Things Foucault had treated the discourses of the human sciences as autonomous spheres – "epistemes" – that could be studied exclusively in terms of their internal logics: in light of the rules that determine the limits of what can and cannot be said. The archaeological approach, with its inordinate focus on language and discourse, lacked a critical element necessary to link Foucault's theory to the revolutionary activity of the gauchistes: insight into the practical functioning of power at the "corpuscular" level of everyday life. In retrospect, Foucault would belittle The Order of Things and The Archeology of Knowledge as "formal exercises" that occupied a "marginal" position within his oeuvre. He regretted that these two texts failed to address the newer, more explicitly political themes that concerned him: themes that pertained to questions of power and resistance.[45]

Foucault's identification with Maoist populism brought certain anti-intellectual tendencies in his persona to the fore. He admitted that he viewed his political engagement on behalf of GIP as a "veritable deliverance from the lethargy I am experiencing with regard to literary pursuits."[46] Adherence to the Maoist "mass line" entailed a celebration of the people's pristine, incorruptible good sense. Intellectuals, conversely, were disparaged as an alien element. In his Second Discourse, Rousseau had argued that "sophistication" risked corrupting the people's healthy common sense. For similar reasons, Foucault began to wonder whether, in addition to the universal intellectual's obsolescence, "writing" itself hadn't been surpassed as a form of contestation. After all, hadn't the Maoists shown that the time had come for struggle to express itself directly in the form of revolutionary action, foregoing the mediating function of the verb? If in point of fact intellectuals of the classical stamp interfered with the attainment of political consciousness, couldn't one say the same for "textuality,"

[45] See Didier Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 259-60.

[46] Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits* vol. I, 51.

the intellectual's preferred mode of expression? At one point Foucault frankly avowed that he far preferred his practical work on behalf of GIP to "to university banter and the scribbling of books."[47]

In working with GIP Foucault sought to return to the problems raised in his first major work, Madness and Civilization, a book that radically challenged inherited ideas about societal normalcy.[48] In The Order of Things and The Archaeology of Knowledge, the themes of power and resistance were largely absent. In retrospect, Foucault would fault himself for having been overly preoccupied during his so-called "archaeological" phase with the realm of language or discursivity, a bias that was characteristic of structuralism in general. By the same token, by his own admission he had undervalued the practical effects of power: its finite, concrete, molecular operations on the plane of everyday life.[49] In Madness and Civilization, these thematics had surfaced – albeit obliquely – via Foucault's attempt to evaluate a society by examining the modalities via which it distinguished the "normal" from the "pathological": who was included vis-à-vis who was excluded, the center from the periphery, and so forth. In this context Foucault felt compelled to resuscitate and recover the "sovereign enterprise of unreason" that, since the Enlightenment, had been ghettoized, interned, and silenced. Years later, he was heartened by the enthusiastic reception the book received from a new generation of militants in the post-May period. For example, Deleuze and Guatarri's Anti-Oedipus, written in the

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47 Le grand enfermement," *Dits et Ecrits* vol. II, 301 ; see also Folie, Littérature, et Société, in *Dits et Ecrits* vol. II, 115.

48 See also Foucault's Introduction to Georges Canghuilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological* (Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books, 1992), 7-23.

49 See Foucault, *Truth and Power*, 114: "I don't think I was the first to pose the question #[of power]. On the contrary, I'm struck by the difficulty I had in formulating it. When I think back now, I ask myself what else it was that I was talking about, in Madness and Civilization or The Birth of the Clinic, but power? Yet I'm perfectly aware that I scarcely ever used the word and never had such a field of analyses at my disposal."

spirit of "anti-psychiatry" and destined to become one of the most influential expressions of the post-May critique of the repressive nature of technocratic expertise, was inordinately indebted to Foucault's démarche in Madness and Civilization. At Deleuze's insistence, Foucault composed the preface.

Reflecting back on this early period in his thought, Foucault recalled the conceptual and political impasse of the predominant approaches to power. Among orthodox Marxists, power was still understood primarily in economic terms: as a function of class standing or ownership of the means of production. To be sure, Althusser's 1970 essay on "Ideological State Apparatuses," which first appeared in the PCF theoretical organ La Pensée, had belatedly argued for the semi-autonomous influence of politics and culture.[50] Among liberals and conservatives, power was typically viewed according to the modern natural law or juridical model: as a function of "rights" and "constitutions." Yet, both approaches proceeded on a plane of theoretical abstraction that often masked and obscured power's concrete, phenomenological, everyday efficacy. Both standpoints viewed power as something negative – as the embodiment of restrictions or limitations – rather than as a productive force capable of fabricating the docile bodies and pliable selves that, ultimately, revealed power's authentic societal nature.

In a later interview, Foucault described the muted reception of Madness and Civilization as follows:

> "What I myself tried to do in this domain was met with a great silence among the French intellectual Left." It was only because the political opening created by the May events, Foucault continued, "that, in spite of the Marxist tradition and the PCF, all of these questions came to assume their political significance, with a sharpness that I had never envisaged, showing how timid and hesitant those early books of mind had still been."[51]

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[50] Louis Althusser, Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'état (Notes pour une recherche), *La Pensée* 151 (1970), 3-38.

[51] Ibid., 111. As Foucault later observed: "It is certain that, without May '68, I never would have done what I did with regard to the prison,

Thus, during the early 1970s, among French intellectuals, hospitals, prisons, asylums, and psychiatric institutions began to take on an entirely new political import and meaning. Among the gauchistes, the notion of political contestation was reconceived and reformulated. "Class" ceased to be the alpha and omega of political struggle. Instead, as an outgrowth of the GIP experience, the "populist" idea took hold that the proper end of politics was to give those who were deprived of the right to speak – "les exclus" – a voice. The new goal of political activism was to create a space for those who had been systematically marginalized and excluded to speak out; and to do so in a way that proved impossible when their champions had been political parties, unions, and "prophetic intellectuals" who presumed to speak in their name.

At one point during this period, Foucault is alleged to have remarked to Deleuze: "We have to free ourselves from the errors of Freudian-Marxism." To which Deleuze responded: "All right: I'll take care of Freud, you take care of Marx."[52]

The extension of "the political" that flourished in the post-May period among leftist groups like the Gauche Prolétarienne disconcerted traditional Marxists, for whom the proletariat was the privileged and exclusive bearer of class consciousness. In the eyes of orthodox Marxists, the unpardonable heresy the gauchistes had committed was to have afforded equal consideration to the lumpenproletariat, who, according to the tenets of the Marxist catechism, were incapable of acceding to proper political consciousness.

As Foucault noted at the time: "After May 68, when the problem of [government] repression and judicial prosecution became increasingly acute, it shocked me and rekindled a memory ...: [It suggested] we were returning to a generalized confinement that already existed in the XVII century: a police force with unlimited discretionary powers ... Today ... one is

delinquency, sexuality. In the earlier climate, it would not have been possible"; Conversation avec Michel Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits* vol. IV, 81.

52 Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits* vol. I, 55.

returning to a sort of generalized, undifferentiated, confinement."[53]

In Foucault's view what was needed was a new method of historical analysis that would permit one to analyze the evolution of the human sciences through their "micro-effects" on subjectivity. Foucault outlined his new approach in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." Taking his bearings from Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals, Foucault defined the task of the genealogist as a critical enterprise that demystifies humanist ideals and their correlative institutional manifestations by tracing them back to specific historical assertions of the "will to power." This approach sought out the "origins" of those ideals not in the lofty formulations of Enlightenment philosophes but in the everyday vicissitudes of historical practice. In this way, the method of genealogy confuted the humanist standpoint of self-described universal intellectuals. The skills of the specific intellectual, conversely, "required patience and a knowledge of detail and ... depend on a vast accumulation of source material ... [It] demands relentless erudition."[54]

This characterization faithfully describes the way Foucault envisioned his work with GIP. In a roundtable discussion published in the countercultural magazine Actuel, Foucault explained the Nietzschean impetus underlying GIP's practical struggles and aims. Just as in the Genealogy of Morals Nietzsche had effected a transvaluation of the Christian ideals of "noble" and "base" – whereas prior to Christianity, "noble" connoted uninhibited exercise of power and rank, with Christianity's rise, the meek and demure were deemed noble, and the powerful were viewed as morally "base" – Foucault argued that a similar exercise in transvaluation was required for the predominant approaches to "guilt" and "innocence":

> „The ultimate goal of its [GIP's] interventions was not to extend the visiting rights of prisoners to thirty minutes or to procure flush toilets for the cells, but to question the social and moral

[53] Foucault, Le Grand Enfermement, in *Dits et Ecrits* vol. II, 308.

[54] Foucault, Nietzsche, Genealogy, History, in *The Foucault Reader*, 140.

> distinction between the innocent and the guilty. . . . Confronted by this penal system, the humanist would say: "The guilty are guilty and the innocent are innocent. Nevertheless, the convict is a man like any other and society must respect what is human in him: consequently, flush toilets!" Our action, on the contrary, isn't concerned with the soul or the man behind the convict, but it seeks to obliterate the deep division that lies between innocence and guilt."[55]

Less than five months after the press conference at the Saint-Bernard Chapel, GIP published its first pamphlet, Enquête dans vingt prisons (Investigation in Twenty Prisons). Although the Enquête contained no statistical information, it did include two completed questionnaires and a selection of representative answers.[56] In his introduction to the forty-eight page booklet, Foucault reaffirmed that the investigations were not designed to ameliorate or soften a manifestly oppressive institution, to make what was unacceptable palatable. Instead, GIP's investigations were designed to expose the deceptions of a "carceral society." It would confront that society at those junctures where it acted in the name of "efficiency," "right" and "the norm." Rehearsing the Maoists' "populist" line, Foucault continued:

> „These investigations are not being made by a group of technicians working from the outside; the investigators [i.e., the prisoners] are the ones who are being investigated. It is up to them to begin to speak, to bring down the barriers, to express what is intolerable, and to tolerate it no longer. It is up to them to take responsibility for the struggle which will prevent oppression being exercised."[57]

In the year and a half that followed, Foucault and GIP produced three more pamphlets. Their investigations encompassed

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[55] Michel Foucault, Revolutionary Action: "Until Now", *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, Donald F. Bouchard ed. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 227.

[56] Philip Artières et al., *Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons: Archives d'une lutte*, 1970-1972 (Paris : Editions de L'IMEC, 2003), 80-81.

[57] Ibid.

issues ranging from the mundane procedures for censoring prisoners' mail to heart-rending descriptions of widespread prisoner suicides (43 suicides were documented in 1973 alone).

Even as Foucault was announcing the creation of GIP in February 1971, the aforementioned hunger strikes were beginning to place massive, unwelcome pressure on the Pompidou government. In order to bring the first wave of strikes to an end, the authorities conceded new privileges to dozens of prisoners: more liberal visitation rights, unlimited access to newspapers and radio (both of which had previously been forbidden), and so forth. In response to an ensuing wave of strikes, the government agreed to additional concessions: the maximum period of solitary confinement was reduced from 90 to 45 days, the censoring of prisoners' mail was eliminated, and regulations governing furloughs were liberalized.[58] A new government commission was established to ensure that, in each of the French prisons, punishments were being fairly and equitably administered. Previously, prisons had been sites of "law-free" surveillance: oversight had been virtually non-existent.

Through the GIP enquêtes, it came to light that, at Toul, the regional director had explicitly instructed the medical staff not to treat sick or injured prisoners. According to the prison psychiatrist, Dr. Edith Rose, it was common practice for inmates to be bound hand and foot, and left to lie motionless for days at a time. With regularity, prisoners were treated sadistically. They were arbitrarily denied the most minimal amusements and pleasures: a soccer ball during exercise period; their daily ration of five or six cigarettes. Dr. Rose told of prisoners emerging from up to a year of solitary confinement with severe mental disorders. Her chilling indictment of the prison system was published in a special issue of the Maoist organ, La Cause du Peuple (18 December 1971). She copied her brief to President Pompidou and Guardian of the Seals

[58] See Grégory Salle, *Mai 68 a-t-il changé la prison française?*, 9-10.

René Pleven. When government authorities sought to undermine her credibility, Foucault rose eloquently to her defense in the pages of Libération.[59] For him, Dr. Rose was the archetype of the new breed of "specific intellectual": purveyors of concrete information and stubborn truths rather than vacuous, ineffectual ideals.

GIP's 1972 enquête on prison suicides had an especially profound and widespread impact. As a result of the groups efforts, within a few months the inhumane and degrading conditions of French prison life literally became front page news.[60]

Over the ensuing eighteen months, uprisings and hunger strikes erupted throughout the French penitentiary system. Major disturbances occurred at Lyon, Poissy, Grenbole, Draguignan, Nancy, and Nîmes. All told, thirty-five prisons experienced significant upheavals. Given the prisoners' isolation, the humiliating disciplinary procedures and techniques of surveillance to which they were regularly subjected, as well as the arbitrary cultural deprivations, outright rebellion was quite likely the inmates' only available recourse. In many cases the upheavals were indirectly traceable to GIP's efforts to galvanize the inmates' political consciousness and enhance their capacities for self-organization.

"Let It Bleed": The Year of the International Prison Revolt

During the 1970s, the international political conjuncture was favorable toward a reexamination of the prison's political and social function. In the mid-1960s, the Swedish prison reform organization KRUM (National Association for the Humanization of Prison Life) pioneered the tactic of hunger strikes and work stoppages in order to galvanize public opinion

[59] See Foucault, Le Discours de Toul, in *Agence de Presse Libération*, Bulletin no. 12, 9 January 1972 (reprinted in *Dits et Ecrits* vol. I, no. 99)

[60] See GIP, *Suicides de prison* (Paris : Editions Champs Libre, 1972). Daniel Defert recounts that following GIP's investigations into unreported suicides in French prisons, the story appeared on page 1 of *France Soir*; Defert, L'Emergence d'un Nouveau Front, 324.

concerning prison conditions. Their methods proved successful in gaining concessions from the Swedish government, including the unrestricted access to mail and regular conjugal visits.

However, of even greater significance for GIP was the Italian leftist group Lotta Continua, many of whose militants and sympathizers had been imprisoned during the late 1960s as a result of their political activism. Upon discovering that the majority of the prison population consisted of unemployed youth, petty criminals, and members of the underclass, Lotta Continua developed a theory of the sub- or lumpenproletariat as a complementary or supplemental revolutionary force. As a result, the group began to shift its organizing strategy from factories to the so-called "popular districts" or slums of major cities. Along with other representatives of the Italian non-communist left, Lotta Continua developed a concept of the "social factory" – an idea that had important parallels with the theories of French far left groups such as Arguments, Socialisme ou Barbarie, and the Situationist International. According to this notion, under conditions of late capitalism domination was no longer exclusively confined to the workplace. Instead, it had spread to include manifold aspects of everyday life: leisure time, patterns of consumption, urban planning, and higher education. These developments suggested that political contestation was no longer the prerogative of the proletariat alone. It equally concerned other socially marginalized groups – the subproletariat or i dannati della terra ("the wretched of the earth") – who, in theory, had become the industrial proletariat's natural allies. As one important Lotta Continua pamphlet concluded: the prison struggles "will give birth to a general political program that will encompass the entire world: emancipation from the bourgeoisie's manipulation of delinquency so that 'delinquents' might also find their path to revolution alongside the proletariat."[61]

[61] Lotta Continua, *Liberare tutti i dannati della terra* (Rome: Edizionie de Lotta Continua, 1972), 14-17.

All of these ideas would have a pronounced impact on GIP's expanded conception of contestation and political militancy. In 1971 GIP militants Daniel Defert and Jacques Donzelot traveled to Italy to consult with Lotta Continua activists about the prisoners' rights movement, organizing strategies, and related issues.[62] Between 1969 and 1972 Italy experienced a massive wave of prison uprisings: Turin, Monza, Trevise, Genoa, San Vitorre, and Trieste all underwent major revolts.

But it was the American Black Panther movement that undoubtedly had the most significant impact on GIP's understanding of the political nature of incarceration. Beginning in 1968, Foucault read the Panthers' political writings assiduously. He praised them for "having developed a strategic analysis freed from the Marxist theory of society."[63] During the late 1960s and early 1970s, police repression – in essence, a series of political murders – had decimated the Panther leadership. In 1969, Mark Clark and Fred Hampton, the founder of the Panthers' Illinois chapter, were killed in bed during a sanguinary predawn police raid. At the confrontation's outset, the police reportedly fired off some ninety unanswered rounds. An informant had provided the police with the floor-plan of the Panthers' residence. An independent inquiry undertaken by civil rights activist Roy Wilkins and former Attorney General Ramsey Clark concluded that Clark and Hampton had been murdered without provocation and that their civil rights had been egregiously violated.[64]

In August 1971, Black Panther leader George Jackson was gunned down, putatively during the course of an escape attempt, in California's San Quentin prison. Jackson had been imprisoned twelve years earlier for a gas station robbery that

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[62] A few years later, Donzelot would publish an important book that was methodologically inspired by his work with GIP, *The Policing of Families*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1979).

[63] Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits* vol. I, 44.

[64] See Roy Wilkins and Ramsey Clark, S*earch and Destroy: A Report by the Commission of Inquiry into the Black Panthers and the Police.* (New York: Metropolitan Applied Research Center, 1973).

he denied having committed in which a mere $70 was taken. He was initially sentenced to a year in prison. But, as an unbowed, charismatic, and politically savvy African-American, his annual parole requests were routinely denied. A year earlier, Jackson's seventeen year-old brother Jonathan was one of four persons slain in the course of a hostage-taking incident at the Marin County courthouse.

Under the Gallimard imprint, GIP published a pamphlet devoted to Jackson's case, L'Assassinat de George Jackson, which featured a moving preface by the writer and Panther advocate Jean Genet. (GIP's original publisher, the anarchist-oriented Champ Libre, severed all ties once they realized that GIP was staffed and run by Maoists.) Genet, the author of A Thief's Journal (1949), had spent many years in French prisons and was thus a natural GIP ally. While working with GIP, Genet told Foucault about the humiliation he had suffered in prison when a communist prisoner refused to be shackled to him because Genet was a common criminal rather than a "political prisoner" like himself. Genet was openly gay. During the early 1950s, one of Genet's films, Un Chant d'Amour, had been banned in the United States due to its frank portrayals of homosexual themes.[65] Genet identified with the Panthers as charismatic militants who had had the courage to rise up and defend oppressed African-Americans; but also as a group whose leaders possessed a rare capacity for lucid prose and a knack for le mot juste. Genet was especially impressed by Eldridge Cleaver's searing memoir, Soul on Ice, a bestseller that had been translated into French in 1969.

In 1970, Genet toured the United States to publicize and raise money on behalf of the Panther cause. Reflecting on the Panthers' ideological proximity to Marxism, Genet remarked that Americans could little stomach a "red ideology in a Black skin."[66] All told, he spoke at fifteen universities. For a period

[65] See Edward de Grazia, An Interview with Jean Genet, *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* (5) 2, (Autumn, 1993), 307-324.

[66] Cited in Edmund White, *Jean Genet: A Biography* (New York : Vintage, 1994), 522.

of three months, he lived in Panther "safe houses." In New Haven, speaking on behalf of imprisoned Panther co-founder Bobby Seale, Genet attracted a crowd of 25,000. The following year, Genet penned the introduction to George Jackson's prison letters, Soledad Brother – an impassioned cri de coeur written from within the belly of the beast. Commenting on Jackson's death, which he viewed as a political murder, Genet observed: "The word criminal, applied to blacks by the whites, is devoid of meaning. For the whites, all the blacks are criminals because they are black; which is another way of saying that, in a society dominated by whites, no black can be a criminal."[67] In Genet's view, to explain African-American criminality via recourse to the customary juridical lexicon of law and penality – in essence, the ideological window-dressing of state-sanctioned racial discrimination – remained woefully myopic. Instead, only a political approach to the problem, one that included an in-depth understanding of the institutionalized racism that suffused American life, stood a chance of grasping the true nature of the dilemma at issue.

Remarkably, the Panthers, who traded on black machismo and otherwise scorned white support, embraced Genet as one of their own – despite his avowed homosexuality, and despite the fact that, at one point, Genet fell in love with the Panthers' charismatic National Chief of Staff, David Hilliard. The Panthers' familiarity with Genet actually provoked them to reassess their earlier, homophobic attitudes and dispositions.

Prior to meeting Genet, "faggot" had been one of the group's standard terms of derision. Conversely, shortly after Genet returned to France, Panther co-founder Huey Newton, who at the time was imprisoned on a soon-to-be dismissed murder charge, published a position paper on "The Woman's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements." Newton reminded his readers that homosexuals, too, were an oppressed minority – perhaps the "most oppressed." As a matter of

[67] Jean Genet, Préface, *L'Assassinat de George Jackson* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

principle, Newton continued, all people should have the freedom to use their bodies in whatever way they deemed fit. The Panther Minister of Defense concluded by calling attention to the fact that, in the emancipatory struggles to come, both gays and women represented potentially valuable allies: "When we have revolutionary conferences, rallies, and demonstrations, there should be full participation of the gay liberation movement and the women's liberation movement."[68]

Newton's declarations in support of homosexuals had an important trans-Atlantic ripple effect. Shortly after his position paper on gay liberation and feminism had begun to circulate, French gauchistes associated with the Maoist organ Tout! began exploring in earnest questions bearing on sexuality and identity politics. Initially, many of the gauchistes doubted whether such themes were proper concerns of a movement such as theirs that had revolutionary political aspirations. In the eyes of many French activists, Newton's endorsement of homosexual liberation basically settled the matter. Tout's sister publication, Vive la Révolution!, edited by Roland Castro, translated Newton's manifesto in its entirety.[69] Such was the degree of international esteem that the Panther leaders enjoyed – especially in France.

In September 1971, only a month after Jackson's death, New York state's infamous Attica prison uprising occurred. Over forty inmates and guards perished when 1,000 state police and national guardsmen stormed the prison. In 2000, relatives of those who were slain were awarded an eight million dollar court settlement. In its publications, GIP sought to publicize the international dimension of all these prison-related events.

In France, the most serious unrest occurred in December 1971 in the eastern city of Toul as a result of minister Pleven's

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[68] See Huey Newton, The Woman's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements: August 15, 1970, in *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton* (New York: Random House, 1972).

[69] Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Génération II: Les années de poudres* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1988), 231.

decision to forbid the customary receipt of Christmas parcels in response to an escape attempt at neighboring Clairvaux prison. The older convicts immediately barricaded themselves in the prison workshop and began to destroying equipment. Younger inmates set fire to the library. Prisoners hurled furniture, bedding, and dishes from the prison windows. They succeeded in gaining complete control of one of the prison's four cell blocks. One of the younger inmates scribbled on the door of the prison's chapel: "We respect those who treat us with humanity." Yet, at no time during the uprising did the prisoners attempt to seize hostages. During the ensuing negotiations the inmates requested improved dental care, warm showers, and a general amelioration of prison conditions. Their central demand, that the warden be replaced, went unmet.[70]

The unprecedented disruptions at Toul and other prison facilities received massive media attention. They unsettled the nation and spurred the government to overhaul the penal system. In what was undoubtedly GIP's greatest triumph, reforms were enacted to eliminate aspects of prison life that entailed the prisoner's moral stigmatization. The notion that the prisoner's character was somehow "malformed" was jettisoned, as was the idea of "deviance" in general.[71] Pressure from GIP resulted in the passing of an April 1972 law that voided convictions based primarily on a defendant's criminal record and police files. Foucault perceived such dossiers as an expression of the insidious workings of "power-knowledge."[72] Henceforth, punishment would focus on the crime rather than on the criminal. Following Giscard d'Estaing's election in 1974, a cabinet level post to monitor prison conditions was created

In April 1972, Foucault traveled to upstate New York to tour Attica penitentiary. A year later, he published an interview detailing his impressions. Since in France prisons were "closed sites," the Attica visit was Foucault's first experience

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70 Ibid., 379.

71 See Monod, *Foucault et la police des conduites*, 90-91.

72 Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits* vol. I, 57.

inside an actual prison. Above all, he was struck by the prison's "industrial" façade and layout. He described the facility as an "immense machine": a giant maw charged with breaking down and eliminating socially unpalatable elements – something it apparently did with exceptional proficiency. Prison authorities claimed they had granted him full access to the penitentiary's four cell blocks. Only later did Foucault learn they had concealed from him the existence of a fifth cellblock: the prison's psychiatric ward.[73]

Arise Ye Wretched of the Earth: Lumpenproletarians of the World Unite!

Despite his self-effacing rhetoric and objections to so-called universal intellectuals, Foucault gleaned a number of fundamental "Maoists truths" from his two year enquête concerning the nature of the French penal system. Reform, Foucault confidently asserted, wasn't what the people wanted. As he explained in an interview with Gilles Deleuze: "It is not simply the idea of better and more equitable forms of justice that underlies the people's hatred of the judicial system, of judges, courts, and prisons, but—aside from this and before anything else—the singular perception that power is always exercised at the expense of the people."[74]

But if the people remained unconcerned with reforming the penal institution, then how exactly might one describe their demands? In his debate with Maoist leader Pierre Victor on the subject of "Popular Justice," Foucault provided his clearest response. Whereas Victor, following the practices of the Cultural Revolution, advocated the creation of People's Tribunals to effectuate summary justice, Foucault countered that people's courts were an expression of retrograde, bourgeois legality. The very idea of a "court," he insisted, was a construct of bourgeois society whose function was "to ensnare it

[73] See Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits* vol. I, 1395.
[74] Foucault, *Intellectuals and Power*, 77.

[popular justice], to control it, and to strangle it, by re-inscribing it within institutions which are typical of a state apparatus."[75] Ultimately, such courts gave voice to a petty bourgeois mentality that served to defuse and tame the people's healthy and innate revolutionary instincts. As Foucault explains:

> „The people's court during the Revolution . . . had a very precise social basis: it represented a social group which stood between the bourgeoisie in power and the common people of Paris [la plèbe]. This was a petty bourgeoisie composed of small property owners, tradesmen, artisans. This group took up a position as intermediary and organized a court which functioned as a mediator . . .So it is clear that it had reoccupied the position of the judicial institution just as it had functioned under the ancien régime. Where there had originally been the masses exacting retribution against those who where their enemies, there was now substituted the operation of a court and of a great deal of its ideology."[76]

In opposition to the Cultural Revolution's model of popular tribunals endorsed by Victor, Foucault suggested a stark alternative: the September massacres of 1792, when the revolutionaries executed hundreds of helpless prisoners out of fear that they might turn counterrevolutionary.

In a debate with Noam Chomsky later that same year before a Dutch television audience, Foucault presented a Nietzschean unmasking of justice, which he criticized as "an idea invented and put into practice in different societies as an instrument of a particular political or economic power." "It is clear," Foucault continued, "that we live under a dictatorial class regime, under a class power that imposes itself with violence, even when the instruments of this violence are institutional and constitutional." As the philosopher concluded: when the proletariat triumphs, "it will exert a power that is violent, dictatorial, and even bloody over the class it has supplanted." He added, somewhat naively: "I don't know what objection

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[75] Foucault, On Popular Justice : A Discussion with Maoists, in *Power/Knowledge*, 1.

[76] Ibid., 3-4.

one can make against this."[77] In Foucault's estimation, the people wanted – and deserved to have – blood! Foucault fundamentally agreed with Nietzsche's insight in the Genealogy of Morals that the hallmark of the civilizing process entails the progressive sublimation of cruelty. Yet, whereas the bourgeoisie lauded this development as a vindication of its values and morality – as a testament to "civilization" and "progress" – Nietzsche and Foucault criticized it as mechanism of "normalization." It stripped individuals of their instinctual vitality, thereby transforming them into servile and conformist beings – the compliant executors of bourgeois moral and legal codes.

Foucault's championing of the September massacres as a model of people's justice was more than a passing aside. Instead, it was part of what one might describe as a rearguard effort to preserve the idea of Revolutionism in an era in which the proletariat seemed perfectly content with piecemeal economic gains and the comforts of upward social mobility. Faced with this dilemma, many apostles of revolutionary struggle, like Sartre, Régis Debray, and Herbert Marcuse, had flirted with third worldism. If the working classes in advanced industrial societies seemed uninterested in revolution, in an era of decolonization, perhaps the "wretched of the earth" would set in motion global capitalism's downfall.

Foucault, conversely, placed his wager on late capitalism's "human waste": the lumpenproletariat or underclass. He opted for this route in part under the influence of Georges Bataille's theory of la part maudite or the "accursed share." In Bataille' view, all societies engage in forms of sacrifice or expenditure in order to rid themselves of unwanted elements or components. By the same token, such practices lent these execrated strata or groups an inverted nobility. By dint of their status as outcasts, they managed to resist the normalizing compulsions of bourgeois socialization. In "The Notion of Expenditure" Bataille – in a manner similar to Foucault's glorification of

[77] Foucault, De la nature humaine: justice contre pouvoir, in *Dits et Écrits* vol.I, 1363; 1371.

the September massacres – celebrated the massive bloodletting that would occur when the salt of the earth rise up to slay or lay low their reviled oppressors. According to Bataille the "masters and exploiters" bear responsibility for creating "contemptuous forms that exclude human nature – causing this nature to exist at the limits of the earth, in other words in mud." Hence, "a simple law of reciprocity requires that they be condemned . . . to the Great Night in which their beautiful phrases will be drowned out by death screams in riots. That is the bloody hope that . . . sums up the insubordinate content that is class struggle."[78]

Foucault lamented that French working class had readily imbibed bourgeois morality. When the Maoists had tried to hawk at factory gates the issue of Tout! treating homosexual liberation, they were given the cold shoulder – or worse. From an ethical standpoint, it was clear that French workers, in their attitudes toward family structure and sexuality, had become "embourgeoisified." As Foucault lamented in an interview: "The proletariat has been thoroughly imbued with bourgeois ideology concerning morality and legality, concerning theft and crime."[79] In the post-May period, the notion of "extending the domain of struggle" (extension du domaine de la lutte) – applying the methods of contestation that had been learned during the May uprising to domains of everyday life that lay outside of the workplace – had become popular. By advocating the cause of those who were social outcasts – prisoners, the mentally ill, immigrants, the unemployed, and so forth – Foucault stamped his own interpretation upon this post-May adage.

In Foucault's view, prisons were by no means the only social institution that exercised power at the expense of the people. It was simply the institution where power was most evident. The institutional structure of bourgeois society was

[78] Georges Bataille, The Notion of Expenditure, in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings* , trans. A. Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 179.

[79] *Foucault Live* (New York: Semiotexte, 1989), 117...

saturated with power: thoroughly suffused with carceral practices and disciplinary techniques. "The courts, the prisons, the hospitals, the psychiatric wards, workers' health care, the universities, the media: throughout all of these institutions and under various masks, there is an oppression at work," Foucault proclaimed, "that is fundamentally political."[80] As he once quipped: the prison "begins well outside of its gates. From the moment you leave your house!"[81] Prisons helped facilitate the illusion that society's disciplinary mechanisms were confined to this single, institutional locus. In reality, however, they represented merely one concentrated instance of what Foucault at times referred to as the "carceral society."

Building on this metaphor, in the early 1970s Foucault sought to conceptualize anew the inner workings and machinations of power. In the History of Sexuality, his most developed elaboration of this new approach, and probably his best known, Foucault began by challenging the "juridical" conception of power: power conceived as a "negative" limitation restricting our freedom. In Foucault's view, when it came to power, we had still had not metaphorically speaking cut off the king's head. For power is not "something that is acquired, seized, or shared," nor does it emanate from a single source.[82] Furthermore, "relations of power are not in superstructural positions, with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment; they have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play."[83] When power is conceived as productive, decentralized, anonymous, and ubiquitous, the traditional boundaries of the political dissolve; the focus of analysis then becomes society as a whole rather than "politics" in the narrow juridical sense. Resistance, too must be entirely reconceptualized. One can no longer proceed as before, simply

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[80] Michel Foucault, Préface to Enquête dans Vingt Prisons, in *Dits et Écrits* vol. I, 1063.

[81] Michel Foucault, La Prison Partout, in *Dits et Ecrits* vol. I, 1062

[82] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* vol. 1, Robert Hurley, trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 94.

[83] Ibid., 94.

by opposing the state. Insofar as the disciplinary mechanisms of the "state" – whose innate propensity toward control and domination Foucault redefines qua "governmentality" – are omnipresent, resistance, too, must take place everywhere. In other words, "local action" is called for in every instance and on all fronts.

As distant from traditional Marxism as Foucault's new approach to understanding power and resistance may seem, parts of it jibed perfectly with the gauchistes' militant ouvrièrisme. In Foucault's view, the struggle against power's omnipresence — its manifestations in prisons, hospitals, psychiatric wards, and universities — ultimately coincided with the proletariat's struggle against bourgeois society. For one of power's main functions remained to buttress and streamline the capitalist system. In a March 1972 discussion with Gilles Deleuze, Foucault, in a display of impressive rhetorical eloquence, demonstrated this point convincingly:

> „As soon as we struggle against exploitation, the proletariat not only leads the struggle but also defines its targets, its methods, and the places and instruments for confrontation; and to ally oneself with the proletariat is to accept its positions, its ideology, and its motives for combat. This means total identification. But if the fight is directed against power, then all those on whom power is exercised to their detriment, all who find it intolerable, can begin the struggle on their own terrain and on the basis of the proper activity (or passivity). In engaging in a struggle that concerns their own interests, whose objectives they clearly understand and whose methods only they can determine, they enter into a revolutionary process. They naturally enter as allies of the proletariat, because power is exercised the way it is in order to maintain capitalist exploitation. They genuinely serve the cause of the proletariat by fighting in those places where they find themselves oppressed. Women, prisoners, conscripted soldiers, hospital patients, and homosexuals have now begun a specific struggle against the particularized power, the constraints and controls that are exerted over them. Such struggles are actually involved in the revolutionary movement to the degree that they are radical, uncompromising and nonreformist, and refuse any attempt at arriving at a new disposition of the same power with, at best a change of masters. And these movements are linked to

> the revolutionary movement of the proletariat to the extent that they fight against the controls and constraints which serve the same system of power."[84]

This notion of power as ubiquitous and its corollary notion of dispersed and local resistance, were by no means Foucault's discovery alone. Such precepts were central to the ethos of post '68 gauchisme. In the aftermath of the May events, the student activists became convinced that there was no such thing as second order or lesser political struggles. The fight for sexual liberation, for freedom of expression in the high schools and universities, the struggles against racism, discrimination, and homophobia – each and every local struggle against oppression was central to the fight against late capitalism as an oppressive and totalizing mode of domination. Surveying the landscape of radical politics in 1970, the left-wing activist Jean-Edern Hallier, publisher of the gauchiste organ L'Idiot internationale, aptly summarized the post-May political zeitgeist as follows: "The slogans of May '68 have faded, but they are taking on a new, corrosive meaning, eating away at bourgeois culture . . . The revolutionary combat on the cultural front, long considered a secondary objective, has become fundamental, at the same time as this front expands."[85]

During May '68, the students had delayed their support of the workers' movement. The collapse of the left and the rallying of France's silent majority behind de Gaulle in subsequent months convinced them that this failure had been a grave mistake. Henceforth, bourgeois society needed to be confronted head on. Cultural Revolution and the proletariat's struggle against capital needed to reinforce one another.

This situation helps to explain why in the post-May period Mao's notion of a "Cultural Revolution" resonated so deeply with student radicals. In traditional Marxist thought, culture had always been regarded as epiphenomenal: a pale reflection

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[84] Foucault, I*ntellectuals and Power*, 216; emphasis added.

[85] Jean-Edern Hallier, Éditorial, *L'idiot liberté* 1 (December 1970), 3.

of society's socio-economic base. Mao's doctrine of Cultural Revolution, conversely, postulated that the arrows of causality linking "base" and "superstructure" could also be reversed. Culture represented an intrinsically legitimate locus of revolutionary struggle. The gauchistes still believed that proletarian revolution was a sine qua non for the creation of a socialist society. They continued to organize in the factories to prepare the workers for this eventuality. On the other hand, following Mao, they also believed that socialism could not be realized without a sweeping transformation of bourgeois values and mores.

May '68 refocused the students' political energies on problems endemic to French society. In the years leading up to the May revolt, the Left had grown accustomed to the idea that politically significant events always occurred elsewhere – in Eastern Europe, North Africa, Cuba, or Asia. Thus, in the global struggle to topple imperialism, French radicals had been consigned to act as cheerleaders, demonstrating in support of Che, Castro, Arafat, and Ho Chi Minh. A few radicals, such as Régis Debray and Pierre Goldmann, took their commitment a step further by joining their Marxist comrades abroad. However, prior to 1968, no one would have guessed that revolution was possible in France, or that the hexagon itself might once again become an epicenter of world revolution. If a few enragés at Nanterre could ignite a revolt that nearly toppled Gaullism, then perhaps it wasn't unreasonable to "demand the impossible," as a well-known May-era graffito urged. Disenchanted with the traditional Left, disillusioned with the working classes as well as with the reformist orientation of union leaders, in the post-May years many gauchistes felt justified in casting their lot with marginalized elements of society in order to activate heretofore untapped revolutionary potentials. Félix Guattari aptly captured the post-May ethos of "revolutionary pluralism" when he observed: "May '68 taught us to read the writing on the walls; since then we have begun to decipher the graffiti in the prisons, the mental asylums, and

now in the public urinals. A 'new scientific spirit' is being born!"[86]

Coming Out: Foucault and the Revolutionary Homosexual Action Front

The GIP was only one manifestation of the new "scientific spirit" alluded to by Guattari. By 1971, gauchistes and countercultural enthusiasts had begun investigating not only the lives of factory workers, but the lives of peasant farmers, immigrants, psychiatric patients, women, and homosexuals. In August 1970, the Women's Liberation Movement (MLF) was born largely out of the same Maoist milieu that had given birth to GIP. The MLF immediately began investigations or enquêtes bearing on heretofore tabooed or repressed themes relevant to women's daily life. In the post-May years, the transformation of everyday life on the micropolitical level had become the order of the day.

Several months later, France's first homosexual liberation movement, the Front Homosexuel D'action Révolutionnaire (FHAR) was founded. In their early years, both the MLF and FHAR remained closely allied with Maoist groups like the Gauche Prolétarienne, insofar as they shared a kindred revolutionary outlook. As Guy Hocquenghem aptly characterized the emancipatory ethos subtending the founding of the homosexual liberation movement: "If we called ourselves a 'revolutionary homosexual action front,' it was because, for us, what was most essential was not homosexuality but revolutionary action. It was a way of saying not only that a revolutionary could be homosexual too, but that being homosexual might be the best way of being revolutionary."[87]

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[86] Le directeur de publication, "Liminaire", *Recherches* 12 (March 1973), 3.

[87] Les premières lueurs du Fhar (Interview with Hocquenghem), *Gai Pied Hebdo* (12 March 1988): 32.

In 1971 and 1972, while Foucault was investigating prisons, FHAR militants were exploring the lives of homosexuals--not "elite" homosexuals like André Gide, Jean Cocteau, or Jean Genet, whose celebrity provided them a certain degree of freedom, but anonymous, "everyday" homosexuals who worked in low-income, blue collar jobs, who inhabited the poor suburbs or slums on the outskirts of Paris, or who grew up in France's immigrant communities. Like GIP, FHAR gathered information through surveys and questionnaires on homosexuals' everyday living and working conditions: the shady bars and late night cruising spots they frequented; even the prisons and mental institutions where many of them ended up.

Through René Schérer and Guy Hocquenghem, homosexual militants established a visible presence at the University of Vincennes. In 1971 they convened the first university seminar on homosexuality. There were rarely any assigned lectures or readings. Instead, they invited sex trade workers, transvestites, and transsexuals – none of whom had any connection to the academic world – to lead wide-ranging discussion. Many were recruited from notorious homosexual cruising spots such as the Bois du Boulogne west of Paris and the St. Denis district.[88]

In its early phase, FHAR sought to align itself with the cause of the proletariat. While the workers waged their struggle on the shop floor, FHAR would mobilize a "tourbillon des folles" – "whirlwind of fags" (a play on the stock phrase tourbillon des feuilles or a "whirlwind of leaves") – to lead the assault on bourgeois propriety and mores.[89] But in order to do so, it would first have to convince others to "come out" and join their struggle against bourgeois "normalcy." In one of FHAR's earliest calls to arms, militants declared:

> „You dare not say it out loud. Perhaps you won't even say it to yourself. We were like you a few months ago. Our Front will be what we make of it together. We want to destroy the family

[88] See René Schérer, *Hospitalités* (Paris: Anthropos, 2004).

[89] *Le Fléau Social*, 2 (October 1972), 2.

> and this society because they have always repressed us . . .We continue to suffer daily repression, risking interrogation, prison, and beatings, enduring mocking smiles and commiserating gazes . . .We are for a homosexual Front whose task is to fight and destroy "fascistic sexual normalcy."[90]

While Foucault sympathized with the new generation of homosexual activists, he nevertheless maintained a cautious distance from FHAR. Although he welcomed FHAR's existence, he feared that the very idea of a positive "gay identity" could turn into an oppressive social construct. In its own way, it could prove as limiting and restrictive as mainstream heterosexual prejudice.

Throughout most of his life, Foucault's sexuality had been a troublesome issue. During the late 1950s, while serving as cultural attaché in Warsaw, he had been entrapped by the Polish police during a furtive, same-sex tryst – his partner had been a government "plant." The incident forced him to leave Warsaw abruptly and return to France. A few years later, he was passed over for a prestigious appointment in the Ministry of Education due to defamatory rumors concerning his sexual preferences.[91] Sexual orientation was very likely one of the factors that propelled Foucault to study psychology and psychiatry at a relatively young age. When a brash and uninhibited homosexual culture began to emerge in the early 1970s, Foucault, like many homosexuals of his generation, did not really fit in. Foucault was a homosexual of the "Arcadie" generation: the secretive, upper class, genteel, homophile organization founded by Alain Baudry in the 1950s. Like the Mattachine Society in the United States, during the 1950s and 1960s Arcadie provided a discreet, tightly knit community for closeted homosexuals. In 1978 Foucault was the featured speaker at Arcadie's annual gathering. He turned down his speaker's fee (2,000 francs), quipping that no homosexual

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[90] *Rapport contre la normalité*, 9-11.

[91] Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits* vol. I, 55.

should be paid to speak to other homosexuals.[92] As his biographer, Didier Eribon, confirms: "It is obvious that Foucault belonged to the pre-Stonewall, pre-May 1968 generation."[93] Not the least of Foucault's concerns was the consequences that "coming out" might have on his intellectual reputation.[94]

By the same token, Foucault clearly identified with and supported FHAR's thoroughgoing critique of bourgeois "normalcy." He believed that, in his own way, he had been working on a similar critique since Madness and Civilization. While in 1961 Foucault's pathbreaking work may have seemed ahead of its time, ten years hence the gauchistes had more than caught up with him. Deleuze and Guattari, the intellectual eminences behind the anti-psychiatry movement (a trend that viewed Freudianism and psychiatry in general as inherently repressive), clearly appreciated the significance of Foucault's early attempt to write the history of madness qua the repressed "other" of reason. They relied extensively on Foucault's approach for their 1972 magnum opus, Anti-Oedipus. Considered to be the central text of the French anti-psychiatry movement, Anti-Oedipus is perhaps best understood as a critical response to Lacan's immense influence, and, by extension, a critique of the Freudian tradition. (Guattari was a Lacanian analyst who had been psychoanalyzed by Lacan himself.) In a conversation with Pierre Nora, his editor at Editions Gallimard, Foucault described his 1976 book on The History of Sexuality as his own critical rejoinder to Lacan.[95]

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92 Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, 125.

93 Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*, 300-301.

94 See Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, 254-257.

95 Dosse, *History of Structuralism* vol. II, 339. Nora describes Foucault's comportment upon turning in the manuscript for his History of Sexuality, as follows: "I remember him tapping his foot in my office: 'I don't have an idea, my dear Pierre, I have no ideas. After the battle, I come to sexuality, and I have said everything I have to say. 'One fine day he brought me a manuscript, saying, 'You will see, the only idea that I had was to beat on Lacan by arguing the opposite of what he says.'

In the 1950s and 1960s, Lacan's "recovery of Freud" was one of the single most influential currents in French philosophy and human sciences. In his legendary lectures, Lacan relied on structuralist linguistics to translate Freudian concepts from the sphere of biology into the realms of language and culture. By the same token, Lacan continued to rely on Freud's theory of ontogenesis or individuation, culminating in the Oedipal stage – a metaphor for the socialization process. "Oedipalization", which represented the successful formation of the ego, was, for Lacan, a linguistic and cultural process rather than a biological one. At the same time, in Lacan's framework, ontogenesis and individuation were treated as unproblematic, ahistorical constants. It was on this latter point, above all, that Deleuze and Guattari parted ways with Lacan. They contended that the Oedipal stage, rather than representing a necessary step in human psychological development, was an invention of bourgeois society. As the discourse that aims to understand and guide this process, psychoanalysis was in essence the discursive executor of the bourgeois Subject. Hence the polemical title of their opus: "Anti-Oedipus."

Foucault had long contemplated the idea of writing a history of sexuality – more specifically, a history of homosexuality, a subject that was clearly of significant existential import for him, and one that he had been exploring indirectly since the late 1950s.[96] Prior to the 1970s, however, he had conceived the project along the same methodological lines as Madness and Civilization: as a history of the exclusionary acts that condemned homosexuality to secrecy and shame. But, during the mid-1970s, when Foucault finally decided to undertake the project in earnest, conceptions of homosexuality were undergoing a remarkable metamorphosis.

For one, homosexuals had begun to "come out" en masse. The most celebrated instance occurred in January 1972, when, in an essay entitled "The Revolution of Homosexuals," Guy

[96] See Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*, part 3: Michel Foucault's Heterotopia.

Hocquenghem came out in the pages of Le Nouvel Observateur. Hocquenghem related in frank detail the story of his becoming self-aware as a homosexual – as he later acknowledged, "not without a good dose of exhibitionism"[97] Perhaps more than any single event, Hocquenghem's "revolutionary" act – in Pompidou's France, it took considerable courage to openly proclaim one's homosexuality – helped establish the cause of gay liberation firmly in French public consciousness. It also propelled Hocquenghem to instant stardom in Parisian intellectual circles.

That same year, Hocquenghem bested Foucault by publishing the first theoretical elaboration of revolutionary homosexuality, Homosexual Desire. On the manifesto's opening page, Hocquenghem registered a theoretical and political watershed by inverting the terms of previous debates over homosexuality. As Hocquenghem wrote: "The problem is not so much Homosexual Desire as the fear of homosexuality."[98] In other words: the real question is not what homosexuality is but why society is so fearful of it. Hocquenghem used the term "homosexual paranoia" to describe the prevalent anti-homosexual sentiment. (The word "homophobia" had yet to be invented.[99] After surveying a number of current instances of homosexual paranoia in France – the controversies surrounding the work of Jean Genet, for example – Hocquenghem moved on to challenge the idea propagated by social reformers that society was moving steadily towards the liberalization of attitudes towards homosexuality. A cursory glance at the history of homosexual repression in contemporary Europe revealed this idea to be chimerical, Hocquenghem claimed. The incipient tolerance of homosexuality during the twentieth century's

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97 Guy Hocquenghem, La Révolution des homosexuels, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 10 January 1972.

98 *Homosexual Desire*, 49; emphasis added.

99 On the history of the term "homophobia," see "Homophobie" in Didier Eribon ed., *Dictionnaire des Cultures Gays et Lesbiennes*, 225 and Michael Moon's introduction to the 1996 edition of *Homosexual Desire*, 15-16.

early decades had disappeared with the rise of fascism during the 1930s. In the frantic rebuilding of the postwar era, antipathy to homosexuality continued to intensify. In fact, in France, homosexuality had not been criminalized until the Vichy era (1940-44). As Hocquenghem convincingly demonstrated, since the 1950s the number of arrests and the severity of punishments had risen steadily.

Hocquenghem went on to describe how "capitalist society manufactures homosexuals, just as it produces proletarians, constantly defining its own limits."[100] He showed that, whereas the Christian West had been perennially hostile towards homosexuality, the contemporary criminological and medical classifications of homosexuality were relatively recent. The term "homosexual" was first coined in the 1860s by the German sex researcher and social reformer Magnus Hirschfeld. With the late nineteenth-century classification of homosexuality as a sickness or disease, "homosexual paranoia" had been transposed from the religious domain and secularized, as it were. With the advent of psychoanalysis, homosexuality became a fixed scientific category; to employ sociologist Emile Durkheim's expression, it had become a "social fact." It was at this point that homosexuals themselves began to internalize and exhibit the stereotypes and traits that bourgeois society had manufactured for them. As Hocquenghem aptly observes: "We have escaped hellfire in favor of psychological hell."[101]

The motor force behind all of these developments was what Hocquenghem referred to as modern society's "growing imperialism": its inordinate need to control the population and maximize output.[102] In Hocquenghem's view, in order to ensure the continued reproduction of healthy laborers and consumers, capitalism divided up the plenum of unrestricted libidinal pulsation into "heterosexual" and "homosexual" desire. Heterosexual desire, which is teleologically directed

[100] *Homosexual Desire*, 50.
[101] Ibid., 93.
[102] Ibid., 51.

towards procreation, was established as the Norm. Homosexual desire became its doppelganger and foil. By locating homosexual desire in a specific pariah group – "homosexuals" – society succeeded in restricting it. Whereas, heretofore, homosexual desire had been regarded as a possibility for everyone, modern psychiatry treated it as a pathological manifestation associated with a particular social group. Society required both heterosexuals and the homosexuals. But both of these categories were effectively bourgeois constructs: fictions invented by capitalism in order to impose divisions and restrictions on the infinite flux of Desire. In reconstructing the history of homosexuality, Hocquenghem made explicit reference to Madness and Civilization. Like Foucault's madman, Hocquenghem's homosexual is little more than a convenient fabrication of modern capitalism.

The emergence of a bold and uninhibited gay subculture, coupled with Hocquenghem's sensational "coming out" and the pathbreaking publication of Homosexual Desire, confronted Foucault with a dilemma. The philosopher began to feel that he had been deprived of a project that had long been close to his heart. It became clear to him that the initial breakthrough had already been achieved, and that his own contribution would no longer be "audacious." Moreover, as Eribon suggests, he began to take stock of the fact that the approach he had conceived had been essentially misguided. Foucault had intended to "denounce certain prohibitions, to break a certain silence." Yet, by this point, the situation had changed drastically: "people were speaking for themselves everywhere, including in newsmagazines."[103] As Hocquenghem had already written in his "coming out" article in Le Nouvel Observateur: "We are all somehow deformed in an area known as sexual desire or love. We must begin to uncover these desires that we have been forced to hide. No one else can do it for us."[104]

[103] Eribon.

[104] Hocquenghem, La Révolution des homosexuels, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 10 January 1972.

"Three Billion Perverts"

After the publication of Homosexual Desire, Hocquenghem suggested to Deleuze and Guattari that they gather a group of researchers for a special issue on "homosexualities" in the journal Recherches, a publication of the Centre d'Études, de Recherches et de Formation Institutionnelles (CERFI). Deleuze and Guattari eagerly assented and began to assemble a team. Since they had been intellectually and personally close to Foucault during their tenure at Vincennes (in the meantime, the philosopher had left the experimental university for his post at the College de France), they immediately asked him to participate. Although initially intrigued, Foucault gradually lost interest as the younger, more assertive and outspoken homosexuals like Hocquenghem took over.

Hocquenghem had first become acquainted with Foucault through GIP, which in association with the FHAR had launched an investigation into the dubious suicide of Gérard Grandmontagne, a young, openly homosexual prisoner who had been severely beaten by prison guards before dying mysteriously in solitary confinement. To this day it remains unclear whether the cause of death was strangulation or electrocution.[105] (It is noteworthy that Homosexual Desire is dedicated to Grandmontagne.)

Six months later, in March 1973, the final result appeared: Three Billion Perverts: the Great Encyclopedia of Homosexualities. The special issue consisted mostly of unprecedentedly frank and explicit discussions of topics such as cruising, masturbation, sex in the cités (subsidized urban housing projects), and sexual relations among France's North African population. It also included Situationist-inspired homoerotic "recuperations" of children's cartoons.

Noticeably absent from the large volume, however, were the theoretical discourses of Madness and Civilization, Anti-Oedipus, or Homosexual Desire. Instead the participants,

[105] Girard, 106-107.

from the "intellectuals" like Hocquenghem to the various homosexuals they interviewed, spoke in plain and unadorned language about their own experiences, ideas, and fantasies.

Three Billion Perverts was immediately banned, and Guattari was charged with public obscenity – outrage contre bonnes moeurs – an offense that cost him a small fine, but which, strangely, did not seem to adversely affect the journal's financial ties to government ministries. In the end, Foucault's only imprint on the issue was his signature, along with those of Deleuze, Guattari, Sartre, and numerous others.

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Foucault's experiences as an activist came to intellectual fruition in Discipline and Punish, his magisterial exposé of modern disciplinary mechanisms and practices. In order to allay the suspicion that his involvement with GIP might have been a subterfuge to gather material for his forthcoming study, he delayed the book's publication by two years.

In Discipline and Punish Foucault's ingenious stratagem was to shift the focus of debate away from the criminal and toward the system of punishment. He understood penality, first and foremost, as a political form. Disciplinary society's goal was to parry and defuse political challenges from below: uprisings and revolts on the part of an assortment of diffuse lumpenproletarian groups – the so-called "dangerous classes."[106] This underclass of social outcasts harbored an inchoate, yet robust potential for spontaneous action. In Foucault's view the prison system's political mission was to neutralize that potential by reclassifying these unbowed "primitive rebels" as "criminals" and "misfits." By transposing the debate from the realm of politics to the putatively value-free domains of science, medicine, psychiatry, and genetics, disciplinary society

[106] See the classic study by Louis Chevalier, *Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes During the Nineteenth Century,* trans. Frank Jellinek (New York: Howard Fertig: 1973).

was able to turn a political threat into an "objective" debate about "deviancy" and "social pathology." However, in truth, the prison system was merely a cog in a much larger project of societal "normalization." The "means of correct training" and the microphysics of "carceralism" that Foucault described so vividly in Discipline and Punish were also practiced by an array of kindred institutions and organizations: hospitals, schools, asylums, factories, the military, and so forth.

By the same token, historians felt that, by treating three centuries of prison life in some three hundred pages, Foucault had covered too much ground too quickly. Inattention to detail and neglect of historical variation made the book more of a lively, speculative essay than a rigorous, well-documented study. A number of scholars pointed out that Foucault's account of the rise of "disciplinary society" was overly linear. They feared he had merely inverted the Enlightenment narrative of progress with a narrative increasing social control. Efforts to humanize prison life that had been undertaken by the revolutionary governments of the early 1790s had been reversed during the Napoleonic era and the Restoration. Only belatedly, during the July Monarchy (1830-1848), were many of the draconian features of ancien régime penality – the iron collar, branding, amputation of digits, and so forth – eliminated once and for all.

Commentators also felt that Foucault's portrayal of carceralism's hegemony was far too monolithic. As a result, Foucault's account failed to do justice to a panoply of countervailing tendencies whose combined effect was to make surveillance much less omnipotent than the philosopher claimed. Labor history has convincingly shown how, during the nineteenth century, traditional and modern production methods co-existed. Much the same could be said of prisons. Not only did many atavisms of ancien régime penality persist. The practical administration of prisons was much more disorganized and haphazard than Foucault led readers to believe. Both the prison system and modern society in general were much less totalizing and seamless than Foucault had portrayed them as

being. Often, it was quite easy for individuals, as well as entire social groups, to slip through the cracks. Moreover, the disjunction between the disciplinary intentions of experts and on-the-ground social practices was often cavernous. Thus, Bentham's panopticon, which for Foucault had become emblematic of modern carceralism in general, was rarely built.

Analysts also pointed out that the modern prison, far from being the smooth-running machine described by Foucault, remained suffused with traditional ecclesiastical influences. The Church continued to play a major role in the moralization of crime, methods of rehabilitation, and in various supervisory practices. After all, it was post-Tridentine Catholicism that "condemned rebels of all sorts – witches, libertines, heretics; that originated the theory of guilt that registered and dramatized moral failings. And it was the Church that stressed the incurable nature of sin"[107] By criticizing the Bastille as the emblem of autocratic arbitrariness, nineteenth-century Republicans such as Victor Hugo and Léon Gambetta, weren't exactly working to establish a new Gulag. By casting his net so widely, by simplistically holding "bourgeois rationalism" accountable for power's excesses and machinations, wasn't Foucault willfully blind to French republicanism's emancipatory achievements?[108] Was "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" merely an instance of ideological subterfuge meant to mask and conceal increasingly sophisticated mechanisms of "biopower"?

For these and other reasons, observers felt that Foucault's description of nineteenth-century institutional practice as a massive instance of "normalization" was untenable. By methodologically elevating "carceralism" to the status of an impregnable Power, had not Foucault ended up seriously

[107] See Jacques Léonard, L'historien et le philosophie: A propos de Surveiller et punir; naissance de la prison, *Annales Historiques de la Révolution française* (1977) 2.

[108] See, for example, the important book by Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth Century France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

undermining capacities for resistance? By dispersing power in all directions, he paradoxically risked diluting – and, hence, rendering unrecognizable – its core elements and components. No longer exercised by a particular group or class, power circulated amorphously through individuals before re-centering itself – but where, exactly? Ultimately, the workings of power seemed vague and nebulous.

Once power is divested of its core, resistance is deprived of its object. Where should one strike? What tactics should one employ? Whom, precisely, should one strive to contest or resist? Once Power has been elevated to the level of an all-encompassing "discursive regime," efforts to combat it seem almost pointless. They seem to be "always already" inscribed in "power-knowledge" qua episteme. As omnipresent and strangely anonymous, power seemed to be both everywhere and nowhere. As one commentator aptly concluded: in Foucault's scheme, "[power] was irresistible since there was nothing to resist."[109]

Critics also objected to Foucault's continued reliance on "archaeological" concepts and methods which, by definition, banished the "subject" – and, along with it, social actors and oppositional groups – from the philosopher's interpretive framework. As one commentator demurred: "The vocabulary of geometry turns human society into a desert." Thus, instead of highlighting the oppositional potentials of human subjectivity and will, Foucault "speaks about spaces, lines, frameworks, segments, and dispositions."[110] Having belittled prospects for contestation, Foucault's characterization of modern disciplinary practice seemed nightmarish and Kafkaesque. Nowhere in sight were there identifiable actors and social groups who might be capable of resisting power's ineluctable maw.

[109] Dosse, *History of Structuralism* vol. II, 251.
[110] Ibid.

Foucault's Progeny: The New Philosophers

Despite his vigorous promotion of the idea of "specific intellectuals," Foucault paradoxically discovered – along with many of his erstwhile Maoist allies – that he could not dispense with the idea of Universal Human Rights. At issue was a sweeping realignment of French oppositional political culture: from gauchisme to droits de l'homme, one might say. Here, Maoism, in its post-May incarnation, played the unsuspecting role of a way station or transmission belt, weaning intellectuals away from the dogmas of orthodox Marxism and exposing them to an expanded definition of human emancipation. After leftism's implosion, the Eastern European dissident movement arose to capture the imagination of former gauchistes. And in this context, critics of "power" found the idea of human rights indispensable.[111] To have done any less would have been the ultimate in hypocrisy. After all, how could one in good conscience denounce the oppression of "power-knowledge" in the West while turning a blind eye to its repugnant, totalitarian manifestations in the East? Following the publication of Solzhenitsyn's pioneering book on the Soviet Gulag, the "antihumanist" paradigms of structuralism and Marxism were perceived in a new moral light – and found seriously wanting. Both were viewed as "sciences of legitimation" that underwrote oppressive logics of social control.

Thus, during the late 1970s, in what can only be considered a striking political volte-face, Foucault, along with former Maoists like André Glucksmann and Serge July, became a committed droit-de-l'hommiste – a human rights advocate. In 1977, along with Sartre and Glucksmann, Foucault protested a state visit by Soviet president Leonid Brezhnev by staging an alternative public reception for a group of Eastern European dissidents. A year later, along with Médecins sans Frontières

[111] The story is best told by Pierre Grémion in *Paris-Prague: La Gauche face au renouveau et à la régression tchécoslovaques, 1968-1978* (Paris : Julliard, 1985).

founder Bernard Kouchner, Foucault helped establish "A Boat for Vietnam," an organization dedicated to helping Vietnamese refugees fleeing the ravages of leftwing dictatorship.[112] In 1981, when General Wojciech Jaruzelski declared martial law, thereby quashing Solidarity, Poland's nascent independent trade union movement, Foucault successfully lobbied newly elected President François Mitterrand to reverse the government's policy of non-interference.[113]

The alliance with Kouchner and ex-Maoist Glucksmann transformed Foucault into a passionate advocate of humanitarian intervention (le droit d'ingérance): the moral imperative to intervene in the domestic affairs of a nation when human rights are being systematically violated. In 1981, Foucault addressed a major conference held in Geneva where these themes were being debated and discussed, with the intention of promoting a new and more vigorous Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen.[114] Explicitly relying on the human rights-derived idiom of the day, Foucault celebrated the existence of "an international citizenship" requiring individuals to speak out against abuses of power wherever they may occur. "It is the duty of this international citizenship," he continues, "to always bring the testimony of people's suffering to the eyes and ears of governments . . . The suffering of men must

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[112] As a youth, Kouchner had been a member of the Union des Jeunesses Communistes and was never a Maoist. Nevertheless, his itinerary – from leftism to staunch human rights advocate – is highly representative of the political trajectory pursued by the Maoists. Kouchner became Minister of Health under François Mitterrand's presidency (1992-1993) (and then again in 2001 under Lionel Jospin) and French foreign minister under Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-). For a brief account of his career, see James Traub, A Statesman Without Borders, The New York Times, 3 February 2008.

[113] Foucault, The Moral and Social Experience of the Poles Can No Longer Be Obliterated, in *Power*, ed. James Faubion (New York: New Press, 2000), 465-473.

[114] See Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits* vol. II, eds. Daniel Defert and Francois Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 1526. As the editors explain: Foucault sought to "get as many persons as possible to react to this text, with the hope that the result would lead to a new Declaration of the Rights of Man".

never be a silent residue of policy. It grounds an absolute right to stand up and speak to those who hold power."[115] Foucault went on to praise humanitarian NGOs such as Amnesty International, Terre des Hommes, and Kouchner's Médecins du Monde as exemplary of the new moral standpoint of international citizenship, which, in his view, established the "right . . . of private individuals to intervene effectively in the order of international policies and strategies."[116]

Foucault's alliance with the GIP Maoists had sensitized him to the multiplicity of forms in which domination appeared in modern society. But the GIP response, for all its bravado and tenacity, had remained diffuse and ad hoc. Unquestionably, a more systematic and principled approach to the problem of "power" was needed. Thus, during the late 1970s and under the influence of a changed political zeitgeist, Foucault assumed the guise of a "universal intellectual" and a champion of democratic values. (His one relapse – and a serious one – was his defense of the revolution of the mullahs in Iran. Foucault viewed the popular revolt against the Shah as a praiseworthy, indigenous anti-colonial insurrection. Once again, a prominent Western intellectual had been seduced and deceived by the lure of third worldism – albeit, this time a third worldism draped in religious garb.)[117]

The new humanitarian sensibility had been articulated during the late 1970s, with considerable media fanfare, by the so-called "New Philosophers." In their front ranks former Gauche Prolétarienne militants such as Glucksmann, Jean-Paul Dollé, Christian Jambet, Guy Lardreau and Philippe Nemo, figured prominently. As an ex-GIP leader and activist, Foucault enthusiastically supported his former colleagues and fellow militants.

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[115] Foucault, Face aux gouvernements, les droits de l'homme, in *ibid*., 1526-27.

[116] Michel Foucault, *The Essential Foucault* , eds. P. Rabinow and N. Rose (New York: The New Press, 2003), 64-65.

[117] See Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

For decades left-leaning Parisian intellectuals had sought to separate Marxism qua doctrine from its various concrete historical deformations, thereby holding out the prospect that the radiant utopian future guaranteed by historical materialism's founders was still beckoning on the horizon. The New Philosophers' gambit – which owed more to the voluble media coverage their books received than to their intellectual originality (the critique of Marxism they embraced had for the most part been developed by the Socialism and Barbarism group during the 1950s and 1960s) – was to link communism's manifest political failings to the missteps of Marxist theory. Glucksmann first developed this thesis in his 1975 book, La Cuisinière et le mangeur d'hommes (The Cook and the Man-Eater). In Glucksmann's view, Marx was the "Chef" who contrived "recipes" for the theoretical mastery of humanity – recipes that were implemented by "Man-Eaters" like Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, and Mao.

Thus, in 1977, when Glucksmann's The Master Thinkers first appeared, Foucault published a laudatory review entitled "The Great Rage of Facts" in the left-wing, mass circulation weekly, Le Nouvel Observateur.[118] The imprimatur of France's leading philosopher-intellectual was an unequivocal signal that New Philosophy deserved to be taken seriously by a broadly educated public. By choosing this title, Foucault, who once described himself as a "happy positivist," suggested that no amount of Marxian-inspired theoretical pyrotechnics could change the nature of the "facts" attesting to communism's abysmal, real world track record. (The title was also an unsubtle jibe directed against Althusser, whose structuralist approach stressed Marxism's unimpugnable theoretical cogency despite any "deviations" that might be found in actual practice.) In Foucault's view, the "facts'" stubbornness stood as an insuperable obstacle to the delusional belief that,

[118] Michel Foucault, La Grande Colère des faits, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 9 May 1977. Reprinted in Sylvie Bouscasse and Denis Bourgeois, *Faut-il brûler les nouveaux philosophes : le dossier du «procès»* (Paris : Nouvelles Editions Oswald, 1978).

somehow, a return to Marxist theory in its original, pristine state could set the world right. Moreover, in the Gulag Archipelago – a book that washed over the Parisian intellectual scene like a tidal wave – Solzhenitsyn based his case not on sophisticated interpretive paradigms but instead on stolid and immoveable "facts."

Moreover, the narratives of hardship and deprivation he recounted consisted of unadorned testimonials by the Gulag's innocent victims: the "plebs," who fell beneath the radar scope of sophisticated "theories" like structuralist Marxism. As such, the plebs were doomed to a "pre-theoretical" consciousness; from the standpoint of intellectual sophistication, they had nothing to say. Yet, as Solzhenitsyn had shown, it was their testimony alone, and not Marxism qua "theory," that had allowed the truth to unfold and become known. Following the lead of Glucksmann, who employed the term extensively in The Cook and the Man-eater and The Master Thinkers, in his writings on carceralism Foucault would embrace the notion of the "pleb" as a type of pre-manipulated, existential substrate: the individual in her "sheer being" prior to logics of modern disciplinary control or "subjectivization."[119] Although Foucault was wary about turning the "pleb" into a new fundamentum inconcussum or essence, on numerous occasions he affirmed its status as a pre-conceptual, ontic basis of resistance. "There is plebs," Foucault enthuses, "in bodies, in souls, in individuals, in the proletariat, in the bourgeoisie . . . everywhere in a diversity of forms and extensions, of energies and irreducibilities." Whereas it would be an exaggeration to claim that the pleb escapes relations of power, insofar as it exists at power's limits, Foucault continues, it provides an indispensable basis for theorizing the "other" of power qua contestation.[120] A good illustration of the use to which Foucault put the concept occurs in Discipline and Punish, where,

[119] Foucault used the expression the "non-proletarianized pleb" as early as O*n Popular Justice: A Discussion with the Maoists* (1972).

[120] Pouvoir et stratégies," *Dits et Ecrits* vol. II, 420-21.

following Fourier, he celebrates criminality as a form of transgression or resistance vis-à-vis reigning societal norms. ("It may be," observes Foucault, "that crime constitutes a political instrument that could prove precious for the liberation of our society . . . Indeed, will such an emancipation take place without it?")[121] It is in this context that Foucault urges greater attention to the linkages between the lower classes and illegality, the reciprocal relationship between the proletariat and the "urban plebs."[122]

In agreement with Glucksmann, Foucault held that the totalizing nature of Marxist thought was at the root of the doctrine's historico-political excesses. Unorthodox or reformist currents of Marxism continually held out the prospect that, if only Marx's ideas were correctly interpreted, socialist humanity would, at long last, finally come into its own. Foucault effusively praises The Cook and the Man-eater as the book that took the courageous final step in breaking with historical materialism's long train of rationalizations and self-deceptions.[123] Foucault summarizes Glucksmann's position as follows:

The whole of a certain Left has attempted to explain the Gulag . . . in terms of the theory of history, or at least the history of theory. Yes, yes, there were massacres; but that was a terrible error. Just reread Marx or Lenin, compare them with Stalin and you will see where the latter went wrong. It is obvious that all those deaths could only result from a misreading. It was predictable: Stalinism-error was one of the principal agents behind the return to Marxism-truth, to Marxism-text which we saw in the 1960s. If you want to be against Stalin, don't listen to the victims; they will only recount their

[121] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 289.

[122] Ibid., 287.

[123] See Foucault, *La Grande Colère des faits*, 420-21 : "It seems to me that Glucksmann's analysis escapes all these so readily practiced forms of reduction. "

tortures. Reread the theoreticians; they will tell you the truth about the true.[124]

The New Philosophers' were Foucault's intellectual progeny in another important sense as well. For the theoretical basis of their critique of Marxism was Foucault's "power-knowledge" dyad: the idea that knowledge, rather than being something that will set us free as the philosophes had argued, is itself a form of power; the contention that no form of knowledge is disinterested or value-free; that, instead, all insight is implicated in the production and maintenance of power-relations. Of course, Foucault derived this standpoint from a critical reading of Nietzsche, who had famously unmasked the "will-to-power" subtending all allegedly impartial claims to knowledge or truth. In The Master Thinkers, Glucksmann carried this argument to an implausible extreme, going so far as to suggest that the Auschwitz and the Gulag represented the hidden telos of the Western intellectual tradition. The only figures he seemed to exempt from this simplistic, denunciatory litany were Socrates and Rabelais – and Foucault, of course, whose portrayal of the "disciplinary society" (the philosopher's shorthand for the repressive institutional structure of the modern West) as a manifestation of "soft totalitarianism" figures prominently in Glucksmann's account.. (The East had its Gulag. But the West specializes in "means of correct training.") The problem was that, by shifting their thinking to the strategic plane of "power" and "force," New Philosophers like Glucksmann abandoned the terrain of reason and philosophical argumentation. "Reason" was reduced to a manifestation of the Will to theoretical mastery – as with Foucault's expression, "the Will to Knowledge" (la volonté à savoir) – and "Truth" became merely the ideological window-dressing for power-relations or "interest."[125] Suffice it to say that once one

[124] Ibid. For an excellent account of the Solzhenitsyn effect , see Pierre Grémion, *Paris-Prague : la gauche face au renouveau et à la régression tchécoslovaques.*

[125] See the astute critique in Jacques Bouvresse, *Le Philosophe chez les autophages* (Paris : Editions de Minuit, 1984), 44, 89.

discounts reason and intellection as inherently repressive, one abandons the only means available to think through the problems of the political and historical present.

Jacques Lacan's theories were another important influence on the New Philosophers. In the post-May period the idea took hold that, try as one might, it was impossible to escape the Discourse of the Master. In other words: Abandon all hope, ye who enter the "symbolic realm" or language! There is no circumventing the fact that Discourse itself is merely a mechanism of domination to which there is no "outside" or "escape." As Lacan resignedly declared in a 1969 colloquy: "The aspiration to revolution has but one conceivable issue, always, the Discourse of the Master. That is what experience has proved. What you, as revolutionaries, aspire to is a Master. You will have one!"[126] Lacan's view of language – as filtered through the exclusionary mechanisms of ego-formation or "ontogenesis" – as, in essence, a "discursive penitentiary" harmonized with Foucault's critical views on the repressive function of language qua "discursive regime" or "episteme." (What both approaches neglect is a theory of the autonomy or originality of the "speech act," which by virtue of its expressive capacities possesses the ability to escape the rigid constraints of structure.) Hence, the popularity of the ethereal Christian tract penned by ex-Maoists Christian Jambet and Guy Lardreau, L'Ange (Angel), which argued that, in light of the "fallen" state of language, history, and politics, "transcendence" remained the sole option available. The choice was clear-cut: either Stalin or Joan of Arc. There were no half-measures to be found.

Those who disagreed with the New Philosophers' perspective were brusquely dismissed as "Master Censors"

[126] Lacan, Impromptu at Vincennes, *Television* (New York : Norton, 1978), 126. In fairness, Lacan's remarks are as much a critique of the repressive function of ego-formation ("ontogenesis"), which he chronicles in his famous essay on the "Mirror Stage," as they are an indictment of the Symbolic realm.

(maïtre-censeurs).[127] Thus, in their defense of human rights the New Philosophers displayed an intolerance for criticism that, many respects, mirrored their earlier, pro-Chinese ideological dogmatism.

It was ironic, then, that despite his congenital anti-Sartrism, it was Foucault who, when all was said and done, inherited Sartre's mantle as France's archetypical engaged intellectual. By the same token, the demands of commitment in a post-totalitarian epoch mandated a return to the ethical vocation of the intellectual as represented by Voltaire, Victor Hugo, and Emile Zola.[128] In 1978 François Furet had proclaimed: "The French Revolution is over."[129] With it died the prophetic intellectual: the political clairvoyant who specialized in envisioning humanity's radiant utopian future. The universal intellectual was reborn from his ashes.

[127] See Bernard-Henri Lévy, La Réponse aux Maitres-Censeurs, in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 27 June 1977.

[128] On this point, see the excellent book by Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May '68 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal: Queens University Press, 2006).

[129] François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 1.