

# The Impossible Prison

---

## A Foucault Reader

Daniel Defert  
Gilles Deleuze  
Harun Farocki  
Michel Foucault  
Thomas Hirschhorn  
Lisa Le Feuvre  
David Macey  
Alessandro Petti  
Ken Starkey

---

Nottingham  
Contemporary  
Visual Arts

# Contents

**Introduction** Page 04

**David Macey** Page 06  
*After Foucault*

**Michel Foucault** Page 08  
*The Eye Of Power*

**Harun Farocki** Page 16  
*Controlling Observation*

**Ken Starkey** Page 21  
*Stranger In A Strange Land:  
Foucault In The Business School*

**Lisa Le Feuvre** Page 26  
*Preferring Not To: Acconci,  
Graham, Nauman, Foucault*

**Gilles Deleuze** Page 28

*Postscript On The Societies Of Control*

**Alessandro Petti** Page 32

*Assymetry In Globalized Space:  
Postscript On The Society Of Control*

**Daniel Defert** Page 36

*The Emergence Of A New Front: Prisons*

**Thomas Hirschhorn** Page 44

*24h Foucault*

## Introduction

This reader is published to accompany our exhibition *The Impossible Prison* which features 16 artists whose videos, sculptures, drawings and photographs are incarcerated in the cells and corridors of an Edwardian police station, which remains much as it was when it closed in 1985. Three of the artists also feature as authors in this publication: Harun Farocki, Thomas Hirschhorn and Alessandro Petti of Multiplicity.

The exhibition is the fifth and final chapter of *Histories of the Present*, Nottingham Contemporary's yearlong series of off-site projects in advance of the opening of our new building next year. Our strategy has been to use historically significant sites in and around Nottingham as sources of inspiration for contemporary and international enquiries. The overarching title is borrowed from Michel Foucault, whose histories of madness, medicine, prison and sexuality continue to inform how we understand power, knowledge and the self in the 21st century. He also compared his historical approach to archaeology, evoking the excavation and revelation of what has been superseded and concealed. The police station is operated by the Galleries of Justice, a crime museum in Nottingham that has five subterranean floors of cells and dungeons below its Victorian courts of law, spanning several centuries. It offers, in that sense, a kind of archaeology of the penal system as practiced in Europe since the late Middle Ages.

Foucault's work and life in the 1970s, in particular, has informed the making of this exhibition and its accompanying public programme. It was during this decade that he developed his immeasurably influential thought on power, in *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (1975) first and foremost, and in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality: the Will to Knowledge* (1976). This was the most politically active period in Foucault's life: he undertook his leadership of the *Groupe d'Information sur Prisons* (GIP), which was active in Paris and the French provinces in the early 1970s, as a continuation and practical application of his philosophical work on power relations in Western culture.

For Foucault, prison is no longer the exception at the dawn of the modern age: “Prison continues, on those entrusted to it, the work begun elsewhere, which the whole of society pursues on each individual through innumerable mechanisms of discipline”, he wrote in *Discipline and Punish*. Some artists in *The Impossible Prison* deal directly with prison: Farocki, Ashley Hunt and Artur Zmijewski most of all. Others reflect on varying attributes of a disciplinary or post-disciplinary society (Deleuze, in a late, far-reaching essay reprinted here, argued in 1990 that disciplinary society was giving way to ‘societies of control’). The architecture of occupation in Palestine, the role of two-way mirrors in corporate architecture, and the rather officious regulations of a Russian school for models are some of the varied subjects addressed by artists in *The Impossible Prison*. Historically speaking, the exhibition begins with three seminal figures in the early development of Conceptual art, performance and video. We are implicated, as viewers, in the videos of Vito Acconci, Dan Graham and Bruce Nauman through the particular ways they train the camera on their own bodies.

This reader begins with Foucault himself, whose life and work are memorably and succinctly re-invoked in a short essay by David Macey, Foucault’s foremost biographer. An interview with Foucault follows, in which he outlines how visibility and spatial techniques come to define the operations of power in the modern epoch, not least through the example of Jeremy Bentham’s ‘panopticon’ prison. It then opens up to various legacies and applications of his thought: how inmates of an American super-prison become objects in the viewfinders of both closed-circuit television cameras and the automatic rifles of guards (Farocki); how Foucault’s thought on disciplinary institutions have been transposed to the analysis of corporate life and management techniques (Starkey); how the performances and videos of Acconci, Graham, Nauman and their artistic contemporaries might be read via Foucault’s work on observation and surveillance (Le Feuvre); and how architecture and urban planning is used militarily by the Israeli state to control the lives

of Palestinians (Petti). The reader ends with a personal and illuminating recollection of the activity of GIP by Daniel Defert, Foucault’s long term partner. Finally, by way of a coda, Thomas Hirschhorn’s statement of intent for his *24 Hour Foucault*, summons up the art and power of the extraordinary philosopher’s thought.

The reader, like the programme of talks and workshops that form part of *The Impossible Prison* – which besides Macey, Le Feuvre, Starkey and Petti, involves artist and activist Ashley Hunt, author and ex-prisoner Erwin James, philosopher Jonathan Rée and architect and theorist Eyal Weizman – reflect our aim to reveal the social relevance of so much of the most interesting art made today. No philosopher of the last fifty years has done more to erode the hierarchies and divisions in both knowledge and society than Foucault. We now think differently as a consequence. Today’s art, crossing disciplines with consummate ease, is perfectly adapted to navigate this new environment.

**Alex Farquharson**

*Director, Nottingham Contemporary*



# David Macey

## *After Foucault*

Foucault sometimes appears to be ubiquitous. Book after book appears on topics as diverse as *Foucault and Feminism*, *Foucault and Cultural Studies*, *Foucault and the Writing of History*, *Foucault and the Politics of Gender*, and *Foucault and History of Science*. The titles are imaginary; the possible contents and areas of interest are not.

Foucault seems to have become relevant to virtually every academic discipline in the UK, perhaps more so than in France. It would be difficult to read cultural studies, gender studies, sociology or any combination of them without at least encountering the name.

It is, on the other hand comparatively rare to find a book entitled *Foucault and Philosophy*. That might have pleased him. Although Foucault originally trained as a philosopher and taught philosophy, his chair at the Collège de France was in the History of Systems of Thought. This implied a much wider field of investigation than that of the professional philosopher. Part of the appeal of his work is that it has always extended far beyond the narrow limits of academic philosophy.

For a British reader, the attractive thing about 'continental philosophy' (which in practice usually means French philosophy) has long been that it allows one to escape the constraints of analytic philosophy that can be terribly inward-looking: an arid examination of a so-called 'ordinary language' and its meaning.

As Foucault argued more than once, other things can be much more fun to philosophise about; madness, prisons, sexuality and personal identity. The sinister attractions of some of the topics Foucault dealt with was further enhanced by the appearance of the man himself. His carefully constructed image; a shaven head and glasses, which whilst worn for the obvious reasons, always looked like part of a costume. That Foucault was gay gave a whole new meaning to Nietzsche's notion of gay science, even though Foucault claimed to be a philosopher who was gay rather than a gay philosopher. The whispered stories, often exaggerated, of his involvement in sadomasochistic activities, and the final reality of death from Aids-related complaints inevitably added to the strange aura that already surrounded the philosopher.

Yet to say that Foucault was a philosopher creates as many

problems as it solves. He could also be described as a social historian, as a historian of psychiatry and medicine, as a literary theorist or simply as a thinker. He has variously been described as a structuralist, a post-structuralist and even a post-modernist, though 'postmodernism' was a term he almost never used. Foucault was a political activist and, perhaps surprisingly, something of street fighter – quite possibly the only French philosopher to have had his ribs broken by CRS riot police. But above all, Foucault was someone who refused to be defined, in either personal or disciplinary terms. He tells the reader of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*; "Do not ask me who I am and do not ask me to remain the same."

Foucault did not remain the same. Born in 1926, he was, at the time of his death on 25 June 1984, without doubt France's most distinguished thinker and enjoyed a dazzling international reputation. That reputation was based upon a series of dense and difficult books that began with *Madness and Civilisation*, originally published in France in 1961. Like its author, the book changed considerably. It was a doctoral thesis – not usually the most fascinating of genres – yet within the space of only a few years it had become a major work of reference for the anti-psychiatry movement, a text to be read alongside Laing's *Politics of Experience* and *The Divided Self*. It was followed by a study in the history of medicine and an essay on Raymond Roussel, an almost forgotten French novelist. Neither was a commercial success, but the publication of *The Order of Things* in 1966 suddenly, and to his great surprise, turned its author into a best-selling celebrity. Four years later, he was elected to the Collège de France – France's most distinguished academic institution – and was also in some danger of compromising his academic reputation by becoming involved in the Maoist upheavals of the day.

Although much of Foucault's work is dense and difficult, his writing is often seductively beautiful. The image that opens *Madness and Civilisation* is dubious on empirical grounds – there is little evidence that a ship of fools ever did actually drift along the canals of the Rhineland and Flanders – but it has lured many readers into a challenging book. *Birth of the Clinic* (1963) is a serious study in the history of medicine, but it is a shot through with a brooding and almost erotic beauty. A passage towards the beginning of the first volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* juxtaposes a quotation from a confessor's handbook and a passage

David Macey is a writer and translator who lives and works in Leeds. His books include *Michel Foucault* (2004) and *Frantz Fanon: A Biography* (2000). His many translations from French include Michel Foucault's *Society Must be Defended*, 2003.

from de Sade's notorious *120 Days of Sodom*. The similarity is startling. Together, the confessor and the libertine whisper: "Tell everything...all impure gazes...all obscene remarks...all consenting thoughts...".

The masterly juxtaposition introduces a dominant note that can be heard in virtually everything Foucault wrote. It is a note of suspicion. What if confessors, torturers and psychoanalysts were all saying: "Tell me what your desire is...so that I may know who and what you are, and control you?" Foucault is an uncomfortable thinker, and not one who provides solutions. His work provides no manifestos and no programmes, but it does force us to ask questions. Is the emergence of modern psychiatry necessarily an improvement on what went on before it? Or is it leading to new forms of social control? Whilst few would regret the abolition of the legal torture described at the beginning of *Discipline and Punish*, we have to ask ourselves if the development of the prison system was necessarily a step forward, not least because Foucault argues, debates about prison reform are as old as the prison system and as repetitious as prison labour. This is not an academic question: after all, it is in our name that people are imprisoned and confined. Jeremy Bentham's panopticon – a prison so constructed that invisible guards could watch prisoners at all times – was never actually built, but the surveillance cameras are on the streets. Foucault's work is resolutely interdisciplinary, and it is by standing at the interface between disciplines that he is able to voice so many suspicions, to ask so many questions. To ask a question Foucault did not live to ask; if 'mediation' and 'counselling' do become part of the divorce process, how long will it be before petitioning for divorce – and most divorce proceedings are initiated by women – becomes a symptom?

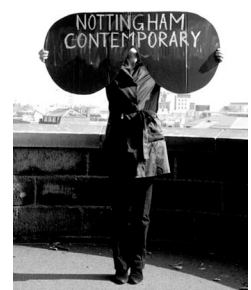
The art of suspicion extends to the personal level too. Foucault's refusal to define or to allow himself to be defined is a reminder that statements beginning 'I am' are to be distrusted, that identity – including gender identity – is not something given. It is something to be constructed. The final two volumes of the *History of Sexuality* are studies in Greek and Roman philosophy which explore how the modern notion of individuality or subjectivity began to take shape. They are also a reminder that a self can be created like a work of art, and that the pleasures afforded by desire must also be controlled if they are to be truly pleasurable.

There is no repressed sexuality to liberate, but there is an identity to be constructed and cared for. It has often been claimed that Foucault's vision of a disciplinary society and his contention that power is at work throughout society leave no room for revolt or rebellion. Yet a quietly serene vision does arise from the final texts, published only days before his death.

Briefly a member of the Communist Party in his youth, he was never again to join a conventional political organisation. He was, however, politically active in a number of areas at different times. His most activist period was in the early 1970's with the short-lived Prison Information Group. The Group existed not to speak for prisoners, but to give prisoners a voice. And it succeeded in doing so without any formal organisation, without membership cards and without bureaucracy. Whilst it did not lead to any major reforms, it does lead one to ask whether prison reform is possible. No answer was forthcoming, but the question still lingers.

In other areas, Foucault's actions were perhaps more conventional: a defence of human rights in Spain and Eastern Europe, and a resolute stance against racism in France, coupled with a refusal to tolerate sexual oppression. If only one lesson emerges from both Foucault's books and his life, it is that very few things indeed are absolutely good or absolutely evil, and that everything is dangerous. And that we are alone out there.

David Macey,  
After Foucault, first published in *New Times*, 25 June, 1994.



---

*The Impossible Prison / A Foucault Reader*

**MICHEL FOUCAULT**

---

# Michel Foucault

*The Eye of Power*



JEAN-PIERRE BAROU: Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon* is a work published at the end of the 18th century that has remained largely unknown yet you've called it "an event in the history of the human mind," "a revolutionary discovery in the order of politics." And you described Bentham, an English jurist, as "the Fourier of a police society." This is all very intriguing for us, but as for you, how did you fall upon the Panopticon?

MICHEL FOUCAULT: It was while I was studying the origins of clinical medicine. I was considering a study on hospital architecture in the second half of the 18th century, when a major reform of medical institutions was under way. I wanted to know how medical observation, the observing gaze of the clinician became institutionalized; how it was effectively inscribed in social space; how the new hospital structure was at one and the same time the effect of a new type of gaze and its support. And I came to realize, while examining the different architectural projects that resulted from the second fire at the Hotel-Dieu in 1772, to what extent the problem of the total visibility of bodies, of individuals and things, under a system of centralized surveillance, had been one of the most constant guiding principals. In the case of hospitals, this problem raised yet another difficulty: one had to avoid contacts, contagions, physical proximity and overcrowding, while at the same time ensuring proper ventilation and circulation of air: the problem was to divide space and leave it open, in order to ensure a form of surveillance at once global and individualizing, while carefully separating the individuals under observation. For quite some time I believed these problems to be specific to 18th century medicine and its beliefs. Later, while studying the problems of the penal system, I became aware that all the major projects for the reorganization of prisons (projects that date, incidentally, from slightly later, from the first half of the 19th century) took up the same theme, but almost always in reference to Jeremy Bentham. There were few texts or projects concerning prisons where Bentham's "device," the "panopticon" did not come up.

The principle is simple: on the periphery runs a building in the shape of a ring; in the centre of the ring stands a tower pierced by large windows that face the inside wall of the ring; the outer building is divided into cells, each of which crosses the whole thickness of the building. These cells have two windows: one corresponding to the tower's windows, facing into the cell; the other, facing outside, thereby enabling light to traverse the entire cell. One then needs only to place a guard in the central tower, and to lock into each cell a mad, sick or condemned person, a worker or a pupil. Owing to the backlighting effect, one can make out the little captive silhouettes in the ring of the cells. In short, the principle of the dungeon is reversed: bright light and the guard's observing gaze are found to impound better than the shadows which in fact provided a sort of protection.

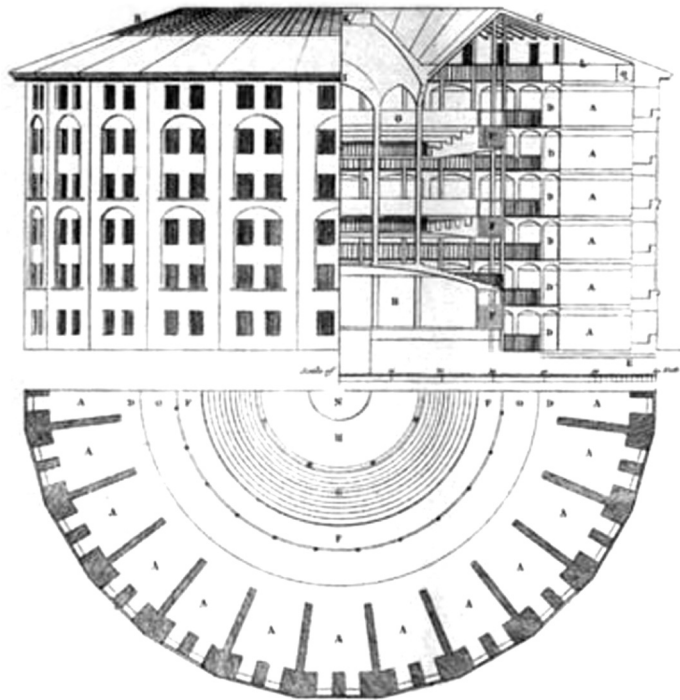
One is already struck by the fact that the same concern existed well before Bentham. It seems that one of the first models of this system of isolating visibility was instituted in the dormitories of the Military Academy of Paris in 1751. Each of the pupils was assigned a glassed-in cell where he could be observed all night long without any possible contact with his fellow students or even the domestic help. In addition there was a very complicated mechanism whose sole purpose was to enable the barber to comb each of the cadets without touching him physically: the pupil's head extended from a kind of hatch while his body remained on the other side of the glass partition, allowing a clear observation of the entire process. Bentham told how it was his brother who first had the idea of the panopticon while visiting the Military Academy. In any case, the theme clearly was in the air at this time. Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's constructions, most notably the salt-plant he constructed at Arc-et-Senans, tended to provide the same effect of visibility, but with one important addition, namely, that there be a central observation-point that would serve as the seat of the exercise of power as well as the place for recording observations and acquiring knowledge. At all events, while the idea of the panopticon antedates Bentham, it was he who actually formulated it, and baptized it. The very word panopticon can be considered crucial, for it designates a comprehensive principle. Bentham's conception was therefore more than a mere architectural figure meant to resolve a specific problem, such as that raised by prisons or schools or hospitals. Bentham himself proclaims the panopticon to be a "revolutionary discovery," that it was "Columbus' egg". And indeed it was Bentham who proposed a solution to the problem faced by doctors, penologists, industrialists and educators: he invented a technology of power capable of resolving the problems of surveillance.

It is important to note that Bentham considered his optical procedure to be the major innovation needed for the easy and effective exercise of power. As a matter of fact, this discovery has been widely employed since the end of the 18th century. But the procedures of power resorted to in modern societies are far more numerous and diverse and rich. It would be false to say that the principle of visibility has dominated the whole technology of power since the 19th century.

MICHELLE PERROT: So the key was architecture. What about architecture as a mode of political organization then? For everything is spatial, not only mentally but also materially, in this 18th century current of thought.

FOUCAULT: In my opinion, it is at the end of the 18th century that architecture begins to concern itself closely with problems of population, health and urbanism. Before that time, the art of building responded firstly to the need to make power, divinity and might manifest. The palace and the church were two major architectural forms, to which we must add fortresses.

MICHEL FOUCAULT



Architecture manifested might, the Sovereign, God. It developed for a long while according to these requirements. Now at the end of the 18th century, new problems emerge: the arrangement of space is to be used for political and economic ends.

A specific type of architecture arises during this period. Philippe Aries has written some very important things on the subject of the house, which, according to him, remains an undifferentiated space until the 18th century. There are rooms that can be used interchangeably for sleeping, eating or receiving guests. Then, little by little, space becomes specified and functional. A perfect illustration can be found in the development of working-class housing projects between the 1830's and 1870's. The working-class family is to be fixed; by assigning it a living space (a room that serves as kitchen and dining room), the parents' bedroom (the place of procreation), and the children's bedroom, one prescribes a form of morality for the family. Sometimes, in the most favorable of situations, there will be a boy's room and a girl's room. A whole "history of spaces" could be written, that would be at the same time a "history of the powers" (both these terms in the plural), from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of housing, institutional architecture, from the classroom to the hospital organization, by way of all the political and economic implantations. It is surprising how long it took for the problem of spaces to be viewed as an historical and political problem. For a long time space was either referred to "nature" – to what was given, the first determining factor – or to "physical geography"; it was referred to as a kind of "prehistoric" stratum. Or it was conceived as the residential site or the field of expansion of a people, a culture, a language or a State. In short, space was analyzed either as the ground on which people lived or the area in which they existed; all that mattered were foundations and frontiers. It took the work of historians like Marc Bloch and Fernand Braudel to develop a history of rural and maritime spaces. This work must be expanded, and we must cease to think that space merely predetermines a particular history, which in return reorganizes it through its own sedimentation. Spatial arrangements are also political and economic forms to be studied in detail.

I will mention only one of the reasons why a certain neglect regarding spaces has prevailed for so long, and this concerns the discourse of philosophers. At the precise moment when a serious-minded politics of spaces was developing (at the end of the 18th century), the new achievements of theoretical and experimental physics removed philosophy's privileged right to speak about the world, the cosmos, space, be it finite or infinite. This double investment of space by political technology and a scientific practice forced philosophy into a problematic of time. From Kant on it is time that occupies the philosopher's reflection, in Hegel, Bergson and Heidegger for example. Along with this occurs a correlative disqualification of space in human understanding. I recall some ten years ago discussing these problems of a politics of spaces and someone remarked that it was very reactionary to

<sup>1</sup> John Howard made the results of this investigation public in his study: *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales, with Preliminary Observations and an Account of some Foreign Prisons and Hospitals*, 1777.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Starobinski, *Transparency and Obstruction*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); *The Emblem of Reason*. (MIT Press, 1998).

insist so much on space, that life and progress must be measured in terms of time. I must add that this reproach came from a psychologist: here we see the truth and the shame of 19th century philosophy.

PERROT: We might perhaps mention in passing the importance of the notion of sexuality in this context. You pointed this out in the case of surveillance of cadets and, there again, the same problem surfaces with respect to the working-class family. No doubt the notion of sexuality is fundamental.

FOUCAULT: Absolutely. In these themes of surveillance, and especially school surveillance, it seems that control of sexuality becomes directly inscribed in the architectural design. In the case of the Military Academy, the struggle against homosexuality and masturbation is written on the walls.

PERROT: Talking about architecture, doesn't it strike you that people like doctors, whose social involvement is considerable at the end of the 18th century, played in a sense the role of spatial 'arrangers'? This is when social hygiene is born; in the name of cleanliness and health, the location of people is controlled. And with the rebirth of Hippocratic medicine, doctors are among those most sensitized to the problems of the environment, milieu, temperature, etc., which were already givens in John Howard's investigation into the state of prisons.<sup>1</sup>

FOUCAULT: Doctors were indeed, in part, specialists of space. They raised four fundamental problems: the problem of locations (regional climates, the nature of soil, humidity and aridity: they applied the term "constitution" to this combination of local determinants and seasonal variations that at a given moment favor a particular type of illness); the problem of coexistence (the coexistence of people among themselves, questions the density or proximity; of people and things, water, sewage and ventilation; or the coexistence of humans and animals, slaughter-houses and cattle sheds; and finally, the coexistence of the living and the dead, involving cemeteries); the problem of housing (habitat, urbanism); and the problem of displacements (the migration of people, the spreading of illnesses). Doctors and military men were the prime administrators of collective space. But the military thought essentially in terms of the space of "military campaigns" (and thus of "passages") and of fortifications. Doctors, for their part, thought above all in terms of space of housing and cities. I cannot recall who it was that sought the major stages of sociological thought in Montesquieu and Auguste Comte, which is a very uninformed approach. For sociological knowledge is formed, rather, within practices such as that of doctors. In this context Guepin, at the very beginning of the 19th century, wrote a marvellous study on the city of Nantes.

The intervention of doctors was indeed of such crucial importance at this particular time because they had to deal with a whole range of new political and economic problems, which

accounts for the importance of demographic facts.

PERROT: A prominent feature of Bentham's thinking is the question of numbers. He keeps making the claim that he had solved the problem of how to control a great number of people with just a few.

FOUCAULT: Like his contemporaries, Bentham encountered the problem of the accumulation of people. But whereas economists posed the problem in terms of wealth (population-as-wealth, since it is manpower, the source of economic activity and consumption; and population-as-poverty, when it is in excess or idle), Bentham considered it in terms of power: population as the target of the relations of domination. I think it could be said that the power mechanisms at work, even in an administrative monarchy as developed as it was in France, were full of holes: it was a global system, but erratic and uneven with little hold on details, that either exercised its controls over established groups or resorted to the method of exemplary intervention (as is clear in the fiscal system or criminal justice), and therefore had a low "resolution," as they say in photography. Power was incapable of practicing an exhaustive and individuating analysis of the social body. Now, the economic mutation of the 18th century made it necessary for the effects of power to circulate through finer and finer channels, taking hold of individuals, their bodies, their gestures, every one of their daily activities. Power was to be effectively exercised over a multiplicity of people as if it were over one individual.

PERROT: The demographic upswings of the 18th century undoubtedly contributed to the development of such a form of power.

BAROU: Is it surprising then to learn that the French Revolution, through people like La Fayette, favorably welcomed the project of the panopticon? He actually helped Bentham become a "Citizen of France" in 1791.

FOUCAULT: To my mind Bentham is the complement to Rousseau. For what is in fact the Rousseauian dream that captivated the revolutionary era, if not that of a transparent society, at once visible and legible in every one of its parts, a society where there were no longer any zones of obscurity established by the privileges of royal power or the prerogatives of a given body, spaces of disorder: the dream that each man, from his own position, could see the whole of society, that hearts should communicate directly and observations carried out unobstructed and that opinion reigned supreme over each. Jean Starobinski made some interesting comments on this subject in *Transparency and Obstruction* and in *The Emblem of Reason*<sup>2</sup> Bentham is at once close to this Rousseauian notion, and the complete opposite. He poses the problem of visibility, but in his conception visibility is organized completely around a dominating and observing gaze. He initiates the project of a universal

**MICHEL FOUCAULT**

---

visibility that would function on behalf of a rigorous and meticulous form of power. In this sense the technical idea of the exercise of an “all-seeing” power, which is Bentham’s obsession, is connected to the Rousseauian theme, which is in a sense the Revolution’s lyricism: the two themes interlock perfectly - Bentham’s obsession and Rousseau’s lyricism.

PERROT: What about this quote from the *Panopticon*: “Each comrade becomes an overseer”?

FOUCAULT: Rousseau would probably have said the opposite: each overseer must be a comrade. In *L’Emile*, for example, Emile’s tutor is an overseer, but he must also be a friend.

BAROU: The French Revolution did not interpret Bentham’s project as we do today; it even perceived humanitarian aims in this project.

FOUCAULT: Precisely. When the Revolution examines the possibilities of a new form of justice, it asks what is to be its mainspring. The answer is public opinion. The Revolution’s problem once again was not just that wrongdoers be punished, but that they could not even act improperly, being submerged in a field of total visibility where the opinion of one’s fellow men, their observing gaze, and their discourse would prevent one from doing evil or detrimental deeds. This idea is ever present in the texts written during the Revolution.

PERROT: The immediate context also played a part in the Revolution’s adoption of the Panopticon; the problem of prisons was then a high priority. Since 1770, in England and in France, there was a strong sense of uneasiness surrounding this issue, which is clear in Howard’s investigation of prisons. Hospitals and prisons are two major topics of discussion in the Parisian salons and the enlightened circles. It was viewed as scandalous that prisons had become what they were: schools of crime and vice so lacking in decent hygiene as to seriously threaten one’s chances of survival. Doctors began to talk about the degeneration of bodies in such places. With the Revolution, the bourgeoisie in turn undertook an investigation on a European scale. One Duquesnoy was entrusted with the task of reporting on the “establishments of humanity,” a term designating hospitals as well as prisons.

FOUCAULT: A definite fear prevailed during the second half of the 18th century: the fear of a dark space, of a screen of obscurity obstructing the clear visibility of things, of people, of truths. It became imperative to dissolve the elements of darkness that blocked the light, demolish all of society’s sombre spaces, those dark rooms where arbitrary political rule fomented, as well as the whims of a monarch, religious superstitions, tyrants’ and priests’ plots, illusions or ignorance and epidemics. From even before the Revolution, castles, hospitals, charnel houses, prisons and convents gave rise to a sometimes over-valued distrust or hatred; it was felt that the new political and moral order could not be

**FOUCAULT:**

*From even before the Revolution, castles, hospitals, charnel houses, prisons and convents gave rise to a sometimes over-valued distrust or hatred; it was felt that the new political and moral order could not be instituted until such places were abolished.*

instituted until such places were abolished. During the period of the Revolution, Gothic novels developed a whole fanciful account of the high protective walls, darkness, the hide-outs and dungeons that shield, in a significant complicity, robbers and aristocrats, monks and traitors.

Ann Radcliffe's landscapes are always mountains, forests, caverns, mined castles, frighteningly dark silent convents. Now, these imaginary spaces are like the negative of the transparency and visibility the new order hoped to establish. The reign of "opinion" so frequently invoked during this period is a way of exercising power on the sole basis of things being known and people seen by a kind of immediate observing gaze that is at once collective and anonymous. A form of power whose *primum mobile* is public opinion could hardly tolerate zones of darkness. Bentham's project aroused such a great interest because it provided the formula, applicable in a wide variety of domains, for a form of "power through transparency," a subjugation through a process of "illumination." The Panopticon to a certain extent was the form of the "castle" (a dungeon surrounded by high protective walls) to paradoxically create a space of exact legibility.

BAROU: The Age of Enlightenment would also have liked to abolish the sombre areas of darkness within man.

FOUCAULT: Absolutely

PERROT: One is also struck by the techniques of power used within the Panopticon itself. Essentially there is the observing gaze, but also speech, for there are those well known "tin tubes" that connect the chief inspector to each of the cells in which, according to Bentham, not one prisoner but small groups of prisoners are confined. What is very striking in Bentham's text is the importance attributed to dissuasion: "It is necessary for the inmate," he writes, "to be constantly under the eyes of the inspector; this prevents the capacity of any wrong doing, even the wish to commit wrong." This is one of the major preoccupations of the Revolution: to keep people from doing evil, and even wanting to: not being able and not wanting to do evil.

FOUCAULT: Two different things are involved here: the observing gaze, the act of observation on the one hand, and internalization on the other. And isn't this the problem of the cost of power? Power is only exercised at a cost. There is obviously the economic cost, which Bentham discusses: "How many guardians will the Panopticon need? How much will the machine cost?" But there is also the specifically political cost. If power is exercised too violently there is the risk of provoking revolts; or if the intervention is too discontinuous, there could be resistance and disobedience, phenomena of great political cost. This is how monarchic power operated. The judicial apparatus, for example, arrested only a ridiculously small proportion of criminals; from which it was deduced that punishment had to be spectacular so as to instil fear in those present. Therefore monarchic power was

violent and resorted to glaring examples to ensure a continuous mode of operation. To this conception of power the new theoreticians of the 18th century retorted; this power was too costly in proportion to its results. These great expenditures of violence only had exemplary value; multiplying the violence, one had to multiply the revolts.

PERROT: This is what happened during the gallows riots.

FOUCAULT: On the other hand there is a form of surveillance, which requires very little in the way of expenditures. No need for arms, physical violence, or material restraints. Just an observing gaze that each individual feels weighing on him, and ends up internalizing to the point that he is his own overseer: everyone in this way exercises surveillance over and against himself. An ingenious formula: a continuous form of power at practically no cost! When Bentham realizes what he has discovered, he calls it a "Copernican revolution in the order of politics," a formula that is exactly the reverse of monarchic power. And it is true that among the techniques of power developed in modern times, observation has had a major importance but, as I said earlier, it is far from being the only or even the principal system.

PERROT: It seems that Bentham envisaged the problem of power essentially in terms of small groups of individuals. Why? Did he consider that the part already is the whole, that if one succeeds at the level of small groups this can be extended to society as a whole? Or is it that society as a whole and power on that scale had not yet been grasped in their specificity then?

FOUCAULT: The whole problem for this form of power is to avoid stumbling blocks and obstructions presented in the *Ancient Regime* by the established bodies, and the privileges of certain categories, the clergy, the trade guilds, magistrature. The bourgeoisie was perfectly aware that a new legislation or constitution won't be enough to guarantee its hegemony. A new technology had to be invented that would ensure the free-flow of the effects of power within the entire social body down to its most minute of levels. And it is by such means that the bourgeoisie not only achieved a political revolution, but also managed to establish a form of social hegemony which it has never relinquished since. This is why all of these inventions were so important, and why Bentham was surely among the most exemplary inventors of power technologies.

BAROU: Yet it is not immediately clear who could profit from the organized space that Bentham advocated, even for those who occupied or visited the central tower. Bentham's proposals confront us with an infernal world from which there is no escape, neither for those who are being watched, nor for those who are observing.

FOUCAULT: This is perhaps the most diabolical aspect of the idea and of all the applications it brought about. Power here

**MICHEL FOUCAULT**

---

isn't totally entrusted to someone who would exercise it alone, over others, in absolute fashion; rather this is a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise the power as well as those who are subjected to it. It seems to me this is the major characteristic of the new societies established in the 19th century. Power is no longer substantially identified with a particular individual who possesses it or exercises it by right of birth. It becomes machinery that no one controls. Obviously everyone in this machine occupies a different position; some are more important than others and enable those who occupy them to produce effects of supremacy, ensuring class domination to the extent that they dissociate political power from individual power.

PERROT: The way the Panopticon operates is somewhat contradictory from this point of view. There is the principal inspector who keeps watch over the prisoners from a central tower. But he also watches his subordinates as well, the guards, in whom he has no confidence. He often speaks rather disparagingly of them, even though they are supposed to be his auxiliaries. Doesn't this constitute an aristocratic form of thought? Actually supervision was a crucial problem for industrial society. Finding foremen and technicians capable of regimenting and supervising the factories was no easy task for the bosses.

FOUCAULT: This was an enormous problem, as is clear in the case of the 18th century army when it was necessary to create a corps of NCO's competent enough to marshal the troops effectively during often very difficult tactical manoeuvres involving the rifle, which had just been perfected. Movements, displacements and formations of troops, as well as marches, required disciplinary personnel of that kind. Workplaces posed the same problem in their own right, as did school, with its headmasters, teachers, and disciplinarians. The Church was one of the rare social bodies where such competent small corps of disciplinarians existed. The not too literate, but not too ignorant monk and the vicar joined forces against children to school hundreds of thousands of children. The State only devised comparable cadres much later, with hospitals. Until recently, the majority of their staff were nuns.

PERROT: Nuns played a considerable part in women's work. In the 19th century the well-known residential establishments housed a female work force supervised by nuns specially trained to maintain factory discipline. The Panopticon is also preoccupied with these issues as is apparent when it deals with the chief inspector's surveillance of his staff and his surveillance of everyone through the control tower's windows, an uninterrupted succession of observations that call to mind the dictum: "Each comrade becomes a guardian." One has the vertiginous sense of being in the presence of an invention no longer mastered by its creator. Yet it is Bentham who begins by relying on a unique, central form of power. Who did he mean to put in the tower? The eye of God? Yet God is barely present in his texts, for religion only plays a utilitarian part. So who is in the tower? In the last

analysis it must be admitted that Bentham himself is not too clear about who should be entrusted with this power.

FOUCAULT: He cannot entrust it to anyone in that no person can, or may, be a source of power and justice as the king was in the former system. In the theory of the monarchy it was implicit that one owed allegiance to the king. By his very existence, willed by God, the king was the source of justice, law and authority. Power in the person of the king could only be good; a bad king was equivalent to an historical accident or to a punishment inflicted by the absolutely good sovereign, God. On the other hand no single individual could be trusted if power and authority are arranged as a complex machine where it's an individual's place, and not his nature, that is the determining factor. If the machine were such that someone could stand outside it or had the sole responsibility for its management, power would be identified with that person and one would be back to the monarchic system of power.

In the Panopticon, everyone is watched, according to his position within the system, by all or by certain others. Here we have an apparatus of total and mobile distrust, since there is no absolute point. A certain sum of malevolence was required for the perfection of surveillance.

BAROU: A diabolical machine, as you said, that spares no one. Could it be the image of power today? But, according to you, how did we get to this point? What sort of "will" was involved, and whose?

FOUCAULT: The question of power is greatly impoverished if posed solely in terms of legislation, or the constitution, or the state, the state apparatus. Power is much more complicated, much more dense and diffuse than a set of laws or a state apparatus. One cannot understand the development of the productive forces of capitalism, nor even conceive of their technological development, if the apparatuses of power are not taken into consideration. For example, take the case of division of labour in the major work places of the 18th century; how would this distribution of tasks been achieved had there not been a new distribution of power on the very level of the productive forces? Likewise for the modern army: it was not enough to possess new types of armaments or another style of recruitment; this new form of power called discipline was also required, with its hierarchies, its commands, its inspections, its exercises, its conditionings, its drills. Without this the army such as it functioned since the 18th century would never have existed.

BAROU: And yet is there nevertheless an individual or a group of individuals who provide the impetus for this disciplinary system?

FOUCAULT: A distinction must be made. It is clear in the organization of an army or a work place, or some other institution, that the network of power adopts a pyramidal form. Therefore there is a summit. But even in a simple case, this "summit" is not

the “source” or the “principle” from which the totality of power derives as from a focal point (such as the monarch’s throne). The summit and the lower elements of the hierarchy stand in a relationship of reciprocal support and conditioning: they “hold together” (power as a mutual and indefinite “extortion”). But if you ask me whether the new technology of power has its historical roots in a specific individual or in a group who would decide to apply this technology in their own interests and in order to shape the social body according to their designs, then I would have to say no. These tactics were invented and organized according to local conditions and particular urgencies. They were designed piece by piece before a class strategy solidified them into vast and coherent ensembles. It should also be noted that these ensembles do not consist in a homogenization but rather in a complex interplay of support among the different mechanisms of power, which nonetheless remain quite specific. Thus where children are concerned at the present time the interplay between the family, medicine, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, the school, and the judicial system does not homogenize these different agencies, but establishes connections, cross-references, complementarities and determinations that presuppose that each one of them maintains, to a certain extent, its own modalities.

PERROT: You have opposed the idea of power as a superstructure, but not the idea that this power is in a sense consubstantial to the development of the productive forces, of which it is a part.

FOUCAULT: Correct. And power is constantly being transformed along with the productive forces. The Panopticon was a utopian program. But already in Bentham’s time the theme of a spatializing, observing, immobilizing i.e. disciplinary, power, was in fact outflanked by much more subtle mechanisms allowing for the regulation of population phenomena, the control of oscillations, and compensation for their irregularities. Bentham’s thought is “archaic” insofar as he attaches so much importance to observation; he is completely modern when he stresses the importance of the techniques of power in our societies.

Michel Foucault, with Jean-Pierre Barou and Michelle Perrot, excerpt from *The Eye of Power*, first published in *Jeremy Bentham, Le Panoptique*, Pierre Belfont, Paris, 1977, and first published in English in *Semiotext(e)’s Schizo-culture issue, III, 2*, 1978. Translated by Mark S Seem.

## FOUCAULT:

*These tactics were invented and organized according to local conditions and particular urgencies. They were designed piece by piece before a class strategy solidified them into vast and coherent ensembles.*



Nottingham  
Contemporary

# Harun Farocki

## *Controlling Observation*

*Notes on a film about punishments  
and surveillance in the USA.*

Harun Farocki, a filmmaker, artist and writer living in Berlin and Vienna, is one of the leading figures of experimental German cinema. He has exhibited internationally and has made nearly 90 films including 3 feature films. He has written for numerous publications and from 1974 – 1984 he was editor of the magazine *Filmkritik* (Munich).



In January, Cathy Crane and I started research in the USA for a film with the working title *Gefängnisbilder (Prison Images)*. We were looking for footage from security cameras installed in penitentiaries, instruction material for prison officers, for documentaries and feature films, which included depictions of prisons. We got to know a private investigator who as a civil rights activist campaigns for the families of prisoners killed in Californian prisons - a private detective who reads Blumenberg when he has to wait.

An architect showed us the plans for a new penitentiary for "sex offenders" in Oregon; a third of the planned buildings had been crossed out, having been intended for therapeutic measures before the legislature refused funding. In Campden near Philadelphia a guard showed me around the prison; the men gave me disdainful, sidelong looks from behind glass similar to that in a lion house. I saw women brushing each other's hair like women in a Pasolini film. The guard told me that there were vents in the ceilings of the day rooms through which tear gas could be introduced, but that this had never been done as the chemicals deteriorated after a time.

## *Pictures from the Maximum-security Prison in Corcoran, California.*

A surveillance camera shows a pie-shaped segment of the concreted yard where the prisoners, dressed in shorts and mostly shirtless, are allowed to spend half an hour a day. One prisoner attacks another, whereupon those not involved lie flat on the ground, arms over their heads. They know that when a fight breaks out, the guard will call out a warning and then fire once using rubber bullets. If the prisoners continue fighting, the guard will use live ammunition.

The pictures are silent, the shot only revealed in the trail of gun smoke drifting across the screen. The camera and the gun are right next to each other, field of vision and field of fire become one. The reason that the yard was built to form pie-segments is clear - so that there is nowhere protected against observation or bullets. One of the prisoners collapses, usually the one who attacked. In many cases he is dead or fatally wounded.

The prisoners belong to prison gangs with names like Aryan Brotherhood or Mexican Mafia. They have received long sentences and been locked up far away from the world in a maximum-security prison. They have hardly anything but their bodies, whose muscles they train constantly and their affiliation to an organization. Their honour is more important to them than their life; they fight although they know they will be shot at. At Corcoran, brawling prisoners have been fired on, on more than two thousand occasions. Some guards have claimed that their

colleagues have often sent members of conflicting groups into the yard together deliberately and placed bets on the outcome of the fights as though the prisoners were gladiators.

The surveillance cameras run at reduced speed in order to save on material. In the footage available to us, the intervals were extended so that the movements are jerky and not flowing. The fights in the yard look like something from a cheap computer game. It is hard to imagine a less dramatic representation of death.

## *Surveillance Technology*

We obtained the footage of the fights and shootings from a woman attorney representing the relatives of the prisoners killed. The guards always stated that they had feared the attacking prisoner was carrying a weapon, such as the sharpened handle of a plastic spoon. The prisoners in Corcoran are subject to such strict controls, however, that that would hardly be very probable. From a central control room it is possible to monitor which cells are occupied and which are empty, which doors are open and in which walkway each person is to be found. The guards can give an electronic identification signal so that any forbidden movement by a prisoner can be discovered.

In the present judicial crisis in the USA and despite sinking crime rates, the number of prisoners has quadrupled over the past twenty years, many new prisons are being built, including some by private operators. New technologies are being developed and implemented in order to reduce costs.

Guards are meant to have as little direct contact with the prisoners as possible and just as the role of humans in the manufacture of goods has given way to machines, so prisoners are to be kept almost without any direct human intervention. There is a machine for sale which can check for drugs and weapons in all a prisoner's orifices. Metal detectors at every door. An iris scanner is a device which photographs the iris, isolates the significant characteristics and compares them with a set of data. This equipment can be fixed to doors and used to identify each individual, prisoner or guard, within two seconds. A chair embraces a raging prisoner in its steel arms and gags him with gentle force, like something from a cinema fantasy. This object too expresses a desire for objectivity, for dispassionate repression.

*The cameras and gun are right next to each other, field of vision and field of fire become one.*

## *Public Relations*

The State of California has removed the word “rehabilitation” from its statutes; prison no longer even purports to aim at correction, it is explicitly there to punish. The justice department commissioned a video for the media, primarily intended to prove that those sentenced to prison do not lead a life of luxury at all, but on the contrary have a tough time there (*The Toughest Beat in California*). The stylistic means employed include doors being locked over-loudly, guards approaching with over-loud steps rattling their keys as if execution is looming all the time. They are shown in slow motion, using a long focal length and against background music intended to link them with heroes from Westerns.

This video can be compared to a propaganda film the Nazis produced at Brandenburg prison in 1943. Both have the same message, “The time for leniency is over. Let us no longer speak of correction, but rather of the severity of punishment”. Both films show how a prisoner is bound hand and foot like a beast in the circus. Both films make the criminal into a spectacle. In doing so the Californian film is more sensationalist than the Nazi film. The extent of abuse in Germany of 1943 was of course greater than in the California of today but the Nazis were still at pains to maintain an appearance of legality.

The demand for entertainment has grown immeasurably since then. Even films critical of prisons wish to be entertaining. There are hardly any critical films, which manage to do without the fearful excitement accompanying an execution.

## *Prison as a Spectacle*

With the advent of the modern era punishment underwent a fundamental change and public torture and execution were abolished. Those who break the law are shut away behind walls, withdrawn from the gaze, made invisible. Every picture from prison is a reminder of the cruel history of the criminal justice system.

We see a film produced by the Bureau of Prisons in Washington for further education of prison staff. A prisoner is raging and a guard tries in vain to calm him down; he calls his superior who again attempts appeasement. Then the guard fetches a camera so as to document the following procedure completely. A combat unit arrives on the scene together with a physician; having stormed the cell and overwhelmed the prisoner they then tie him up on the bed. (The five members of the combat unit are wearing protective helmets and breastplates and each of them has the task of seizing a particular part of the raging man’s body.) All this is captured on camera as if to document the detachment which the justice apparatus is supposed to maintain towards the prisoner.

Precisely because the portrayal is so meticulous it is also implausible and operates as a denial. It protests too much that the personnel were acting indifferently and without emotion, that they took no pleasure in subjecting the prisoner. The message is proclaimed so often and so loudly that one must believe the opposite to be true.

## *Observational Control*

In modern prisons, intended to improve the prisoner, he is no longer put on exhibit, yet the guard's controlling gaze is still upon him. The guard is society's representative and with this in mind Jeremy Bentham, the philosopher of punishment, drew up plans for a prison with a central watchtower, providing a line of sight into each cell. The prisoners would be unable to tell whether the tower was actually occupied, they would simply be aware of potential observation. Bentham imagined that anyone would be able to enter the tower and perform the task of supervision.

In order for panoptic control to work, cells must be open and instead of a wall have bars, as is usual in the USA. Over the past ten years prisons have once more been built according to panoptic principles in the United States. In point of fact, video cameras could be used anywhere but what is important to prison operators is that the prisoner feels exposed to live observation. At the same time there are more and more prisons where the prisoners can no longer enter into direct visual contact with their visitors - neither through a grille nor through plate glass. They may only communicate via videophone. This is justified on humanitarian grounds: relatives no longer need to undertake long journeys to the prison, they only have to go to an office, which provides and supervises the connection.

At the same time one of prison film's central narrative figures loses its rationale. How often have we viewed scenes where visitor and prisoner are talking together and the invigilating guard steps in? Or of a parting couple symbolically touching in a gesture of longing through the glass pane separating them?

## *Studio Play*

Silent films from Griffith's times which play in a prison.

In those films, which are related to theatre, the cell resembles a sitting room. Like the fireplace in the sitting room the bars in the cell are theatre props which the stand-in for the prisoner may not rattle without them falling off. Without a fourth wall, a cell becomes merely a scene in a peepshow the more so if the actors don't perform but just portray.

Because there are few visitors in prison it is difficult to relate dramatic intrigue. This is why silent films often make the prison cell into the setting for visions. The condemned man imagines his execution or pardon, the desperate recall their lost happiness, the vengeful picture their hour of satisfaction. The imaginary is shown using superimpositions, double exposures and with the help of other film tricks. Seen in this manner, the prison cell is a spiritually rich location. We come to understand that the origins of the cell lie in monastic seclusion.

"Alone in his cell the prisoner is delivered up unto himself; in the silence of his passions he descends into his conscience, questions it and senses that moral awakening within, which never completely dies in man's heart". The cell is to be not just a grave, but also a scene of resurrection.

## *Removing Walls*

More than anything else, electronic control technology has a deconstraining effect. (Companies no longer have to be concentrated in one place, production units can produce different things.) Locations become less specific. An airport contains a shopping center, a shopping center contains a school, a school offers recreational facilities etc. What are the consequences for prisons, themselves mirrors of society as well as counter-images and projections? On the one hand, electronic technology makes it possible to constrain a person even when outside prison, to supervise and to punish him, and in the form of electronic foot tagging to keep someone under house arrest while allowing him to attend the workplace or school.

On the other hand, some two hundred years after Europe tore down its city walls, ever-increasing numbers of people are closing themselves off in so-called 'gated communities'. The residents of these communities are by no means only from the upper classes. Security technology is no longer restricted to selectively regulating access to 'sensitive' nuclear or military facilities, today it is also used to control access to normal offices and factories. Throughout 5000 years of urban history streets have always been public space; 25 years ago in Minneapolis the first system of inner-city skywalks was established with private security firms to exclude undesirables.

Deregulation does not by any means imply a reduction of control. In one of his last writings Deleuze outlined the vision of a society of controls, which he said would replace disciplinary society.

## *The end of themes and genres*

We have already mentioned the fact that the prison visiting hour scene will soon find itself without a correspondence in reality. The introduction of electronic cash will make bank robbery well nigh impossible too, and if it turns out that in future all weapons will be electronically secured and only capable of being used by the licensed owner, the end of all the screen shoot outs will be round the corner.

With the introduction of iris scanners capable of identifying an individual *en passant*, the comedy of errors becomes endangered. It will be almost impossible to tell the story of a man going to prison in another's stead or of a visitor exchanging clothes with the prisoner thus allowing him to walk free.

With the increase in electronic control structures everyday life will become just as hard to portray and to dramatize as everyday work is already.

## *Prison - workhouse*

In the prison film more work scenes are shown than in other genres. It is in the Netherlands of the 17th century, where there were cells in which water kept rising and whose inmates had to bale them out so as not to drown; by which means it was demonstrated that man must work to live. In 18th century England many prisoners had to work the treadmill; today many prisoners can again be found on treadmills, in order to keep physically fit.

Prison labor was hardly ever economically significant and at best had educational value. Prison gives training for industrial work, being organized in a similar way. To concentrate, to distribute in space, to order in time, to compose a productive force within the dimension of space-time whose effect will be greater than the sum of its component forces.

It is worthwhile comparing images of prison with those taken in the work-research laboratories: the opening of the cell; the prisoners leaving the cell; role-call; marching to the yard; circling round the prison-yard etc. Experiments were ordered for the organization of Fordist factories. How should a wall be built? Should one worker lift the stone and do the mortaring; or is it better for one worker to do the lifting and a second worker to do the mortaring?

These tests present a picture of abstract work while the pictures from the surveillance cameras yield a picture of abstract existence.

Harun Farocki, *Controlling Observation*, in Susanne Gaensheimer and Nicolaus Schafhausen, eds, Nachdruck/Imprint, Sternberg Press and Verlag Vorwerk 8, Berlin, 2001. Published on the occasion of the retrospective exhibition of Harun Farocki at the Westfälischer Kunstverein and Filmclub Münster, June 29th - August 5th 2001, in cooperation with the Frankfurter Kunstverein.

*We come to understand that  
the origins of the cell lie in  
monastic seclusion.*

**NoTtInGhAm  
cOnTempOrArY**

# Ken Starkey

## *Stranger In A Strange Land: Michel Foucault In The Business School*

Foucault has enjoyed more frequent citation in Anglo-Saxon management research than other French philosophers of his era. This mirrors his more general reception in the Anglo-Saxon intellectual world. In his recent study of the impact of intellectuals, Posner places Foucault top of his list of the most cited contemporary intellectuals, his 'top five' comprising Foucault first then Bourdieu, Habermas, Derrida, and Chomsky. Foucault has been more cited in this Anglo-Saxon management literature than in French management circles. Since the late 1980s and early 1990s we have seen a regular Foucaultian stream of research in Anglo-Saxon management and organization studies. This, at first sight, might seem 'strange' because Foucault's major focus is not business and management. His later work, for example, looks at a world very far removed from modern business, the world of ancient Greece, and topics, such as sexuality and ethics, without an obvious management link. It is also strange that the Frenchness and Continental European scholarship of his work has appealed so much in the UK and the USA.

One can speak of a dominant 'Foucault' in the sense that there is a unity in Foucault's reception in the business school. The Panopticon serves as the totem of Foucault's assimilation into the management research community. Foucault's perceived relevance to management is to support a critique of modernism that has aspired to a regime of total organization. The panopticon provides a concentrated focus for Foucault's attempts to delineate the principles of a disciplinary society. The panopticon was a physical manifestation of the search for optimal control, a tower from which institutional inmates could be observed and, through their internalisation of the belief that they were constantly being monitored, controlled. Panopticon principles were devised for what we would now describe as total institutions such as prisons but the idea was applicable to a range of different organisations. In Foucault's words, 'Prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons' They are designed 'to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power ... Bentham [the panopticon's chief proponent] laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before their eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment; but he must be sure that he always will be so'.

For Bentham, perhaps ironically, as a utilitarian, the panopticon was a major technology for achieving the common good. It offered the prospect of 'morals reformed – health preserved – industry reinvigorated – instruction diffused – public burdens lightened ... its aim is to strengthen social forces – to increase production, to develop the economy, spread education, raise the level of public morality; to increase and multiply'. Once people had the idea that they were under surveillance, the disciplinary regime was, according to Bentham, surprisingly light, far less heavy than direct visible control. For Bentham, the panopticon was a key

Ken Starkey is Professor of Management, Organisational Management and Organisational Learning at the University of Nottingham. He has published widely on management theory and co-edited *Foucault, Management and Organisation Theory* (1998) with Alan McKinlay.

*Those who have appropriated Foucault's ideas see panopticons everywhere, in new information technologies, in accounting practices, in HR appraisal systems.*

*Writing for the later Foucault is an experiment, a way of becoming something different, a challenge to existing ways of thinking.*

instrument of democracy, allowing those in power to scrutinise citizens and public sector employees. It reappears in FW Taylor's and Henry Ford's modern factory system when, as Alfred Chandler, the eminent business historian, noted, 'the visible hand of management' replaced the 'invisible hand of market forces'.

For Foucault, the panopticon captured the gaze of authority, the 'new optics' of the modern era: 'first of all: an organ of generalized and constant oversight; everything must be observed, seen, transmitted; organization of a police force; instituting of a system of records (with individual files), establishment of a panopticism'. This went hand in hand with a 'new mechanics: isolation and regrouping of individuals localization of bodies; optimal utilization of forces; monitoring and improvement of the output; in short, the putting into place of a whole discipline of life, time, and energies.'

Foucault's work that has most impacted management research was about prisons, schools, hospitals and other non-business organisations although these organisations have increasingly come to be seen by managers as interesting business opportunities, as financial capitalism spreads its tentacles ever wider and as governments look for entrepreneurial solutions to fiscal crisis. An embryonic interest in management is there in *Discipline and Punish* where he does refer to factories and common principles of organisation that they share with prisons. Those who have appropriated Foucault's ideas see panopticons everywhere, in new information technologies, in accounting practices, in HR appraisal systems. The new public management, for example, seems to have appropriated Foucault's 'mechanisms that analyse distributions, gaps, series, combinations, and which use instruments that render visible, record, differentiate and compare' to drive control and change in the public sector.

The context of management research is important in understanding the interest in Foucault. Business schools in the US are a long established institutional phenomenon. In the UK business schools were a primarily post-World War II phenomenon. Set up in the 1960s, they expanded exponentially through the 1980s and 1990s, and had to import academics from other disciplines to make up for the shortfall of those with dedicated management research training. In the US the supply of dedicated business school staff had been confronted in the 1960s so we now have a generation of business school staff, in the main trained in business schools. In the UK, later to the business school game, and still unsure of how closely to model its business schools on their US prototypes, debates continue about how to incorporate the social sciences as a counterpoint to the power of economics and finance. Many sociologists migrated to the business school, a rare area of growth in the social sciences, as the demand for sociologists in other parts of the academy waned. Sociologists then engage with a management agenda but in the main, authoring critical studies about business and management.

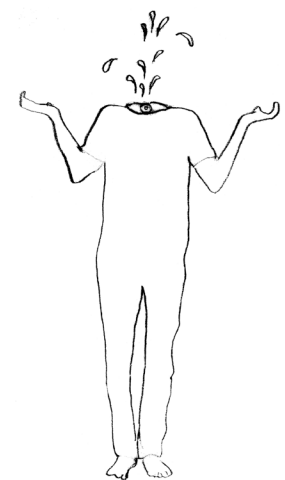
Management research covers a wide intellectual territory, in which many groups, at best loosely affiliated, colonise different spaces with a range of epistemological and methodological claims. The embrace of Foucault's work has been strongest in the critical management research community in the business school context. This school of research found a major focus in the labour process debate associated with Braverman's Marxist-inspired studies of work under contemporary capitalist forms of organizing. Foucault was identified as a natural ally of this group and his theorising of power/knowledge and, in particular, his image of the panopticon, eagerly embraced as major interpretive tools. The Critical Management Studies Interest Group of the American Academy describes itself thus: "a forum within the Academy for the expression of views critical of established management practices and the established social order. Our premise is that structural features of contemporary society, such as the profit imperative, patriarchy, racial inequality, and ecological irresponsibility often turn organizations into instruments of domination and exploitation. ... we aim in our research, teaching, and practice to develop critical interpretations of management and society and to generate radical alternatives" (see <http://aom.pace.edu/CMS>). Foucault was adopted as an ally in this cause and as a primary source for theorising the technologies of domination.

Why are some authors accepted, others rejected? As Foucault himself tells us, once a book or an article is written, the author ceases to exist and becomes the 'subject' of his reception, subject to the interpretive desires of others. "In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is, rather, a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears". It is likely that Foucault himself would have found the reception of his work oversimplifying and too dystopian. In critical management research the panopticon provides a convenient symbol, and 'crutch', that reduces the complicated workings of modern corporations to the uni-dimensional image of overseer (manager) and seen (the docile employee). The reaching out to this part of Foucault's work has a paradoxical effect. It traps those who reach out in structures of thought that are themselves imprisoning precisely because they see panopticons everywhere. The vision of the panopticon is the basis of attraction, it offers the lure of tribal membership, the totem of the tribe, but it traps those who embrace it uncritically in models of thought that are themselves imprisoning.

The constant message of Foucault's later work – the second and third volumes of *History of Sexuality* and the essays of this later period – is more hopeful, with its strong emphasis upon ethical behaviours and forms of community to which individuals and groups willingly commit themselves rather than being imprisoned. It offers an image of self-transcendence, the importance of rethinking our situatedness. The later Foucault dreams of a critical social theory, certainly, but one that "would multiply not judgements but signs of existence ... Criticism that hands down

sentences sends me to sleep; I'd like a criticism of scintillating leaps of the imagination. ... It would bear the lightning of possible storms". Writing for the later Foucault is an experiment, a way of becoming something different, a challenge to existing ways of thinking. The later Foucault, we suggest, would prefer a different form of reception and would subscribe to a different image of the academy, more open, more like an agora than a panopticon. This mode of reception would 'use' Foucault as a companion to prise open the conditions of possibility, to escape our tribal boundaries and limits, not to draw around us the walls of our intellectual prison. In our current social and economic crisis, as panopticons crumble all around us, this is what we need.

Ken Starkey, *Stranger in a Strange Land: Michel Foucault in the Business School* written for the present publication and based on *Government, organisation et gestion: l'héritage de Michel Foucault* by Armand Hatchuel, Eric Pezet, Ken Starkey & Eric Lenay, Presses de l'Université de Laval, Quebec, 2005.

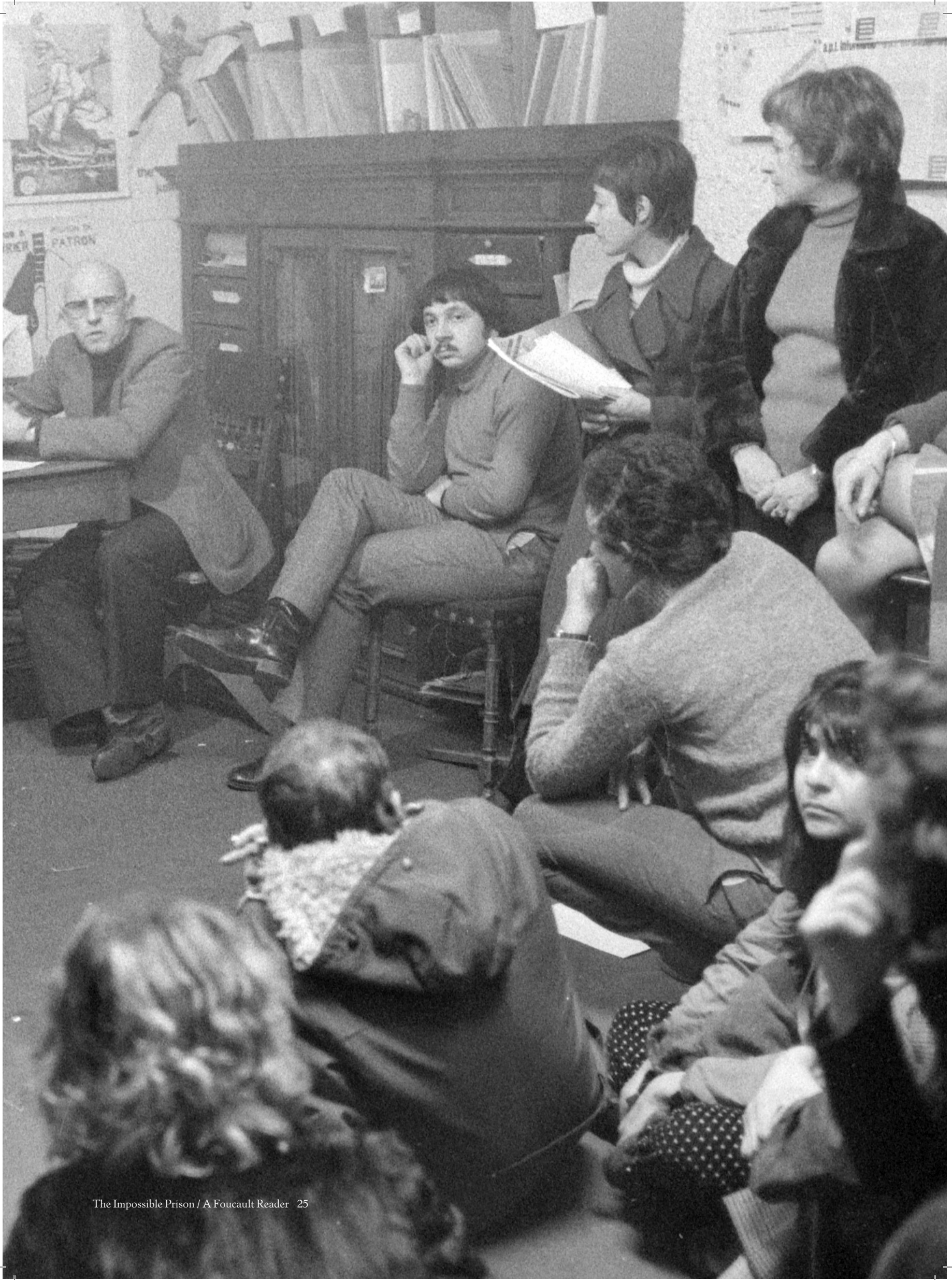


Nottingham Contemporary



GIP, 17 January 1972 (Sartre on left, Foucault on right)  
PHOTO © Elie Kagan/BDIC-MHC





# Lisa Le Feuvre

## *Preferring Not To: Acconci, Graham, Nauman, Foucault*

### *Notes for a lecture*

Look. Looked at. Looking at. Looked at by. Look away. Look with. Don't Look. Passive, active and indifferent ways of looking operate and are operated on as networks of power. Looking involves taking, giving and refusing permissions – a process predicated on control. These relationships are inscribed within tangible and intangible structures. The legal system is one such framework – it is a set of rules implemented through governmental regulation of behaviour between people. The rule of law separates the judgement and passing of law from individuals in order to ensure that governmental authority is asserted through established procedural and publicly known structures, striving for a just and objective system of governance.

Herman Melville's short story of 1853 *Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street* recounts a position of doubt, failure and indifference in the face of the law. This short story, taken up by the philosophers Soren Kierkegaard, Gilles Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben, is narrated by an elderly attorney who describes his encounter with Bartleby, a man who he chose to employ in his chambers as a scribe on the basis of his apparent constancy. This temperament he believed would even-out the inconsistencies of his existing copyists – one of whom was irascible in the morning, the other in the afternoon. Although the scrivener was fast and committed to his chores at the start of his employment, he very quickly adopted a particular attitude of indifference, responding to requests with the phrase "I would prefer not to" in an incessant passive resistance to required and prescribed behaviours.

Bartleby's own prescription to 'prefer not to' confounds the attorney through its logical, closed structure that, once begun, cannot be arrested. Bartleby's conduct is never aggressive, never negative. It is simply indifferent, yet operates within the given infrastructure. His profession is that of a scribe: his task is to copy faithfully and unquestionably. However, as his insistence to prefer not to gathers speed, fulfilment of his task becomes an impossible and illogical activity. He does not refuse, rather he simply prefers not to. The tale of Bartleby is recounted by his employer, a man of the law who believes himself capable of objectivity and kindness – it is through this particular subjectivity that the case is recounted. On ceasing to copy Bartleby, according

to the narrator, stands before a view-less window staring ahead in a 'dead-wall reverie'.

Michel Foucault turned his attention in a pair of lectures in the late 1970s at the Collège de France to the ways that governmentality is made thinkable and practicable in both its present and historical forms. He points out that resistance that separates itself from systems of dominance is ineffective as it can easily be recuperated as an acceptable counter-system. By allowing visible resistance to operate, a just system is 'proved', so validating the particulars of government. Resistance within a system, though, has a different effect.

Bartleby left his employer in a doubt-riddled confusion. Eventually the once-efficient scrivener is asked to leave. Six days notice is given, but on the seventh Bartleby simply articulated that he preferred not to leave, continuing his gaze into the distance. In frustration, the attorney moved his chambers, his own power now lost to his former employee. Bartleby still preferred not to leave the building – he had become a part of the infrastructure. The landlord however, uninfected by a sense of responsibility to Bartleby, took legal recourse and Bartleby was conducted to the Halls of Justice. His minor charges left him free to roam the prison grounds, and he chose to stand in the quietest yard silently facing a wall. The attorney curiously continued to feel an inexplicable bond to the silent man, prompting him to visit the gaol. On arriving he proclaimed to the officer in charge that Bartleby was indeed an honest man. On seeing him standing in his place, looking, the attorney believed he could perceive 'peering out upon him the eyes of murderers and thieves' from the window-slits of the surrounding prison buildings. The attorney was concerned for Bartleby's well being and decided to follow the accepted codes of bribery, in spite of being an instrument of the law himself, which would provide Bartleby with food above standard prison-fare. This, though, the scribe preferred not to take. Slowly he wasted away into disappearance. In the Halls of Justice Bartleby perverted the assumed power of confinement and chose to exert his own power.

Lisa Le Feuvre is a curator, writer and lecturer based in London. She is Curator of Contemporary Art at the National Maritime Museum. She lectures on the Curatorial MA at Goldsmiths College and recent writing includes essays on Robert Morris and Wolfgang Tillmans.

Such rule following and consensual suspensions of disbelief is critical to a number of works by Bruce Nauman. In the early 16mm film *Legal Size* (1966), for example, regulation is struggled with, contested and, although ultimately capitulated to, resisted while paradoxically remaining within the system. Like law, architecture is another regulator of behaviour, movement and lines of vision. It inscribes power via invisibility and visibility. Dan Graham has consistently investigated the intersection of the politics of vision and architecture, paying attention to the often-invisible assumptions that accompany corporate architecture that, in turn, impacts upon public life. In the complex 1974-6 work *Video Piece for Two Glass Office Buildings* he specifically addresses the reflective glass architecture that characterises the tall corporate buildings constructed in 1970s New York that, unlike their transparent post-war predecessors, enabled looking out but never in. These towering structures made themselves private through the use of reflective glass that play back surroundings on the surfaces, performing an appearance of invisibility in spite of their immensity.

*Video Piece for Two Glass Office Buildings* takes place in two facing rooms in parallel glass office buildings. Each has a mirror installed opposite and parallel to the window. It reflects the contents of the room, the view seen through the window and doubles the existing reflective qualities of both. In front of each window sits a large video monitor sits, on top of which a camera, recording both the reflected image in the mirror and any individual observing the monitor, is installed. The left-hand building transmits the representation live to the screen in the right-hand building, whilst the right-hand building transmits its representation to the left with an eight-second delay. This creates a feedback situation whereby one must choose to look in the mirror or at the screen, each one offering a different register of control through vision.

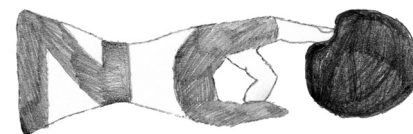
Through custom and practice, rather like the legal system, prescriptions for conduct become embedded into behaviour and society. Such consensual assumptions become simply the-way-things-are: on a grand scale, measurement of time and distance are arbitrary concepts that have become truths; on an everyday scale, red lights have to be stopped at otherwise chaos ensues;

on a personal scale, generally one doesn't stare at strangers. Vito Acconci's *Following Piece* of 1969 initiates a series of events where accepted modes of conduct are refuted. The artist selects a stranger who he then follows through streets and spaces that he deems public until the unknown individual crosses into the private realm. Private space, a home or car for example, become defined by Acconci's potential visibility, and public space by his ability to move through space unnoticed while following.

The performance was engaged in every day for a month and evidence was recorded through images and text, which then distributed the unauthorised act of surveillance and Acconci's chosen withdrawal of free will. Acconci remains invisible to the individual he holds in his vision, yet becomes visible through its documentation. Both the artist and his unwitting partner in crime are generally seen from behind, one unaware of the seen surveillance, the other defining a subject through looking and inviting himself to be looked at in the future through documentation.

There is a politics to law, architecture and conduct: all three involve authority, tactics and opinions that negotiate and address boundaries between public and private realms through structured acts of looking. A glance, stare or gaze is a function of power. Sometimes, though, withdrawal can be more effective than engagement.

*Lisa Le Feuvre, Preferring not to: Acconci, Graham, Nauman, Foucault. Notes for a lecture first published in this reader.*



*The individual never ceases passing from one closed environment to another, each having its own laws.*

# Gilles Deleuze

## *Postscript On The Societies Of Control*

### *Historical*

Foucault located the *disciplinary societies* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; they reach their height at the outset of the twentieth. They initiate the organization of vast spaces of enclosure. The individual never ceases passing from one closed environment to another, each having its own laws: first the family; then the school (“you are no longer in your family”); then the barracks (“you are no longer at school”); then the factory; from time to time the hospital; possibly the prison, the preminent instance of the enclosed environment. It’s the prison that serves as the analogical model: at the sight of some laborers, the heroine of Rossellini’s *Europa ‘51* could exclaim, “I thought I was seeing convicts.”

Foucault has brilliantly analyzed the ideal project of these environments of enclosure, particularly visible within the factory: to concentrate; to distribute in space; to order in time; to compose a productive force within the dimension of space-time whose effect will be greater than the sum of its component forces. But what Foucault recognized as well was the transience of this model: it succeeded that of the *societies of sovereignty*, the goal and functions of which were something quite different (to tax rather than to organize production, to rule on death rather than to administer life); the transition took place over time, and Napoleon seemed to effect the large-scale conversion from one society to the other. But in their turn the disciplines underwent a crisis to the benefit of new forces that were gradually instituted and which accelerated after World War II: a disciplinary society was what we already no longer were, what we had ceased to be.

We are in a generalized crisis in relation to all the environments of enclosure, prison, hospital, factory, school, and family. The family is an “interior,” in crisis like all other interiors—scholarly, professional, etc. The administrations in charge never cease announcing supposedly necessary reforms: to reform schools, to reform industries, hospitals, the armed forces, prisons. But everyone knows that these institutions are finished, whatever the length of their expiration periods. It’s only a matter of administering their last rites and of keeping people employed until the installation of the new forces knocking at the door.

Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) was one of the most influential philosophers of the late 20th century. Amongst many works on philosophy, literature, film and art he wrote *Difference and Repetition* (1968), *Foucault* (1986) and co-wrote with Félix Guattari the best sellers *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). A close intellectual friend of Foucault’s, the latter once remarked, “one day, perhaps, this century will be called Deleuzian.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Foucault *Theatrum Philosophicum*

These are the *societies of control*, which are in the process of replacing disciplinary societies. “Control” is the name Burroughs proposes as a term for the new monster, one that Foucault recognizes as our immediate future. Paul Virilio also is continually analyzing the ultra rapid forms of free-floating control that replaced the old disciplines operating in the time frame of a closed system. There is no need to invoke the extraordinary pharmaceutical productions, the molecular engineering, the genetic manipulations, although these are slated to enter the new process. There is no need to ask which is the toughest regime, for it’s within each of them that liberating and enslaving forces confront one another. For example, in the crisis of the hospital as environment of enclosure, neighborhood clinics, hospices, and day care could at first express new freedom, but they could participate as well in mechanisms of control that are equal to the harshest of confinements. There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons.

## Logic

The different internments of spaces of enclosure through which the individual passes are independent variables: each time one is supposed to start from zero, and although a common language for all these places exists, it is *analogical*. On the other hand, the different control mechanisms are inseparable variations, forming a system of variable geometry the language of which is numerical (which doesn’t necessarily mean binary). Enclosures are molds, distinct castings, but controls are a *modulation*, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point.

This is obvious in the matter of salaries: the factory was a body that contained its internal forces at the level of equilibrium, the highest possible in terms of production, the lowest possible in terms of wages; but in a society of control, the corporation has replaced the factory, and the corporation is a spirit, a gas. Of course the factory was already familiar with the system of bonuses, but the corporation works more deeply to impose a modulation of each salary, in states of perpetual metastability that operate through challenges, contests, and highly comic group sessions. If the most idiotic television game shows are so successful, it’s because they express the corporate situation with great precision. The factory constituted individuals as a single body to the double advantage of the boss who surveyed each element within the mass and the unions who mobilized a mass resistance; but the corporation constantly presents the brash rivalry as a healthy form of emulation, an excellent motivational force that opposes individuals against one another and runs through each, dividing each within. The modulating principle of “salary according to merit” has not failed to tempt national education itself. Indeed, just as the corporation replaces the factory, *perpetual training* tends to replace the *school*, and

continuous control replaces the examination. Which is the surest way of delivering the school over to the corporation.

In the disciplinary societies one was always starting again (from school to the barracks, from the barracks to the factory), while in the societies of control one is never finished with anything, the corporation, the educational system, the armed services being metastable states coexisting in one and the same modulation, like a universal system of deformation.

In *The Trial*, Kafka, who had already placed himself at the pivotal point between two types of social formation, described the most fearsome of judicial forms. The *apparent acquittal* of the disciplinary societies (between two incarcerations); and the *limitless postponements* of the societies of control (in continuous variation) are two very different modes of juridical life, and if our law is hesitant, itself in crisis, it’s because we are leaving one in order to enter the other. The disciplinary societies have two poles: the signature that designates the *individual*, and the number or administrative numeration that indicates his or her position within a *mass*. This is because the disciplines never saw any incompatibility between these two, and because at the same time power individualizes and masses together, that is, constitutes those over whom it exercises power into a body and molds the individuality of each member of that body. (Foucault saw the origin of this double charge in the pastoral power of the priest, the flock and each of its animals, but civil power moves in turn and by other means to make itself lay “priest.”)

In the societies of control, on the other hand, what is important is no longer either a signature or a number, but a code: the code is a *password*, while on the other hand disciplinary societies are regulated by *watchwords* (as much from the point of view of integration as from that of resistance). The numerical language of control is made of codes that mark access to information, or reject it. We no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass/individual pair. Individuals have become “*dividuals*,” and masses, samples, data, markets, or “banks”. Perhaps it is money that expresses the distinction between the two societies best, since discipline always referred back to minted money that locks gold as numerical standard, while control relates to floating rates of exchange, modulated according to a rate established by a set of standard currencies. The old monetary mole is the animal of the space of enclosure, but the serpent is that of the societies of control. We have passed from one animal to the other, from the mole to the serpent, in the system under which we live, but also in our manner of living and in our relations with others. The disciplinary man was a discontinuous producer of energy, but the man of control is undulatory, in orbit, in a continuous network. Everywhere surfing has already replaced the older sports. Types of machines are easily matched with each type of society, not that machines are determining, but because they express those social forms capable of generating them and using them. The old societies of sovereignty made use of simple machines, levers, pulleys,

*Man is no longer man  
enclosed, but man in debt.*

clocks; but the recent disciplinary societies equipped themselves with machines involving energy, with the passive danger of entropy and the active danger of sabotage; the societies of control operate with machines of a third type, computers, whose passive danger is jamming and whose active one is piracy or the introduction of viruses. This technological evolution must be, even more profoundly, a mutation of capitalism, an already well-known or familiar mutation that can be summed up as follows: nineteenth-century capitalism is a capitalism of concentration, for production and for property. It therefore erects a factory as a space of enclosure, the capitalist being the owner of the means of production but also, progressively, the owner of other spaces conceived through analogy (the worker's familial house, the school). As for markets, they are conquered sometimes by specialization, sometimes by colonization, sometimes by lowering the costs of production. But in the present situation, capitalism is no longer involved in production, which it often relegates to the Third World, even for the complex forms of textiles, metallurgy, or oil production. It's a capitalism of higher-order production. It no longer buys raw materials and no longer sells the finished products: it buys the finished products or assembles parts. What it wants to sell is services but what it wants to buy is stocks. This is no longer a capitalism for production but for the product, which is to say, for being sold or marketed. Thus it is essentially dispersive, and the factory has given way to the corporation. The family, the school, the army, the factory are no longer the distinct analogical spaces that converge towards an owner, state or private power, but coded figures, deformable and transformable, of a single corporation that now has only stockholders. Even art has left the spaces of enclosure in order to enter into the open circuits of the bank.

The conquests of the market are made by grabbing control and no longer by disciplinary training, by fixing the exchange rate much more than by lowering costs, by transformation of the product more than by specialization of production. Corruption thereby gains a new power. Marketing has become the center or the "soul" of the corporation. We are taught that corporations have a soul, which is the most terrifying news in the world. The operation of markets is now the instrument of social control and forms the impudent breed of our masters. Control is short-term and of rapid rates of turnover, but also continuous and without limit, while discipline was of long duration, infinite and discontinuous. Man is no longer man enclosed, but man in debt. It is true that capitalism has retained as a constant the extreme poverty of three-quarters of humanity, too poor for debt, too numerous for confinement: control will not only have to deal with erosions of frontiers but with the explosions within shantytowns or ghettos.

## Program

The conception of a control mechanism, giving the position of any element within an open environment at any given instant (whether animal in a reserve or human in a corporation, as with an electronic collar), is not necessarily one of science fiction. Felix Guattari has imagined a city where one would be able to leave one's apartment, one's street, one's neighborhood, thanks to one's (dividual) electronic card that raises a given barrier; but the card could just as easily be rejected on a given day or between certain hours; what counts is not the barrier but the computer that tracks each person's position-licit or illicit-and effects a universal modulation.

The socio-technological study of the mechanisms of control, grasped at their inception, would have to be categorical and to describe what is already in the process of substitution for the disciplinary sites of enclosure, whose crisis is everywhere proclaimed. It may be that older methods, borrowed from the former societies of sovereignty, will return to the fore, but with the necessary modifications. What counts is that we are at the beginning of something. In the *prison system*: the attempt to find penalties of "substitution," at least for petty crimes, and the use of electronic collars that force the convicted person to stay at home during certain hours. For the *school system*: continuous forms of control, and the effect on the school of perpetual training, the corresponding abandonment of all university research, the introduction of the "corporation" at all levels of schooling. For the *hospital system*: the new medicine "without doctor or patient" that singles out potential sick people and subjects at risk, which in no way attests to individuation-as they say-but substitutes for the individual or numerical body the code of a "dividual" material to be controlled.

In the *corporate system*: new ways of handling money, profits, and humans that no longer pass through the old factory form. These are very small examples, but ones that will allow for better understanding of what is meant by the crisis of the institutions, which is to say, the progressive and dispersed installation of a new system of domination. One of the most important questions will concern the ineptitude of the unions: tied to the whole of their history of struggle against the disciplines or within the spaces of enclosure, will they be able to adapt themselves or will they give way to new forms of resistance against the societies of control? Can we already grasp the rough outlines of the coming forms, capable of threatening the joys of marketing? Many young people strangely boast of being "motivated"; they re-request apprenticeships and permanent training. It's up to them to discover what they're being made to serve, just as their elders discovered, not without difficulty, the telos of the disciplines. The coils of a serpent are even more complex than the burrows of a molehill.

Gilles Deleuze, *Postscript on the Societies of Control*, first published in *L'Autre journal* no. 1, 1990, and published in English in October, 59, Winter 1992, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA. Translated by M Joughin.



# Alessandro Petti

*Assymetry In Globalized  
Space: Postscript On The  
Society Of Control*

Alessandro Petti is an architect and researcher in urban studies at the University Institute of Architecture of Venice, Italy. He is a member of Multiplicity: agency for territorial investigations based in Milan and he is the curator with Sandi Hilal of the research project and exhibition *Stateless Nation* (2004). He lives and works in Bethlehem, Palestine.



*To explain how this security mechanism functions, Foucault provides the example of how the plague was treated between the 16th and 17th centuries, when territory was subject to regulation specifying when people could go out and how they should behave at home.*

During the course he gave at the Collège de France between 1977 and 1978,[1] Foucault investigated the passage of a disciplinary society into a society of security, by which he means *a society in which there is a general economy of power which has the form of, or which is dominated by, the technology of security*. He pays particular attention to the distinction *between discipline and security in their respective ways of dealing with the organization of spatial distributions*. He provides three examples from history.

The first is the project by Alexandre Le Maître, in which the city is defined in terms of sovereignty; a distinguishing feature of this spatial project is the capital and its role in relation to the rest of the territory. Indeed, the relation between sovereignty and the spatial arrangement is fundamental, since *the city is essentially conceived in relation to the more global dimension of the territory, while the State itself is conceived as an edifice*. Foucault associates this spatial project with the age of law, in which the security mechanism is both a legal and juridical mechanism. To explain how this mechanism of security functions, he provides the example of the treatment of lepers, who were excluded from the city through laws and regulations.

His second example is the town of Richelieu, based on political thought that was established in the 17th century. The town was built using the form of the Roman camp, with the grid embodying the instrument of discipline: hierarchies and relations of power are established through the structural formation of the space. Discipline forms an empty, closed space; discipline belongs to the order of construction. Foucault associates this spatial project with the disciplinary age, the institution of the modern legal system. In order to explain how this security mechanism functions, he provides the example of how the plague was treated between the 16th and 17th centuries, *when the territory was subject to regulations specifying when people could go out and how they should behave at home, prohibiting contact, and requiring them to present themselves to inspectors, and so on*.

The third example is Nantes, where the space was organized to give structure to the problem of hygiene, trade and other types of networks.

An important problem for towns in the 18th century was allowing for surveillance, since the suppression of city walls made necessary by economic development meant that one could no longer close towns in the evening or closely supervise daily comings and goings, so that the insecurity of the towns was increased by the influx of the floating population of beggars, vagrants, delinquents, criminals, thieves, murderers, and so on, who might come, as everyone knows, from the country. In other words, it was a matter of organizing circulation, eliminating its dangerous elements, making a division between good and bad circulation, and maximizing the good circulation by diminishing the bad. [2]

*I think about how the permanent and mobile checkpoints work, not by attempting to resolve the problem of armed attacks once and for all, but, rather, by reducing their probability.*

This spatial project is associated by Foucault with the age of security. To explain how this mechanism works, he provides the example of smallpox and inoculation practices beginning in the eighteenth century. The fundamental problem will not be the imposition of discipline...so much as the problem of knowing how many people are infected with smallpox...the statistical effects on the population in general. In short, it will no longer be the problem of exclusion, as with leprosy, or of quarantine, as with the plague, but of epidemics and the medical campaigns that try to halt epidemic or endemic phenomena.[3]

Nevertheless, Foucault cautions that these three mechanisms can be found in different historical periods and that one influences the other, hence, a complex apparatus of discipline is required to make the mechanisms of security work. They do not follow each other in succession and the forms that emerge do not cause the earlier ones to disappear. There is not the legal age, the disciplinary age, and then the age of security. Apparatuses of security do not replace disciplinary mechanisms; when a technology of security is put into action, for example, it may make use of or, at times, multiply judicial and disciplinary elements.

In other words, in a period of the deployment of mechanisms of security, it is the disciplinary that sparked off, not the explosion, for there has not been an explosion, but at least the most evident and visible conflicts.[4]

Foucault's schema helps us to arrive at a better understanding of how the wall built by the Israelis to encircle Palestinian towns, for example, is indeed a disciplinary mechanism, but one which acquires force only thanks to the security mechanism of the road system. Indeed, if discipline acts in an empty space through isolation, hierarchy and repression, security, on the other hand, allows for a certain amount of circulation, making a division between good and bad circulation, since its objective is not to block flows but to monitor them. Security does not tend, like discipline, to resolve the problem, but, rather, to manage probable events that are only partially controllable while attempting to minimize the risks.

*Discipline gives architectural form to a space and considers the hierarchical and functional distribution of the elements as an essential problem:* I think of how the Israeli guard towers and military camps are organized in the layout of a prison plan, to allow for surveillance even when there is no one observing and guarding from the towers, because all that is needed to influence people's behavior is that the mechanism exist.

*Security seeks, rather, to structure an environment based on a series of possible events or elements that must be regulated within a multi-functional and transformable framework:* I think about how the permanent and mobile checkpoints work, not by attempting to resolve the problem of armed attacks once and for all, but, rather, by reducing their probability, in the same way that taking

digital fingerprints for the identity cards issued to Palestinians by the Israelis marks the passage toward a biopolitical power that invades the very nature of humanity, our DNA, transforming a people into a population, into statistical data.

For security, control of the road circulation is equally important as the juridico-legal apparatus and the disciplinary apparatus. The problem is not one of delimiting the territory, as it is for the disciplinary mechanism, or at least not exclusively so. *It is a question of allowing circulation, controlling it, distinguishing between good and bad circulation, and assisting movements, but in such a way as to eliminate the dangers inherent to this circulation.*

What we are dealing with here is not exclusion, a crude but blatant separation like South African apartheid. What we have here is a much more sophisticated regime. The problem is not about imposing a law that says no (if such a law exists) but about keeping certain phenomena at bay, within acceptable limits, *by encouraging their progressive self-annihilation. The mechanisms in this type of control become increasingly "democratic"*. It is for this reason that the sociopolitical future of Palestine-Israel is so relevant to countries that consider themselves to be liberal democracies. It is here that forms of government will come into being which will juxtapose freedom and domination, access and separation, liberalism and occupation.

Alessandro Petti, *Assymetry in Globalized Space: Postscript on the Society of Control* is an excerpt from *Arcipelaghi e enclave. Architettura dell'ordinamento spaziale contemporaneo*, published by Bruno Mondadori, Milan, 2007.

[1] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France (1977-1978)*, Pelgrave MacMillan, 2007

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid

Nottingham  
Contemporary

# Daniel Defert

*The Emergence of  
a New Front: Prisons*

Daniel Defert (born 1937) was a sociology professor at the Centre Universitaire of Vincennes. In 1984 he founded the first French Aids awareness organisation, AIDES, after the death of his partner Michel Foucault. He is the author of numerous articles on ethno-iconography and public health.

The Group d'Information sur les Prisons (GIP) was established in late 1970 as part of the Gauche Prolétarienne's (GP<sup>1</sup>) defensive strategy – 'expanding the resistance' was the expression we used at the time—but the GIP very quickly became autonomous. When the GP was dissolved by Georges Pompidou's government on 27 May 1970, all its activities, including the distribution of its paper *La Cause du peuple*, became illegal. Re-establishing a 'dissolved league' could result in a heavy prison sentence. Acts of violence, such as assault or assault with intent, meant an appearance before the Cour de Sécurité de l'Etat, a special court originally established during the fight against the OAS<sup>2</sup>. The leaders of the GP, which had gone underground, resorted to a strategy that had become traditional in the history of communist movements: an alliance with personalities or organizations committed to the defence of civil rights and described, with a hint of contempt, as 'democrats' by those who, in the same tradition, described themselves as 'revolutionaries'. Jean-Paul Sartre therefore became the editorial director of the banned *La Cause du peuple*, whose previous two editors, Michel Le Bris and Jean-Pierre Le Dantec, had been jailed, whilst a new paper called *J'Accuse* took over its public role. Simone de Beauvoir sponsored the new Association des Amis de la Cause du Peuple, which tried to go on distributing the paper in public. It was in this context that Secours Rouge [Red Aid] was re-established and that a famous name from the past was revived. It brought together three generations of representatives of the French left, or in other words summarized the entire history of the left from the Dreyfus Affair onward: Madame Halbwachs-Basch, the daughter of Victor Basch and widow of Maurice Halbwachs, their son Pierre Halbwachs, Charles Tillon, the founder of the FTP<sup>3</sup>, Jean Chaitron, Bernard Lambert, the founder of the Paysans Travailleurs [Workers-Peasants] union, Jeannette Colombel and Sartre, to mention only some of the founder members. A few left-wing Gaullistes also joined the movement. It was as a result of this process of reconfiguration that Maurice Clavel introduced Michel Foucault and Claude Mauriac to one another. It was all the easier to mobilize in that the dissolution of the GP had been preceded, in April 1970, by the so-called '*loi anti-casseurs*' ['anti-wreckers law'], which posed a threat to the freedom to demonstrate by making political organizations collectively responsible for anything that might happen during a demonstration – and a lot had happened since May 68.

During the summer of 1970, a cell was established inside the underground Gauche Prolétarienne to maintain political links with the jailed militants, to prepare their defence, to turn their trials into political platforms, in accordance with the Leninist tradition, and to make it clear to the 'masses' that the acts they had been charged with had a political significance. Almost two hundred people were being held in a dozen or so prisons all over France. My friend Jacques Rancière asked me to join the cell, which was known as the Organisation des prisonniers politiques [Political Prisoners' Organization]; this was probably a way of approaching Michel Foucault, who had not been in France in

---

<sup>1</sup>Maoist, but non-Leninist, organization established in late 1968, and born of the encounter between libertarian militants from the Mouvement du 22 mars and the Jeunesses Communistes Marxist-Léninistes. The GP launched the movement that led militants to 'establish themselves' as factory workers.

<sup>2</sup>OAS: Organisation Armée Secrète [Secret Armed Organization], terrorist movement opposed to Algerian independence.

<sup>3</sup>Francs-Tireurs et Partisans: the main armed resistance group during the wartime Occupation (trans).

**DANIEL DEFERT**

---

1968 and who seemed to have no particular political allegiance in Paris. I anticipated the GP's wishes by suggesting, a few months later, that Foucault should lead a commission of inquiry into the situation in the prisons.

In September 1970, the OPP, which was led by Serge July at the time, was planning and organizing the logistics for the first hunger strike by the jailed militants, who were demanding political prisoner status. The goal was not, as propaganda from other *groupuscules* implied, to obtain privileges, but to win the right to hold meetings, to communicate with their organizations and to have access to newspapers, which were still banned from prisons. The FLN had enjoyed those rights in its day<sup>4</sup>. The main goal, however, was to exert a political influence to counter the new and very harsh forms of repression that were being used. No government is prepared to admit to holding political prisoners. Despite the fame of some of the prisoners (Michel Le Bris, Jean-Pierre Le Dantec and Alain Geismar) the strike did not receive a lot of support on the outside and ended in failure. Someone else took over the leadership of the OPP. He was ascetic, had enough charisma to inspire his troops and went by a wide variety of pseudonyms or nicknames such as Pierre Victor and even Jean Tsétung. I later learned that he was in fact Benny Lévy. It was decided to call for a second hunger strike in mid-January 1971, by which time the Christmas parcels would be exhausted; Christmas was the only time of the year when prisoners in French jails were allowed to receive food parcels from their families.

At the beginning of December 1970, the OPP began to mobilize the 'democrats' who were to provide the new strike with outside support. The people's tribunal that the GP had recently organized in Lens had called doctors as expert witnesses to submit a report on the unhealthy and dangerous conditions in the mines, and, taking that as a model, I suggested that we should form a committee of experts to investigate the general situation in the prisons and that Michel Foucault should be asked to chair it. The GP's leadership agreed to the proposal, but initially saw it as a way of staging a spectacular operation: prominent figures would turn up at the prisons gates in an attempt to speak in the name of the people, and would be driven back or even clubbed by the police in front of photographers. Now, if there was one form of manipulation that Foucault detested above all else, it was this as he identified it with one form of French anti-intellectualism.

I had put forward Foucault's name without his knowledge. The idea that it might distract him from his painstaking work paralyzed me with fear. The GP's leadership sensed my reluctance and dispatched a few militants, including Jacques-Alain and Judith Miller, who were assistant lecturers in his department at the University of Vincennes, to try to persuade him. Jacques-Alain argued the case for a public enquiry modelled on the American senatorial commissions. Foucault finally agreed, saying that it was a natural continuation of the work he was doing.

In late December, he invited people he thought capable of establishing or planning a commission of enquiry into prisons to his home. Acting on the advice of his friend Casamayor, a lawyer who had declined to be part of the commission on the grounds that he might face a conflict of interests, he invited Jean-Marie Domanach, Louis Joinet, who had recently founded the *Syndicat de la Magistrature*<sup>5</sup>, several doctors from the prison administration, the legal correspondent Frédéric Pottecher, a few lawyers, included Christian Revon, Jean-Jacques de Felice and Christine Martineau, who formed the 'Défense active' collective, and my friends the philosopher Danièle Rancière and the sociologist Jacques Donzelot. The GP was also represented by Philippe Barret, who was close to the organization's leaders, though I never actually found out if he was, or was not, our political commissar. In all, some twenty people were present. Everyone argued for the need for an enquiry, but they also argued that the idea was unworkable. Some claimed that only they were competent to deal with such issues, whilst others put forward the hypothesis that the testimony of prisoners could not be relied upon. Danièle Rancière and Christine Martineau – who was working on a book on prison labour<sup>6</sup> – had already drafted a questionnaire, and we wanted to get it into the prisons. Danièle Rancière had a lot of experience of carrying out factory-gate surveys, using the 'Maoist' method of noting down the questions and answers that came up during discussions with the workers. The questionnaire was, however, our only option because it was so difficult to communicate with prisoners and because the questions needed to be standardized to allow a comparative approach to their conditions of their imprisonment. We decided that a preliminary look at their material conditions would convince the prisoners that we were with them and were interested in them. Our model was supplied by Marx's enquiries into the condition of the working class.

This first meeting of 'specific intellectuals' – in the sense that Foucault was soon to describe them, or intellectuals who could supposedly subvert their position of knowledge and of power in knowledge – was a failure. Ultimately, the only person who succeeded in playing the political role of the specific intellectual was Dr Rose, the psychiatrist at the 'Ney' prison in Toul and author of the famous 'Rose report', which led to her dismissal from her post after the prison was partly destroyed during the double prisoners' mutiny in December 1971. On the other hand, when Louis Joinet looked at the questionnaire that evening in December 1970, he admitted: 'At least that's a good piece of work'. When he opened the meeting, Foucault had rejected the plan for a people's commission of enquiry into prisons, even though that was why the meeting had been called, and argued that we should gather information that could be distributed through a variety of underground channels. It was at this point that he suggested the name *Group d'Information sur les Prisons* ['Prison Information Group'], or GIP. This group was to be an anonymous network protected by three 'personalities' who were greatly respected for their investigative abilities and ability to tell the

truth: Jean-Marie Domenach, former resistance fighter and editor of *Esprit*, a journal that was becoming, amongst other things, a reference point for social workers – a social group that was becoming professionalized and that had already distanced itself from its philanthropic origins;<sup>7</sup> the historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet, whose well-documented denunciations of the French army's use of torture during the war in Algeria were of considerable importance during the 1960s; and finally Michel Foucault, who had said that work on prisons was a continuation of his history of psychiatric confinement. The GIP was not designed to have the formal structure of an association; the GP's clandestinity had taught us the importance of informal networks; no one must know the names of our informants, whilst the group's 'names' were there both to protect our informants and to guarantee the truth of what they told us.

When the December 1970 meeting came to a close, we had still to establish an underground network to distribute the questionnaires. We had only three ways of making contact: the former prisoners or political prisoners who had helped us to design our questionnaire, prison staff, with whom we were beginning to make discrete contact, and the queues of visitors waiting outside the prison gates; the administration was still in the habit of humiliating prisoners' families by making them wait for a long time outside the gates on visiting days. The GIP was organized on the basis of one group per prison. First adopted in Paris, the model was rapidly adopted wherever militants were being held in prison: Toulouse, Besançon, Nancy, and Lille... Groups were established and questionnaires were printed using stencils and homemade screen printing equipment and sent to the provinces. When the political prisoners went on strike from January to 8 February 1971, we were ready. This time, the strike had a lot of outside support. Solidarity hunger strikes were organized, including one in the Chapelle Saint-Bernard in Montparnasse. When Simone Signoret and Yves Montand went to visit the hunger strikers with the press in tow, Minister for Justice René Pleven gave in. On 8 February 1971, the hunger strikers' lawyers Georges Kiejman and Henri Leclerc made an announcement in the chapel: they had won a 'special regime' that gave them the benefits of 'political' status, even though the word itself was never used. The militants, who were worried about the state of health of Alain Geismar, who had taken part in both strikes, compromised over that point just as Foucault went public about the establishment of the GIP, which was a way of saying that the struggle would continue. Now that it had a public presence, the GIP could function independently of the GP's original strategy, but it was also in a position to benefit from the social mobilizations the prison issue had triggered outside the system. Foucault, who had until now always refused to play the 'fellow traveller', was not altogether displeased to see the group raising the general issue of imprisonment and the responsibilities of the justice system, rather than simply supporting the demands of an organization to which he had given his fraternal support whilst still keeping his critical distance from it. Some time later,

*I had put forward Foucault's name without his knowledge. The idea that it might distract him from his painstaking work paralyzed me with fear.*

---

<sup>4</sup>FLN: the Algerian National Liberation Front (trans).

<sup>5</sup>Left-leaning union for magistrates and others employed in the justice system, founded in 1968.

<sup>6</sup>Christine Martineau and Jean-Pierre Carasso, *Le Travail dans les Prisons*, Paris: Champ Libre, Collection 'Symptômes', 1972.

<sup>7</sup>See *Esprit*, no 413, April-May 1972, special issue on 'Pourquoi le travail social?' [Why Social Work?] This issue was reprinted three times.

*A group of transvestites had been held together in Fresnes and had been badly treated there. They had been incarcerated dressed as women, and emerged as bearded, hairy men wearing skirts.*

he said to me—I am not sure if this was what he meant at the time or whether it was with the benefit of hindsight—that the initials ‘GIP’ evoked the GP, with the *iota* of difference that intellectuals owed it to themselves to introduce. When I began to campaign around the AIDS issue after his death in 1984, I tried to transcribe his comment and to perpetuate the heritage of the GIP. In an attempt to introduce the difference that solidarity can make I inserted something into the English acronym AIDS. That is why the association I founded was called ‘Aides’.<sup>8</sup>

May 68 had bypassed the prisons –and Parliament, as it happens—as though such places did not symbolize forms of power. I remember that I later read the diary of a prisoner in La Santé in Paris. The entry for one of the most turbulent days of May 68 was simply: ‘Saw a rat today.’ There was worse news to come: some prisoners told us that they had been afraid, or that the guards – the ‘screws’ as the GIP now referred to them in the media—had made them afraid, that the revolutionaries would win, and thus confirmed the old Marxist prejudice against the *Lumpenproletariat* that still structured some political discourse. That prejudice sometimes emerged –in the name of the masses- in our GIP meetings. Jean Genet described the memory, which hurt him, of the Communist resistance fighter who had refused to be handcuffed to him in La Santé under the Occupation.

So Foucault was not exactly unhappy when we avoided those splits by focussing the GIP’s investigation on all so-called ‘common law’ prisoners. We very quickly began to receive signs from inside the prisons that we had the support of the anarchist faction amongst the inmates –the self-taught prison elite.<sup>9</sup> Serge Livrozet, who founded the Comité d’Action des Prisonniers [Prisoners’ Action Committee] in the autumn of 1972, came from that ideological family. The anarchists, on the other hand, expected us to take violent action on the outside, whilst the Maoists were waiting for an increase in violence inside to indicate that the prisoners were becoming politicized. Indeed, some of the GP’s leadership seemed to take an interest in the GIP only when mutinies broke out. In my own view, our group’s aim was to make prisons inoperable as an instrument of political repression. But we quickly learned that prison mutinies were savagely and silently repressed, and that discouraged us from provoking actions we could not protect.

Our allies on *Esprit*, who subscribed to a philanthropic and Christian tradition based on the belief that prison can be a form of rehabilitation, expected the GIP’s actions to lead to reforms; Paul Thibaud, for example, later criticised Michel Foucault over this point. Even the Syndicat de la Magistrature, which was trying to organize prison officers into a huge political trade union-style structure, took a dim view of the antagonism between prisoners and ‘screws’ that we were trying to exacerbate and that inspired many of our actions. Whilst prisons were absent from the political field, the prison question did not, in other words, exist in an ideological vacuum. The decisive thing about Foucault’s

---

<sup>8</sup> The French for AIDS is ‘SIDA’ (translator)

<sup>9</sup> Our first publisher, to whom we were introduced by Gilles Deleuze, was Champ Libre. The publisher, who was close to the anarchists, would have nothing to do with us when he learned of the role the Maoists had played in the birth of the GIP.

<sup>10</sup> The central administration of the Ministry of Justice (translator)

<sup>11</sup> La Roquette: women’s prison in Paris, since demolished.

<sup>12</sup> At the suggestion of Hélène Cixous and Ariane Mnouchkine, the Théâtre du Soleil came to perform some playlets about detention with the GIP outside the gates of the Renault factory in Billancourt. This was the sacrosanct temple of working-class culture, and the performance was well-received by the workers, most of whom were immigrants.



suggestion that we should set up an information group was that it swept aside ideological frameworks and ideological obstacles. By rejecting the idea of a commission of enquiry, which would by definition have had state power as its only interlocutor and target, in favour of a description of the material and anonymous workings of penitentiary control, as reported by the prisoners who were its target, it displaced the whole notion of power, as defined by traditional politics. Marxist suspicions of prisoners and the philanthropic interest in them both masked the actual materiality of punishment, its violence and the fact that, despite the veneer of justice, prisons were legal no-go areas. Providing information about these problems was a way of fighting the censorship of the administration, the judges' lack of interest, the negligence of lawyers, resistance to change on the part of the prison officers unions that actually ran the prisons, and the ignorance and shame of prisoners' families. It was that material aspect of punishment that was to emerge in the press and, before long, political debates. In 1974, the newly elected Valéry Giscard d'Estaing visited a prison and appointed a junior minister to look into conditions in the prisons. Yet the effect of those measures was no more than ephemeral, as Michel Foucault was to point out in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), in which he recalls that a whole series of inoperative reforms had been introduced since 1822, or in other words shortly after the establishment of the penitentiary system.

In the spring of 1971, journalists began to mingle with the GIP's militants in the queues outside the prison gates. There was a flurry of reports on the penitentiary situation. The GIP's questionnaires provided the framework for this new perception of detention. Former prisoners and the families of so-called common law prisoners began to distribute leaflets, to speak at meetings and to sign petitions, and demonstrated outside the Chancellerie<sup>10</sup>; they were, in a word, freeing themselves from their moral stigmatization and adopting the traditional repertoire of political action.

At the beginning of the summer, René Pleven gave in and allowed all prisoners, and not just those with 'special' status, to have access to newspapers. As a result, prisoners began to learn more about the activities of the GIP; it was as though citizens were at last beginning to have some control over the punishments that were handed down in the name of the French people.

The hostage-taking in Clairvaux in September 1971 was to radicalize the situation. Buffet and Bontems, who had been jailed for murder, attempted to escape by exploiting the unrest inside the jail, which was beginning to turn into a collective movement. They took a nurse and a warder hostage and later executed them. The prison officers' union blamed the authorization to allow newspapers into prisons which, a few days earlier, had given a lot of coverage to the mutiny at Attica State Prison in New York. At the same time, the supporters of the death penalty, whose position had been weakened by the growing critical interest in

forms of penalty, swung into action and launched a new campaign in favour of the death penalty in October 1971.

In order to calm the situation – and especially the prison officers' unions – René Pleven applied collective sanctions to all prisoners: there would be no Christmas parcels that year. Systematically searching the parcels (for fear that a file might be hidden in a *sancission*) did make more work for the staff, and it was not a popular job. The measure was discretely announced in November. I can still hear my mates in the GP, and especially Glucksmann, telling me 'Go for it!' But I could not for the life of me see how Christmas parcels could be used to mobilize public opinion. And yet that was the spark that triggered the thirty-two mutinies that took place in the winter of 1971-1972. In some cases, cells were systematically destroyed, as in Toul and Nancy.

It began in Poissy, just as the GIP was organizing a family demonstration outside the Ministry of Justice in the place Vendôme in Paris. We were credited with a talent for coordination that we did not have, but once the mutinies had begun it did become possible to mobilize against the violence with which they were being repressed. The mobilization of young people in the *lycées*, in Secours rouge and on the fringes of the GIP and the interest of the press meant that the general public had at least some idea of what was happening. The mutineers immediately occupied the roofs, from where they could communicate with local people. In Nancy, they threw leaflets from the roofs; the Nancy GIP quickly reproduced them and distributed them all over town. In the winter of 1971-1972, the prisons became a front of violent struggles that enjoyed at least some popular support.

Analysing prison in terms of the materiality of incarceration, the inhumanity of punishment rather than of the law, and of the violent relations that structured relations inside the prisons rather than in terms of reforms and rehabilitation, did a lot to problematize the prison question. The day-to-day management of a prison exploited all the hierarchies that existed outside: the moral hierarchy of crimes, the economic hierarchy of prisoners, and the hierarchy of sexes and sexualities.

The situation inside women's prisons was very different from that in men's prisons, as the group centred on La Roquette<sup>11</sup> and organized by Claude Rouaut discovered. The number of women in prison, the crimes they had committed, relations with the staff and relations with the outside world were all very different. The group therefore saw its actions as an extension of the feminist struggles that were beginning to get organized. A group of transvestites had been held together in Fresnes and had been badly treated there. They had been incarcerated dressed as women, and emerged as bearded, hairy men wearing skirts, and asked us to do something specific. The prison struggle we had been trying to link up with proletarian struggles<sup>12</sup> quickly proved to have more in common with the new feminist, gay and

immigrant movements, in which social control over the body and the mutilation of identities became the structural issue.<sup>13</sup>

The pamphlets produced by the GIP trace the curve of the transformations that took place in the penitentiary situation in 1971-1972.

Their object was to bring knowledge about prison and the day-to-day experience of the inmates into the public domain. As the heterogeneous nature of the GIP's output shows, we really had no discourse of our own. The first pamphlet, *Enquête dans 20 prisons* (*Inquiry of 20 prisons*) consists of questionnaires that were filled in by anonymous prisoners and sent to us from twenty different establishments in the space of less than three months. We did not really have any way of checking the information we received or, which was more serious, of identifying our informants: the account of the use of physical restraints in Toul, for example, seemed to us to be so monstrous and incredible that we were at first unsure about publishing it, but we took a risk and decided to believe what we had read: the mutiny at Toul in December 1971 had revealed the scandal of the punishment block: prisoners in solitary were sometimes left tied to their beds for days on end. We then learned that this enormous questionnaire, which had been filled in by a prisoner who had suffered such treatment, had been posted by Toul's chaplain. Was an anonymous group protected by the names of respected intellectuals the only channel that allowed members of staff like chaplains to denounce what they knew to be unacceptable? Mme d'Escrivain, a social worker in Fresnes, and Dr Rose, the psychiatrist in Toul actually lost their jobs when they acted in accordance with their conscience and their indignation. The Minister for Justice issued the GIP with a writ for libel when it reported an industrial accident that had taken place in Toul and when the story was picked up by *Le Monde*. Several former prisoners confirmed what had happened and the truthfulness of the facts reported by the GIP was never challenged in court. Not one prisoner had lied.

Information is a struggle. That also meant that getting information from prisoners—even though the law, discipline and secrecy made it so difficult—was a way of lending credence to what they said and, ultimately, giving their words the status of an event. When a prison suicide made the front page of *Le Figaro* on 3 November 1972, the way society saw prison had changed; for years suicides had been covered up and existed only in the prison statistics.

The second pamphlet was entitled *Le GIP enquête dans une prison-moèle: Fleury-Mérogis*, and was coordinated by Jacques-Alain Miller and François Regnault. The establishment was typical of the prison reforms of the 1960s. The pamphlet brought together texts describing penitentiary technology that organized the new prisons. The most complete example was Stammheim in Germany, which even rationalized sensory deprivation. *L'Assassinat de George Jackson* is a reminder that the difficulties

---

<sup>13</sup>FHAR (Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire; Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action) was founded by Guy Hocquenghem in March 1971. Some of the GP's leaders saw these new movements as representative of a typically petty bourgeois society.

<sup>14</sup>The GIP, FHAR and the Mouvement de liberation de la Femme shared the same premises in the rue Buffon.

involved in politicizing the prison question in France had led the GIP to take an interest in, on the one hand, the struggles being led by Lotta Continua in Italy's prisons and, on the other, the Black Panthers in America. Genet had suggested to Foucault –this is why they met- that he should write a text demanding the release of George Jackson, which had been put off again and again. At which point, Jackson was murdered. With the help of Genet, we combed the American press to show how this political murder had been covered up. Shortly afterwards, the Attica mutiny visibly made the problem of the over-representation of Black Americans in prison one of their demands for civil rights.

*The Cahiers de revendications sortis des prisons lors des récentes révoltes* (The lists of demands which came out of the prison after the recent riots), which was coordinated by Hélène Cixous and Jean Gattegno, was an expression of how rapidly what prisoners were saying had changed. Although our questionnaire did help, our underground networks of informants had never really spoken as one; from 1972 onwards, prisoners began to acquire a collective political voice as somewhat reformist demands began to emerge from those prisons where they were employed in workshops, and especially from Melun, where Serge Livrozet was being held.

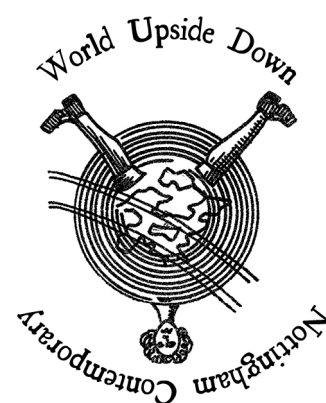
*Suicides de prison* (1972), a pamphlet we wrote together with Gilles Deleuze, described the decline of collective mutinies in France's prisons. As the post-May period came to an end in the prisons, the violence was directed at the prisoners themselves: the new context meant that it was no longer possible to collectivize it. The prison system's May 68 had begun in Toul in December 1971. The two mutinies that took place there illustrated the transformation: the first, which was led by older prisoners, ended with the restoration of order once certain concessions had been won; the second was led by young prisoners and, when the promises that had been made were not kept, cells were wrecked and a tumultuous night-long forum was held in the yard, just as one had been held at the Sorbonne in 1968. Foucault noted that this change influenced subsequent mutinies. The Toul mutiny split the leadership of the GP. Robert Linhart, the editor of *J'Accuse*, formed a Comité Vérité Toul (CVT) made up of militants from the GP, which was now hostile to the GIP, and mobilized Sartre to declare that the prisoners were fighting in the name of everyone, rather as though there was something shameful about fighting for one's own cause, or as though the emergence of factions during these struggles was something that had to be resisted.

The 'divine surprise' of 68 had been spontaneous, had given countless groups a voice, and had led to a general *suspension of economic activity* rather than a nation-wide general strike. After the electoral victory of the right, or from 1969-70 onwards, Marxist, Marxist-Leninist, Maoist and Trotskyist groups tried to launch a new social movement. They were, to a greater or lesser extent, authoritarian and fell back upon fairly traditional modes of analysis and intervention. The Trotskyist movements put the

emphasis on party-building in what were already well-structured milieus, whilst the GP immersed itself in what it called the masses, meaning those fractions of the working class that could be mobilized, groups on the fringes of the working class and small peasant farmers.

The GIP probably marks the turning point between this second post-May period and the emergence of new 'liberation' movements (and especially the women's movement and gay liberation)<sup>14</sup> which, in terms of their patterns of recruitment, their mode of analysis and their goals, were far beyond the control of the political movements that wanted to continue the movement of 68, voluntaristically and by means of forced marches and, in other countries, openly terrorist means. I would happily describe these new movements as not only political but also as socio-ethical in that their goal was to subvert power relations, hierarchies and values.

Daniel Defert, *Emergence of a new front: prisons*, first published as *L'émergence d'un nouveau front: les prisons*, in Philippe Artières, Laurent Quérou et Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, eds, *Le groupe d'information sur les prisons*, Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine, Paris, 2003. Translated by David Macey for this publication.



# Thomas Hirschhorn

## *24h Foucault*

24h Foucault is the *avant-garde* of the *Foucault Art Work*. The *Foucault Art Work* is the project that I have developed following meetings with Daniel Defert and Phillippe Artieres on the invitation of Nicolas Bourriaud at the Palais de Tokyo in October 2003. *Foucault Art Work* is a project (like other projects I have) that remains to be realised in the years to come. It depends on me finding the time, energy, places, partners and money to show the *Foucault Art Work*. This is my objective and I don't want to lose sight of it. This is why the *24h Foucault* is basically the same *Foucault Art Work* project condensed and speeded up. I want the *24h Foucault* to affirm and prove that it's necessary to work as an artist with precision and with excess. I want this project to be precise and exaggerated! For me the *Foucault Art Work* will not change, only speed up. The *24h Foucault* comprises

1. *an auditorium*
2. *a library/documentation centre*
3. *a sound library*
4. *a video library*
5. *an exhibition*
6. *the Merve Verlag archives*
7. *a Toolbox bar*
8. *a souvenir shop*
9. *a newspaper*
10. *a Foucault studio.*

*24h Foucault* is an autonomous work made collectively.  
*24h Foucault* is a work of art!

Thomas Hirschhorn is an artist who lives and works in Paris. He has exhibited internationally including at the Musee d'Art Contemporain De Montreal (2007), Documenta 11, Kassel (2002), and Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2001), where he received the Prix Marcel Duchamp. He was awarded the Joseph Beuys Prize in 2004.

## 24h Foucault, the pre-project

I want to try here to express my wish for the *Foucault Art Work*. This is the title of the work and at the same time it's the Michel Foucault exhibition programme. It's the programme because it's not about doing an exhibition on Michel Foucault. For me it's about showing, affirming, giving form to the fact Michel Foucault was an artist. That his life and his work were a work of art. It's also about giving form to this affirmation that I share with Marcus Steinweg: philosophy is art! Pure philosophy, true, cruel, pitiless philosophy, philosophy that affirms, acts, creates. The philosophy of Spinoza, of Nietzsche, of Deleuze, of Foucault. I don't know Foucault's philosophy, but I see his work of art. It permits me to approach it, to not understand it but to seize it, to see it, to be active with it. I don't have to be a historian, a connoisseur, a specialist, to confront myself with works of art. I can seize their energy, their urgency, their necessity, and their density. Michel Foucault's work of art is charged. It's a battery. I can seize this charged battery. I want to give form to this. In the *Foucault Art Work* project, there is more than a vision: there is a singular commitment. There is the commitment to make a work of art. There is the affirmation that the work of art is philosophy, and that philosophy is a work of art. We must free ourselves from exhibitions. I hate and never use the term show in English: I hate and never use the term piece. I never use and I hate the term *installation*. But I want to make a work, a work of art! I want to become what I am. I want to become an artist! I want to appropriate what I am. This is my work as an artist. *Foucault Art Work* is not documentation. Documentation, documentary films, have been overtaken by fiction and by reality of all types. Because documentation wants to place itself in the middle. I don't want to place myself in the middle. I want to overtake the document, the documentary. I want to make an experience. An experience is something from which I can emerge changed. An experience transforms me. I want the public to be transformed by the experience of *Foucault Art Work*. I want the public to appropriate Michel Foucault's work of art. I want the public to be active to participate. Evidently the most important participation is activity, the participation of reflexion, questioning, making your brainwork. I want the public of *Foucault Art Work* to seize the energy, the strength, and the necessity of Foucault's work. I want the public to confront what is important in the work of Foucault; I want the public to seize the range and the power of Foucault's philosophy. I don't want the public to understand. I want the public to seize the power. The power of art, the power of philosophy!

## Concretely

The *Foucault Art Work* takes place from 14 October to 5 December (7 weeks) at the Palais de Tokyo. I want to make a sort of *Bataille Monument*, but on the inside, in an institution. What have been the lessons from my experience of the *Bataille*

*Monument*? That this experience produces something: meetings, confrontation, production, thought, more work, loss, discussions, and friendship. To produce that, I have understood that it's necessary for the artist to be present all the time and not to be alone. This event must be very well prepared. You have to work uphill on this project with contributors, participants, co-producers. *Foucault Art Work* is going to be an event that must be produced elsewhere at least once (US, Japan or elsewhere). I want the Palais de Tokyo to be only the first event. There must be another. Another partner must be found. *Foucault Art Work* must be an event with between 700 and 1000 square metres of space. The proposed alcove of the Palais de Tokyo is too small. I need more space! It needs a minimum of 700 square metres. In the *Foucault Art Work* event, I want to work closely with my philosopher friend Marcus Steinwig from Berlin. He will be with me on site all the time, during the event. He prepares, he proposes, and he accompanies this work. He is part of the work. He will affirm. He will appropriate. He will act with love, like me, but not with respect. With the love of philosophy, not with the respect of homage. *Foucault Art Work* will be made with love and without respect. Every day there will be the *intervention of a philosopher, a friend, a writer who will interpret the work of Foucault*. There will be a Michel Foucault exhibition. I want the public to understand; the exhibition is only one part of the *Foucault Art Work*. The exhibition with photos, personal books, original documents, press cuttings (international). Peter Gente of the *Merve-Verlag Berlin* made a beautiful exhibition at ZKM in Karlsruhe. There will be a sound-, book- and media-library with all the books (in all languages), all the videos and all audio material of Foucault. I want there to be photocopiers, video material, sound material, on site, simple and efficient, so that the public can take home photocopies or video and audio copies, books, extracts of books or other documents, as they wish. I want the *Foucault Art Work* not only to be a place of production, but also of dissemination. It is important to diffuse and *give diffusion to the work of Foucault* or to parts of Foucault's works. There will be a Michel Foucault shop. The shop isn't a place to sell things, the shop is in fact another exhibition. It's an exhibition of souvenirs made to look at, not to buy. As in the vitrines of a big football club, where trophies are exhibited, photos of former players, the players' vests, the club's different stadiums, the celebrity visits. These are important but not decisive souvenirs. Decisive is what is made today. Today and tomorrow. There will be a *Foucault-Map*. A work that I will do with Marcus Steinweg. Like I did the *Nietzsche-Map* and the *Hannah Arendt-Map*. It's a very big plan of the philosophical position of Foucault in the galaxy of philosophy. There will also be documents and elements that put the *Foucault Archives* at your disposal. This can be integrated in the *Foucault Art Work* project. However the archives must be exposed in another (second) manifestation. Finally I want there to be a simple and condensed auditorium for lectures, concerts, speeches. I want the *public to be inside a brain in action*. There will be no narration, no discussion, and no illustration. There will be affirmation. There will be ideas. There will be confrontation.

**THOMAS HIRSCHHORN**  
-----

When I say: there is no discussion, I mean; it's not to debate and discuss philosophy and art. It's necessary to confront yourself. It's necessary to forge a resistance. I want all the forms, all the contributions to be chosen politically, philosophically, artistically. Because it's the same thing. No element is chosen for any reason other than political. I want the *Foucault Art Work* project to be a proposition that overtakes me, that makes my capacity for responsibility explode. It's necessary to try and be responsible for something, which I can take responsibility for. There must also be a *Foucault-Studio*. A place of work with computers and space for working. Making sculpture, doing research, having experiences that you don't usually have. Learning another language, for example. I repeat: the *Foucault-Studio*, the *Foucault-shop*, the *Auditorium*, the *book- sound- and media-library*, the *Foucault Exhibition*, the *contributors* (every other day), the *Foucault-Map*, the *Foucault Archives*. These eight elements will be put alongside each other as in the human brain; they disrupt each other, they complete each other, they compete against each other. But they never contradict each other – they demonstrate complexity and the infinity of thought. There will be chairs, lots of chairs, armchairs, and lots of armchairs for sitting down and reflecting, reading and exchanging. There will be lots of light. *Foucault Art Work* will be very lit. In the *Foucault Art Work* there will be lots of computers, photocopiers, audio recorders, video and DVD recorders, TV screens, but all these objects will be integrated, mastered; tools, arms, but never aesthetic effects with which to intimidate the public, or show them new technology. The technologies serve art, they serve philosophy. They will be tools, but not necessities. To kill them, it's not necessary to have a gun. To construct a house, it's not necessary to have a hammer. You must always work firstly with your brain.

*Foucault Art Work* will not be a Thomas Hirschhorn exhibition. I will have contributed to this project with others, I hope lots of others. Marcus Steinweg, Manuel Joseph, Christophe Fiat, Peter Gente, not to mention those to whom I've already spoken of the project. This project will be made together, multiply, with multiple singularities, active, turned towards affirmation, the other. Turned to the other with friendship, but without compromise. Neither visual, nor of meaning, nor of space, nor of content.

*Foucault Art Work* is an ambitious project. It is itself an affirmation as much as a work of art.

Thomas Hirschhorn, *24h Foucault* first published on the occasion of the exhibition *24h Foucault*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2-3 October 2004. Translated by Claire Bishop for *Participation* Whitechapel Art Gallery/MIT, 2006.



**NOTTINGHAM CONTEMPORARY**

Publisher's Acknowledgements

Nottingham Contemporary is grateful to all those who gave their generous permission to reproduce the contributions to this reader.

We have attempted where possible to give correct attributions. If there are any queries in this regard, please contact the publisher.

This reader is published by Nottingham Contemporary on the occasion of *The Impossible Prison* at the former police station at Galleries of Justice, High Pavement, Nottingham.

The following artists were in *The Impossible Prison*:

**Vito Acconci, Shaina Anand, Atelier Van Lieshout, Angela Bulloch, Chris Evans, Harun Farocki, Dan Graham, Mona Hatoum, Thomas Hirschhorn, Evan Holloway, Ashley Hunt, Elie Kagan, Multiplicity, Bruce Nauman, Tatiana Trouvé, Artur Zmijewski**

*The Impossible Prison* is curated and edited by Alex Farquharson, Director, Nottingham Contemporary

Designed by Nicholas Chaffe  
[www.nickchaffe.com](http://www.nickchaffe.com)

Thanks to:

We would especially like to thank Tim Desmond, Gary Holmes, Laura Butler, and Chris Sole from the Galleries of Justice.

We would also like to thank Jennie Syson, Ronald Van de Sompel, Jonathan Willets, Anna Colin, Robert Leckie, José Ruiz-Funes from Michel Foucault Archives, Philip Artieres from EHESS, Alexandra Gottely from BDIC, David Macey, Alex Bradley and Susan May at White Cube, Andreina Chiffoteaux and Pamela Eschylles at Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Charlotte Martens from Atelier Van Lieshout, Dietmar Ebenhofer, Doris Leutgeb and Sabine Folie at Generali Foundation, Isabel Bernheimer, Joanna Dien at Foksal Gallery, Katy Partridge at The Approach, Rebecca Cleman at Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI) and Samara Astor at Store Gallery.

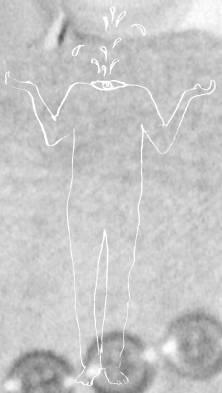
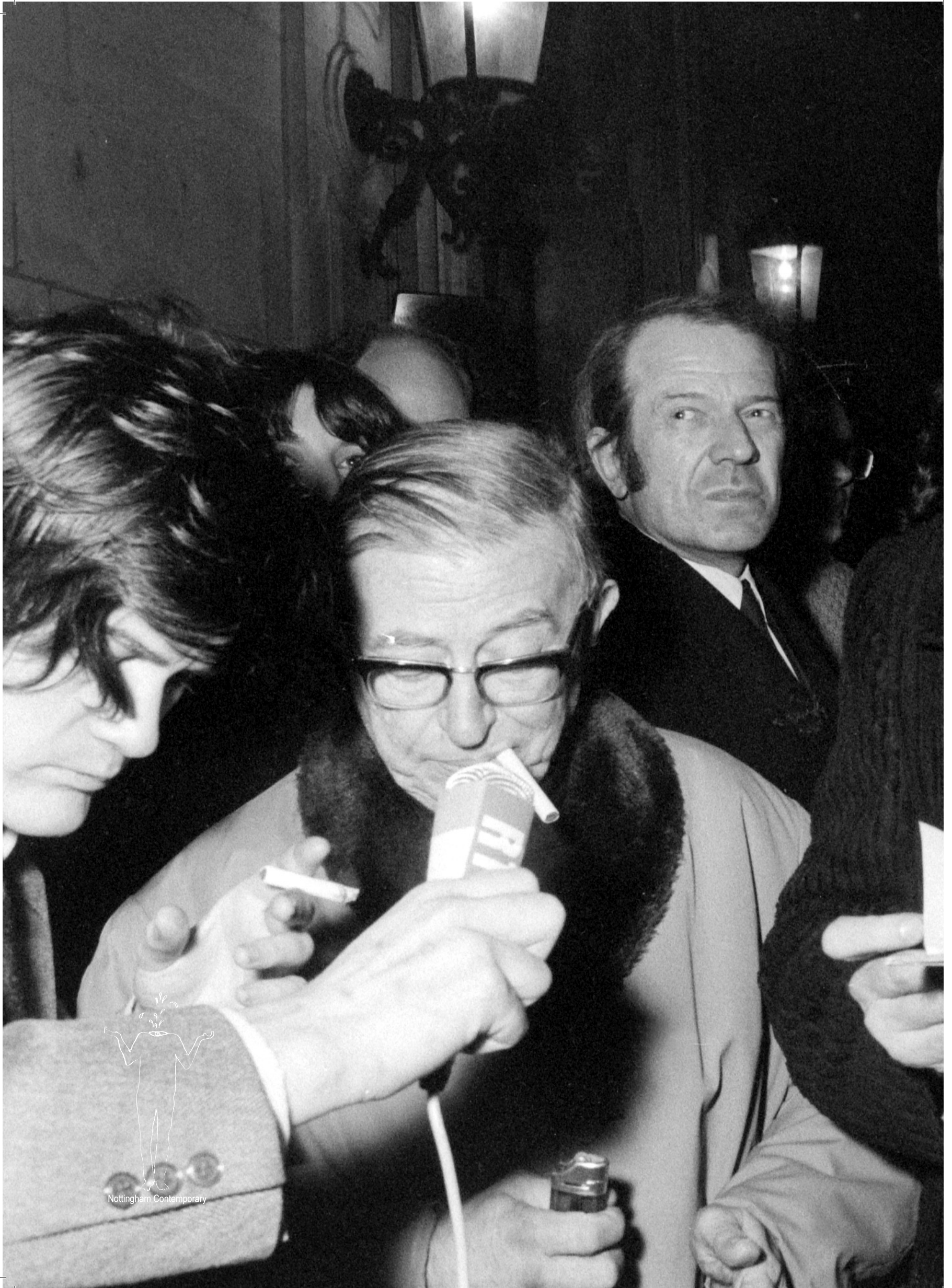
Nottingham Contemporary  
Galleries of Justice  
High Pavement NG1 1HN  
United Kingdom

[www.nottinghamcontemporary.org](http://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org)



**Nottingham  
City Council**

Galleries of Justice



Nottingham Contemporary