Michel Foucault and the **Prisons Information Group.** *Intolerable: Writings from Michel Foucault and the Prisons Information Group (1970-1980)*. Kevin Thompson and Perry Zurn, eds. Trans. Perry Zurn and Erik Beranek. University of Minnesota Press 2021. 465 pp. $140.00 USD (Hardcover 9781517902346); $35.00 USD (Paperback 9781517902353)

In the decades since Michel Foucault's death, there has been no shortage of publications of collections of his lectures, speeches, media interventions, and other unfinished work, as well as a parallel production of analyses of these texts. What sets apart Kevin Thompson and Perry Zurn's collection of documents and writings related to the Prisons Information Group (*Group d'Information sur les Prisons,* or GIP) is the extent to which it decenters Foucault within the group's collective and its networks. In so doing, the documents collected in *Intolerable: Writings from Michel Foucault and the Prisons Information Group (1970-1980)* demonstrate the GIP's ethos of focusing on the voices of prisoners themselves to '*prendre la parole'* or 'take up or take over speech' (9) and reveal information on prison conditions and practices in France and globally. As the text sets out, the GIP used the names of Foucault and other well-known public intellectuals (Gilles and Fanny Deleuze, Daniel Defert, Helene Cixous, Jacques Rancière, Jean Genet, among others) strategically to gain public attention to the cause of making the 'intolerable' conditions of 'incarceration visible in ways that provoked and supported public intolerance of them' (8).

As Thompson and Zurn argue in the expansive introduction, part of the GIP's project was in the reconceptualization of the role of the intellectual as part of a broader reconceptualization of the relationship between emancipatory theory and activist practice. As an archive of texts collected for the first time in English, Thompson and Zurn's project further enacts the GIP's aims of 'desubjugating knowledge as a way of writing/righting the history of the present' (27). The introduction takes up the text as both an archive and a 'toolkit' for such a history of the present in the Foucauldian style, emphasizing the contemporary relevance of the GIP's work in the genealogy of abolition movements, the emergence of the discipline of critical prison studies, and the GIP's connection to parallel movements abroad, including the Black Panthers in the US.

From here, the book is organized chronologically into five sections, tracing the GIP's work during its existence and afterward. 'Genesis (1970-1971)' traces the GIP's emergence from the *Gauche Proletarianne* (GP, a French Maoist organization) and initial focus on the recognition of political prisoners, which was broadened in scope to the non-ideological collection and dissemination of information about and by prisoners. This focus on *information* further emphasizes the GIP's imperatives, including the centring of a broader range of voices from within prisons, refusing the historical separation between political prisoners and the general prison population (between whom there were and remain massive class and race divides); publicizing the 'hidden regimes of our social system' while refusing reformist aims (64); and demonstrating the connection between the prison and the broader penal logics of French society. Notably, Defert characterizes the GIP, influenced by GP and May '68, as beginning from a concern for mass, proletarian struggle in the aftermath of May '68 but eventually becoming more closely aligned with women's movements, gay liberation movements, and immigrant movements. This tension around the GIP as a class-based movement re-

appears throughout the collection.

'The *Intolerable* Series (1971-1973)' of booklets, which examine a range of themes from prison overcrowding and unsanitary conditions to questions about the 'prisons of the future' and prison reform, to prison suicides and analyses of the US Black Prison resistance movement, form the centrepieces of the book and the GIP's principal work. *Intolerable 1*, 'Investigation into French Prisons,' sets up the social institutions of the prison, the police and the legal system as part of a single network of political oppression (89, 103) and offers the results of questionnaires filled out by prisoners and prison staff that produce information about prison conditions and show the arbitrariness of prison guards and administration. *Intolerable 4* showcases the voice of the prisoner HM through his correspondence to show how the prison system and the carceral logic that maintains its order function by entrapping and excluding its outcasts (194) until they are unable to sustain their lives. The second *Intolerable* booklet articulates the GIP's challenge to the reform of the penal system as a study of 'the most advanced French prison,' Fleury-Merogis, an institution that maintains the very intolerable norms and practices it seeks to reform. *Intolerable 3,* 'The Assassination of George Jackson,' examines the media discourse around the coverup of Jackson's killing and highlights the emergence of heterogeneous collectivities *politicized* around the repression of the prison apparatus. It is this aim of the *politicization* of the information about prisoners that the public already knows that is most effectively highlighted in each of the *Intolerable* booklets, particularly through the careful delineation of the project as about 'collective knowledge' rather than the liberal, reformist cause of 'raising consciousness' (110).

The third section, 'Prison Revolts (1971-1972), collects documents related to the GIP's support of prison revolts throughout France in the winter of 1971. A speech by Defert emphasizes how prisons depend on divisions between prisoners at the level of class, race, and employment and highlights the creation of collectivity as a key aspect of the GIP's work. This section also offers a glimpse into the specific critiques of Marxist and leftist organizing in France at the time as insufficiently focusing on the most marginalized in society (277). Contrastingly, statements by Foucault and Deleuze describe prison as a matter of 'the working class,' and 'the labour movement' (259). Foucault writes that in the prison, 'it is utterly apparent that the proletariat is itself the victim of a crime' (273) and criticizes materialist understandings of the penal system, arguing that it is not superstructural but 'penetrates deeply into the lives of individuals and bears on their relations to the productive apparatus' (313). The creation of the figure of the delinquent from the working-class youth through the penal system is the consequence of this crime against the proletariat (253). The texts in this section also especially show the significance of the GIP's timing for its politicizing work: it is only after and through the movements of political prisoners of the Algerian War of Independence and May '68 that the broader politicization of all prisoners and prison activity can occur.

The final two sections, 'Transition (1972-1973)' and 'Reflections (1979-1980 and after)' examine the end of the GIP's organized work and offer after-the-fact and contemporary assessments of its effects and influence by prominent members, including Foucault, Deleuze, and Cixous. The GIP ceased its main operations in December 1972, and its work was, as had always been the intent, taken over by organizations led by former prisoners involved in the Melun prison revolts. These texts

continue to affirm the GIP as a 'forum for experimentation' (385) and not a movement with a specific program for reform. Foucault identifies the GIP as a *critical* movement about the *politicization* of the prison (380), which 'shouldn't be obliged to be a reform movement' (370), or, importantly, an ideological movement. Similarly, in the 2019 interview that ends the text, Cixous assesses the GIP not as a success or a failure but as 'testimony' on the prison (399).

Through the essays and interviews by Foucault in each section of the book, it is possible to trace the influence of Foucault's involvement with the GIP on his intellectual trajectory in his epistemological and methodological transition from archaeology to genealogy. In 'Genesis,' Foucault distinguishes the work of the GIP from his philosophical work on discourse and the history of the human sciences. Later, Foucault describes how he has been rethinking the relationship between theory and practice: whereas he critiques his *History of Madness* as not based on practices, the GIP's work is, of course, practice-based, as is the framing of *Discipline and Punish* (79). Similarly, the GIP's descriptions of the prison as a space for converting youth into lifelong delinquents and the emergence of the confinement society and its differentiation into multiple institutions would become central themes in *Discipline and Punish.* In a 1980 letter on the influence of the GIP, Foucault would more directly credit his experience with the group with the production of *Discipline and Punish* (379).

There is a great deal to recommend in this collection. Beyond the details it fills in on Foucault's life and work, the collection offers a view into the specificity of the historical moment in which the GIP could emerge. This was a moment where a movement spearheaded by intellectuals could create a forum for foregrounding the voices of the excluded and, through this practice, reconsider both the role of the intellectual in activism and the ways in which politicization might function apart from ideology. As its editors affirm, the collection offers a kind of history of the present and serves as important reading for contemporary thinkers on the prison and the intellectual.

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