THE ITALIAN FOUCAULT: COMMUNICATION, NETWORKS, AND THE DISPOSITIF

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation constructs new lines of affinity between Michel Foucault and Marxism, specifically in relation to Communication Studies. It is comprised of both a critical history of oppositional intellectuals, and a postmarxist theory of the biopolitical dynamics of capital. It examines the emergence of Michel Foucault's later historical and philosophical work concerning the deployment of power/knowledge relations, its reception by and sources in a heterogeneous group of Italian and French post/ Marxist intellectuals in the mid- to late-1970s, and its applications to a variety of political and cultural practices mediated by new networks of Information and Communication Technology, especially in North America. The argument hinges on close readings of previously overlooked, underestimated, and/or untranslated interviews, lectures and essays by the late Foucault, a detailed presentation of oppositional movements in Italy and of academic politics in France in the 1970s, and a subsequent extension of some important innovations in communications, namely in response to the shift our post-broadcast media culture. Finally, it proposes the network as a more adequate theoretical form for understanding the interface of power, culture, and subjectivity within the complex and contradictory dynamics of global capitalist communication networks.

Keywords: Foucault, Autonomist Marxism, Network Theory
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the loves of my life, Jennifer and Sabina. Without your love and support this dissertation could never have been completed, nor would it have mattered.
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INTRODUCTION

Radio Alice—a pirate radio station operated by members of the radical left—was broadcasting in Bologna, Italy the evening of March 12th, 1977. Its voices were those of creative resistance, and the radical desire to express ‘something new’: they were seeking to “interrupt the language of machines, of the work-ethic, of productivity.” (Collective A/Traverso, 1980, p. 132) It had become a symbol for the free radio movement that had spread across Italy the previous year when the State’s monopoly on broadcasting was declared unconstitutional. Radio Alice was collectively run by students, militants, youth, communication workers, and other dynamic forces out of the “Movement of 77”. It was an autonomous voice, an Autonomist communication channel in a time ripe with aspirations of revolutionary transformations which increasingly looked outside the State-capital nexus of power. It was open source radio: listeners would phone in, interrupt scheduled programming, and themselves become broadcasters—“We are workers on strike, we want you to play some music and we want to talk to you about the 35 hour week, it’s time they talked about that in contracts” (p. 132); it enunciated the myriad voices of students, workers, women, gays and lesbians, and the radical left; and the doors to their modest studio in a second floor walkup in a residential neighborhood of central Bologna were generally open to all. But on the evening of March 12th, they were locked. While Radio Alice was an explicit expression of new voices of struggle, it was also in the middle of multiple
struggles on a number of fronts. The Italian Communist Party (PCI) was antagonistic, extremely unhappy with the proliferation of autonomous and unauthorized voices on the extra-parliamentary left, claiming that the free radio movement was further weakening the State system and paving the road for private broadcasters. Other sites on the right of constituted power were also opposed, sometimes calling in: "Dirty communists, we're going to make you pay dearly for this radio station, we know who you are" (p. 132). ¹

But there were other more pressing reasons for the locked door that night. The previous day, clashes between the "Movement" and the State exploded in violence on the grounds of the University of Bologna—Europe's oldest—where Francesco Lorusso, an unarmed 26-year old student and Lotta Continua [Continuous Struggle] militant, was shot dead. In the near insurrection which quickly spread from the university across the medieval walled city, Radio Alice became a vital communication source, broadcasting on-air dialogues with insurgent forces who called in during the day, and also revealing the movement of the police, and location of the tanks that roamed the streets. The Radio Alice collective released a communiqué soon after this clash with the State which got to the heart of the matter: "Foucault teaches us something. Communication is subversive: power knows this" (Il documento di Radio Alice, n.d. Trans. mine). On the evening of March 12th, constituted power acted on what it knows and stormed the studio to shut them down.² The station remained on air until the police literally smashed the equipment.³ Radio Alice never broadcast again. The police arrested four people from Radio Alice who were beaten at the police
station, and transferred to a local jail where a number remained for months. The four were released under police supervision and it took seven years to work through the courts when they were found not guilty of any crimes (Radio Alice. n.d. Trans. mine).

Radio Alice and the free radio movement were not alone in taking advantage of the grey zone after the State broadcasting monopoly was declared unconstitutional. There also was an emergent private sector, including a somewhat obscure property developer and one-time lounge singer who had performed primarily on cruise ships. But he entered the television sector, not radio. Within three years, he launched Canale 5, and within a decade, he’d built up a global media giant—MediaSet—which has proven instrumental to his political rise and fall and rise again and subsequent fall as Italian Prime Minister (Settantasettte, n.d.). There will be another time to consider the diverging paths of Silvio Berlusconi and the participants of Radio Alice—although the pages that follow are haunted by the seeming political efficacy of the former’s logic of domination in comparison to the latter’s non-hegemonic logic of becoming. For now, it is sufficient merely to note that the ruptures of March ‘77 were multiple, and its effects were neither teleologically-inscribed, nor could they have been known at the time.

The focus of this study

In this dissertation, I attempt to write a brief “history of the present” by tracing some of the heterogeneous lines of theoretical innovation and political practice which come together in Italy in the late 1970s. More centrally, I use this
historical plane to make connections between the radical manifestations in Italy and the theoretical-political ideas of Michel Foucault.

One of the multiple effects of March '77 was a continued and heightened State oppression against the “Movement”. But the Italian “Movement” was not a unified bloc of dissenting voices and strategy; rather, the “movement” was more akin to today’s “Movement of Movements”—that heterogeneous ensemble of new social movements that came together and to prominence at the W.T.O. summit in Seattle 1999. That is, the “Movement of '77” was already a multiple. Its real roots went back to the 1950s, when masses of workers emigrated from Southern Italy to the factories of Milano and Torino, and bristled against the control of their union bosses. From these early autonomous practices of “organizing from below” flowed more than a decade of rigorous retheorization of marxism by the likes of Mario Tronti, Sergio Bologna, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, and Antonio Negri. Their most significant theoretical contribution was an expression of what they had seen in Italian factories which necessitated a reconfiguration of the relationship between labour and capital. What they learned from labour is that labour itself is the dynamic force in a capitalist society, and its capacity for resistance always precedes capital's strategies for domination

The resultant political crucible—Potere Operaio [Worker's Power]—broke into numerous fragments by 1973, unable to centrally contain the expansive social composition that early autonomists had labeled the “social factory”. In Italy, it is said May '68 lasted a whole decade; that is, after the “Hot Autumn” of 1969, there continued the social liberation of Italian students, women, and youth.
who pursued more liberatory and creative practices. Some of the lines drawn in
that struggle could be best seen in Bologna—a city that was also the crown jewel
of the PCI which had ruled the region since the end of the Second World War.
The diffusion into multiple factions was also predicated on varying degrees of
militant political practices. There was also the Red Brigade in the mix, whose
militarization followed a separate trajectory, albeit one with often coterminous
boundaries whose precise lines remain unclear to this day. The State, however,
seemed uninterested in making such differentiations and preferred to wield a
blunt instrument by simply criminalizing the entire Movement:

The State repression is deadly—but it is not serious. It is not serious because it misses its avowed target (to eliminate the Red Brigades). It eliminates instead what it refuses to acknowledge: the emergence of new social forms of conflict linked to a new social stratum. This stratum is supposedly 'marginal,' but its actual importance, in Italy as elsewhere, can only grow (Lotringer and Marazzi, 1980, p. 9. emphasis added).

Elsewhere there was recognition of the "supposedly marginal", and of
"new social forms" of conflict, of power, of resistance. In neighboring France.
Michel Foucault had long been interested in the marginal, in the "mad", in the
margins of "reason" and in "deviant" forms of truth. Like those in the Italian
'Movement' he had been increasingly politicized, becoming more militant and
was a sustained effort to get out of the "trap"—the space of domination exercised
by sovereign power. This recent foray emphasized what was becoming
increasingly clear to Foucault: the productive aspect of power. He now seemed
to be writing expressly against those who conceptualized power as repressive.
as that which only forbids. Still, he had not forgotten what he had written less than two years previous. In his book Discipline and Punish, Foucault traversed the spectrum of State power, from the ferociously violent execution of the would-be regicide Damiens to the imprisonment of the "vagabond" Béasse in hopes of extinguishing his spirit of refusal (Foucault, 1995, pp. 3-6; 290-92). In short, despite now recognizing the polyvalence of power relations, which are also productive, Foucault retained a keen awareness of the repressive techniques and practices of the State, especially against forces which recognized and acted upon the dispersed microphysical nature of power.

Franco Berardi, known primarily as Bifo, was a part of Radio Alice and of the journal A/Traverso—perhaps most expressive of the emerging links between autonomists and French poststructuralists. He also was one of the many dispersed Bolognese, who fled both the city and country after that fateful night in 1977, not wanting to join his comrades in jail. Bifo's flight led him to Paris, where he reconnected with Félix Guattari, who had been a frequent visitor to the 'creative wing' in Bologna and an enthusiastic supporter of Radio Alice and the free radio movement. Guattari was drawn to something new, to their affective shift, to their creative and transformative embodiment of immaterial labour, to the quotidian—what with Gilles Deleuze he called the "molecular"—to that decisive shift away from the Party and State. This is the sentiment which underlay his argument that "There will be no more October revolutions". Guattari was moved by his perception of something new, a logic of becoming: "The Italians of Radio Alice have a beautiful saying: when they are asked what has to be built, they
answer that forces capable of destroying society surely are capable of building something else, yet *that will happen on the way*” (Guattari, 1980, pp. 236-37).

On the way, Guattari, along with Bifo, tried to build something else—awareness of what was happening in Italy and the building of coalitions of support. Together they wrote the “Appeal against the repressions in Italy”, which was signed by Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Roland Barthes among others. Three days after the appeal appeared in the media, Bifo was arrested by French police working on behalf of the Italian state. But this latest act of repression could not stop this “supposedly marginal but growing social movement”.

My interest in the “Appeal against the repressions in Italy” is particularly centered on the response that came from Foucault. It is my contention that the Foucault of the mid-1970s, read against this historical plane of struggles in Italy, provides an important point of departure from which to understand some of the key tensions and fault lines of power (both of resistance and domination). Elsewhere I have sketched out some of those lines, in particular through the construction of the conceptual persona of the “Italian Foucault” (Cote, 2003). I have fabricated this conceptual persona by reading Foucault primarily from the mid-1970s with a strong inflection of Italian autonomist marxism and against the background of the work of Gilles Deleuze. This is a conceptual persona trapped in struggles amidst polyvalent power relations, between domination and resistance.
This is a politicized Foucault—the Italian Foucault—at the apex of his militant radicality, already becoming something other when he was among the others that signed the “Appeal against the repressions in Italy”. This document began: “...we want to attract attention to the serious events that are currently taking place in Italy, particularly the repression and the beating down of militant workers and dissident intellectuals.” This “appeal” expresses a clear recognition that the institutions and apparatuses of constituted power still play an ongoing role of domination and repression that comes within a larger reconceptualization of power. Yet this is also where lines central to this conceptual persona come together—threads of Foucauldian and Italian autonomist theory and practice that reconceptualize power beyond the State and its juridico-sovereign forms. Specifically, for Foucault this means looking beyond the State to microphysical power relations. For the autonomists, it means looking beyond the factory and a central determining mode of production to see instead the diffusion of power throughout society (the “social factory”) which was increasingly expressed in communication and affective—that is, social and cultural—forms. What also is new to this emerging perspective is the recognition that power is not simply that which “says no”, but also that which is productive and expressive—as that which allows us to see and speak, to valorize, and to signify our subjectivities.

In an interview published just as he signed the “Appeal against the repressions in Italy”, Foucault outlined a key concept to use in order to grasp the play of power. This concept, the “dispositif”, has been literally “lost in translation” by English-language translators whom have variously rendered it “apparatus” or
“deployment” or “mechanism”. This disappearance occurred despite the great importance accorded to the dispositif by Gilles Deleuze, in his often-overlooked essay “What is a dispositif?” In part, this may be because of the effects of the concept: there are no universals and hence no founding subject, hence no a priori “reason” or cogito; just variations of particular compositions which produce their own “truth”. According to Deleuze:

a dispositif comprises truths of enunciation, truths of light and visibility, truths of power, truths of subjectivation. Truth is the actualisation of the lines which constitute a dispositif (Deleuze. 1992).

So, again, what is this dispositif? It is not a hermeneutic instrument—it does not reveal something that was already there but hidden; rather, it is a heterogeneous ensemble which produces meaning and subjectivity through the particular composition of its elements. The dispositif is an “analytic of power” or a “concept” of power. However, there is not a single dispositif of power: it proposes neither an “organizing finality” nor a “universal frame” nor is it merely determined by the unitary necessity of the mode of production. Rather, the dispositif refers to a complex network of relations, to combinatory processes that allow us to “see and speak”. Indeed, if relations of power animate all social fields, then there are as many dispositifs as there are social fields. In other words, the dispositif can be understood as a methodology which facilitates the unraveling of complex causal relations between heterogeneous elements—namely, between the discursive (words) and nondiscursive (things), and between knowledge, power and subjectivity. Thus, dispositifs are neither transcendental nor totalizing: they are expressive combinatory machines which make words, things, and subjectivities
intelligible. It should be emphasized that the dispositif is being presented as a multiple. First, it can be a methodology which entails unpacking and studying each constituent element. Second, it can also be a heterogeneous ensemble wherein those constituent elements cohere to function as an ontological machine—allowing us to see and speak of things intelligibly, and, in turn, ascribing to them "truth".

In the chapters that follow, I reconsider the dispositif in order to make a modest contribution to the "theoretical toolkit" of communication; to offer a supplement, or better still, an alternative to the major forms of "ideology critique". I start with a deceptively simple question and a disciplinary injunction: how can we best address the analysis of "power" in Communication? This question is much more complex than it appears at first sight because in order to look at power, we must see knowledge as its constant and mutually constitutive companion. When addressing power and knowledge, there is an imperative to reconsider the matrix within which they are expressed in their most quotidian and corporeal form: subjectivity—precisely what Foucault, and Deleuze & Guattari did; and what the autonomist political movements in Italy were trying to do.

I propose that we can understand communication and media from this perspective, not as representing power and knowledge in an ideological form, but as being expressive of a particular composition of relations—of enunciability and visibility, of subjectivities, and of power. Power thus takes on a more nuanced form: productive and polyvalent rather than simply repressive and centralized. Here we see the heterogeneous lines of the Italian Foucault coming together in a
triptite conceptualization of power: sovereign, disciplinary, and communication.⁹

Theoretical and methodological approach

This project requires an examination of the affinity between Foucault and various marxisms. I am interested in the way that both the Italian autonomists and Foucault both give priority to resistance over domination and to non-representational forms of power, such as local and autonomous organizations, over State and constituted power. I have undertaken this project partly because I am struck by some of the similarities between Italy in the late 1970s and the situation today. Then, there was a breakdown in representational democracy when the Italian left was hamstrung by the PCI's historic compromise, a political accord with the ruling Christian Democrats which expunged all radical or transformative policies and was expected to be met with silence; in today's regime of neoliberal globalization, we are amidst the clamour of "no alternatives" as Anglo-American representational democracy presents itself as the only option—an "option" that its major powers have been prepared to impose militarily across the globe, especially in regions replete with oil and gas deposits. In Italy, in the 1970s, there was also a war against "terrorists"; today this war has been turned back on citizens of western liberal democracies. Most notably, the U.S. Patriot Act has suspended the democratic principle of due process and transparency in the name of "saving" these very principles. Then Radio Alice was silenced. Today, there are multinational efforts to silence alternative media, such as the seemingly Italian-Swiss initiated, US-led seizure of IndyMedia servers in
the UK, which affected their websites across the globe. Also, as American troops were dropping bombs in their 2004 post-election offensive, other offensives took place in the mainstream media. For example, a former diplomat and professor at Australian National University, well-known for his strong opposition to the US-led war in Iraq had his pre-scheduled interview with CNN International mysteriously disrupted by "sophisticated technical means"; he was supposed to speak about what he called ongoing 'war crimes' in Fallujah (Kevin, 2004).

I will argue that we can think of the aforementioned "events" as "media dispositifs" which comprise truths of enunciation, truths of light and visibility, truths of power and truths of subjectivity, not representing (with or without bias) a preexisting reality but as expressing a composition, a complex set of relations in which the media are always already in the middle.

Finally, it seems necessary at this point to say something about meaning, the search for "truth" and the methods I take as my points of departure for the Italian Foucault. The researcher or analyst (or militant, for that matter) is never a "bearer of universal values" but is always in the midst of a never-ending struggle over meaning. One of the key effects of this struggle is the valorization of truth, which also requires an adequate dispositif in order for that particular truth to signify as such. This is the spectre that haunts all forms of scholarly inquiry—"truth". The concept of "truth" takes us into a terrain that is seemingly opposed to falsehood, or even to ideology. But Foucault argues that it is necessary to complicate such distinctions:
by the truth I didn’t mean to say those real things that are discovered or made accepted, but an ensemble of rules according to which the true can be untangled from the false and specific effects of power attached to the true; it being also understood that the intellectual does not fight in favour of the truth, but around the status of truth and the political-economic role that it plays. The political problems of intellectuals must not be thought of in terms of science/ideology, but in terms of truth/power (Foucault, 2001b, p. 159).

Some will claim that this perspective sets off an inevitable slide into a morass of paralyzing relativism. The pages that follow squarely face such accusations. For now, let me state simply that I view “truth”, as a strategic effect of dispositifs. In the chapters that follow, I propose the dispositif as a critical methodology which takes us in medias res—to myriad struggles through which ‘truth’ gains an ontological surety, an a priori “common sense”, and a grid of intelligibility which allows ‘truth’ to function. I am guided by Foucault’s argument that power is productive and dispositifs are the surface upon which “reality” and “truth” are inscribed—“[a]n ‘age’ does not pre-exist the statements which express it nor the visibilities which fill it” (Deleuze, 1988a, p. 48).

Foucault’s work leads us to consider the ubiquity of struggle—over what we can see, speak, and how we can signify. Perhaps even more apropos in our unfortunate times of the never ending war on terror is the way that war has been proposed as a general grid of intelligibility. In such times, the final lines of the “Appeal against the repressions in Italy” signed by the Italian Foucault is particularly instructive, reflecting the ethico-political necessity of taking sides:

The undersigned demand the immediate liberation of all arrested militants, the end of the persecution and campaign of defamation against the movement and its cultural activities, proclaiming their
solidarity with all dissidents currently under investigation. (Appello, n.d., Tr. mine)

Foucault's work is a challenge to the legitimacy and efficacy of the detached scholar, searching for the “truth”. For Foucault, there is no objective space to be seen, only the roar of battle to be heard. Writing now, as we head into the latter stage of the first decade of the twenty-first century there is no shortage of new voices of creative resistance. Italy is undergoing a renaissance of new media experiments. For example, only a few medieval blocks away from where Radio Alice once broadcast, there is now Telestreet, a micro-television station. Telestreet are micro broadcasters who operate on almost no budget; they only reach a radius of a few blocks; and they are run only by people in the neighborhood in which they broadcast. At the time of writing there are already some 21 Telestreet microbroadcasters in Italy. They are joined in a circulation of struggle through a network of websites where each station uplinks their content for all. They are connected through ‘tactical television’ to other Italian microbroadcasters like “no-war tv”, “urban tv”, and “global tv”. In the spirit of the late 1970s, there is a renewed understanding that communication remains subversive, resistant, creative, and productive. And new forms of social expression, new sites of contestation are always emergent. They are supposedly marginal but they only continue to grow.

Organization of the analysis

The analysis that follows is organized into seven chapters. Throughout, I try to take as much of a genealogical approach as possible in constructing and
drawing on the Italian Foucault. In part, this means that much of the material which I utilize has been confined to the margins, mostly because it is either unavailable in English or rarely consulted. As such, each chapter draws upon at least one, and often several, articles or interviews which have otherwise seen little circulation among English-language interlocutors.

The dissertation is broadly separated into two sections. The first three chapters can be read as an intellectual history which grounds the Italian Foucault—namely, a critical history of related oppositional intellectuals. The latter half applies much of this theoretical foundation to the development of a postmarxist theory of the biopolitical dynamics of capital. Specifically, it posits the network as a more adequate organizational form of the dispositif, particularly for understanding the complex relationship between ICTs, culture, subjectivity and capital. The opening chapter of the dissertation offers a comprehensive introduction to the concept of the dispositif. First, I outline what is meant by a "conceptual persona" as a model for the creation of the "Italian Foucault". Then indicate how Foucault makes an important shift away from structuralism (a label always disavowed by Foucault) in line with the general radicalization of post-68. This is relevant for understanding the dispositif. While the concept of the dispositif expresses a politicized perspective in Foucault’s work, it has not been widely recognized as such. Furthermore, the dispositif signifies a further step away from structuralism—it is not a static, synchronic formation; rather, it is processual, a dynamic network of relations.
Chapter Two focuses on the Italian elements of the conceptual persona that I construct in the opening chapter. First, I look at Foucault’s interactions and interventions with the extra-parliamentary Italian left with whom he shared a diffused and local political focus. As well, there are his protracted struggles with the Italian Communist Party. The chapter also examines a Mediterranean intermediary—Nicos Poulantzas—who ultimately failed to bridge the gap between Foucault and state/Party Marxism. Most significantly, this chapter structures the many conceptual affinities shared by Foucault and the Italian autonomist movement.

In Chapter Three, there is a counterintuitive presentation of struggle, via a rarely noted connection between Marx’s original conception of class struggle and the early 18th century French “race historians”. The Comte de Boulainvilliers, one of the earliest practitioners of “race history”, was a central figure in Foucault’s 1976 College de France lectures which foregrounds struggle and war as constituent elements of sovereign power. Foucault saw how the local and extra-parliamentary radical left of the 1970s was obscured and marginalized by the façade of sovereign power. This inquiry also provides the basis for an early critique that expresses affinity with current myriad practices of new social movements. Furthermore, Foucault’s work from this time demonstrates how the polyvalency of historico-political discourses not only stands in opposition to the philosophico-political discourse of sovereignty, but that it is dependent upon its relational structure and the construction of genealogical knowledge.
Chapter Four considers the collateral conceptual effects the dispositif has on power. The sources for analysis come from lesser-known materials of Foucault, this time a series of interviews and articles that appeared in Italy in 1977-8. As well, the chapter turns to the "subject" in relation to power. This comes through a recasting of resistance as the dynamic force of productivity vis-à-vis subjectivity. In developing this analysis, I draw on Michael Hardt’s reading of an ontology of power grounded in practice. I go on to note how the conceptual distinction between productivity and producibility—in relation to subjectivity—provides a key link between the Italian Foucault, Spinoza and more recent autonomist innovations in political economy such as immaterial labour and the social factory. In short, this chapter presents the dispositif as an ontological machine; as something which provides intelligibility for the heterogeneous elements in which we find ourselves in medias res.

Chapter Five introduces two main themes: affinity and networks. First, I offer a schematic overview of different elements of the so-called “network society” ranging from Manuel Castells to the rhizomatic resistance of the Zapatista’s “electronic fabric of struggle”, to the decentralized information circuits of IndyMedia. I consider the role of affinity to be analogous to “common notions”, a concept central to the work of Spinoza. What are of interest here are the factors which bring heterogeneous elements together in a functional manner. Thus I suggest there is an interdisciplinary move toward network theory, supported by an overview of the emerging field of understanding the characteristics of links and nodes in processes of formation and breaking apart.
The chapter explores principles of network organization ranging from the abstract (power laws) to the practical interface between humans and Information and Communication Technology (Latour's Actor-Network theory).

Networks act as a conceptual terminus. It is not simply that we can understand the dispositif as a network formation. In addition, we can also posit a network dispositif (pace Castells) as a way to better understand our own historical moment. Thus, Chapter Six presents a number of examples of how "network-dispositifs" can be used to examine objects of study in communication. First, I situate today's networks by returning to Marx via Foucault. Marx is presented as having always understood power as being productive and having a multitude of sources. Foucault is presented in relation to his triptych of sovereign-disciplinary-biopolitical power. In the latter part of the chapter, I take a classical model from the political economy of communication—Dallas Smythe's audience commodity thesis—and adapt it to the current reality of our networked society and the concomitant radical rearticulation of the "audience" in social networks. This means introducing notions such as immaterial labour and the general intellect. The chapter concludes by positing the "Soft Revolution" as an emergent dispositif of power; one predicated on affinity, in decentralized P2P networks comprised of cultural, political, economic, and subjective lines that come together under a dynamic of affinity. This marks a considerable shift from the antagonisms and crises of the 1970s. As well, it is an ambiguous process already in partial capture by capitalist market relations. However, what has not changed is the
extent to which current networks represent potential opposition to the established forms of sovereign power.
CHAPTER 1: ‘WHAT IS A DISPOSITIF?’

We will see that concepts need conceptual personae that play a part in their definition. Friend is one such persona... (Deleuze and Guattari, 1996, p. 166)

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have already been introduced as friends of the Italian Foucault. It is from them that I borrow the “conceptual persona” which signifies something more than merely a “friend who appears in philosophy” or “empirical circumstances” in which it emerges. The Italian Foucault is an eminently political composition which could only emerge in its particular historical moment. The utility of the conceptual personae is in how it can “carry out the movements that describe the author’s plane of immanence, and play a part in the very creation of the author’s concept” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1996, p. 63).

There is a political effect of the deployment of the Italian Foucault as conceptual persona: theory functions only in transversal relays to practice—and that practice is always already historicized. This indicates the importance of the parameters of the conceptual persona’s “plane of immanence”—marking the temporal-spatial zones in which the Italian Foucault acts. Some of the key markers include the following: the failures of a Party-based, centralized and hierarchical Marxist politics; the resultant recognition of domination in its myriad structural forms as a political issue; a theoretical impasse between Marxism and structuralism and the subsequent need for renewed conceptual efficacy on the left; the recognition that capitalist globalization was undergoing what was once
forecast as *real subsumption*, an increasing understanding that power is neither centrally located nor possessed but rather relational and diffused on a microphysical level; and, that recognition that power is productive, and increasingly expressed in immaterial forms, in communication and in subjectivities.

The conceptual persona of the Italian Foucault is then a perspective, a point of view that suggests a field of action, and that defines problematics to be engaged. This conceptual persona is political its insistence that something be done. Within Deleuze and Guattari’s “method” of philosophy, what the conceptual persona insists upon is the creation of concepts. This injunction to theory is to enable practice—to make spaces for action visible and articulable.

**Abandoning the structuralist Foucault**

February 21\(^{st}\) 1975 marks the first printed use of the term “dispositif” by Michel Foucault. It was in an interview with philosopher Roger-Pol Droit—subsequently published as “From torture to cellblock”—which originally appeared in the book review section of *Le Monde*. The question Droit asks is simple enough: “Does Michel Foucault have a ‘method’?” Foucault’s answer demonstrated just how much both his theory and practice had changed since his “politicization” in Tunisia ’68. He was no longer the Foucault once celebrated as an ascendant star in the firmament of French structuralist thinkers, alongside Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan, and Roland Barthes. Now he was decisively breaking away, openly casting aspersions on that structuralist grid which had been so in vogue the previous decade. “It is good to abandon this
attitude" he proclaimed. No longer would he look for "the 'non-spoken' of a discourse, the 'repressed' or 'unconscious' of a system" (Foucault, 1996a, p. 149).

One might be tempted to categorize this shift as an Althusserian "epistemological break" that a close textual reading reveals. However, as Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose point out, here Foucault has explicitly rejected what Althusser—his former teacher—called a "symptomatic reading". Henceforth Foucault would not seek “to penetrate beneath what was said and written to reveal hidden interests, the structures of sign systems, what was being repressed or projected” (Rabinow and Rose, 2003, p. vii). So if it was not necessary to engage in a hermeneutic exercise which uncovered and explained subterranean truths in rigorous and formal readings of key texts—for example, that of Marx in Althusser and Balibar’s Reading Capital—then where? To find out we must go to the central site of tension of the “trap" in which Foucault found himself. His answer carried him boldly into terrain he had been traversing gingerly for the past several years. This is ground in which power is not simply that which represses or says "no" but is arrayed in productive formations, enabling non-discursive formations to function, and discourses and their attendant subjectivities to signify.

As Droit’s enquiries were directed at Discipline and Punish, Foucault’s answer addressed the 19th century bourgeoisie. To understand the implementation of polyvalent disciplinary power, whether in schools, in army barracks, in emerging industrial factories, or in prisons, Foucault directs our gaze
not to hidden subterranean depths but to the surface of things. Such a methodological shift enabled him to make startling claims: the bourgeoisie “said precisely what it was doing, what it was going to do, and why...[i]t stated perfectly what it wanted.” So it was not in the “great texts” of the 19th century that Foucault looked, but in his now-famous archives, “a mass of unknown documents which constitute the effective discourse of political action.” Then Foucault completed the detonation of what at the time was a conceptual bombshell, tearing himself away from the structuralist milieu with which he’d long been associated: “For the logic of the unconscious, therefore, we must substitute a logic of strategy. For the logic accorded today to the signifier and its chains, we must substitute tactics and their dispositifs.” (Foucault, 1996a, p. 149). This declaration of a shift from the “unconscious, signifier and its chains” to “strategy, tactics and their dispositifs” flags a reconceptualization of power which will be examined throughout this dissertation. Namely, that power is not centrally located in the mode of production or the state; and, that it is not a fungible commodity possessed by individual subjects but an expression of relations of power and knowledge which is both iterable and polyvalent.

Foucault concluded this interview by placing the dispositif in a conceptual “tool box”, the manner in which he characterized all his books. “If people really want to open them, use a particular sentence, idea, or analysis like a screwdriver or wrench in order to short-circuit, disqualify or break up the system of power, including eventually the very ones from which my books have emerged...well, all the better!” All the better as that is the intention of this dissertation. In this
chapter, I intend to further unpack the concept of the dispositif from the Italian Foucault's tool box.

First, however, I would like to further survey the plane in which this concept was emerging; in other words, a contextualization of the targets of Foucault's conceptual bombshell is in order. This will be done not by perusing the "great texts" of Levi-Strauss or Lacan, for that would not only take us too far off course, it also would be in contravention to the new orientation of the Italian Foucault of the 1970s. This is when he urged looking to lesser-known documents which manifest political action. This is not to suggest that the major works of Foucault are beyond the ken and not to be considered here; as one example, the dispositif cannot be fully understood without considering *History of Sexuality Volume 1* where it is explicitly deployed as a method. It is to suggest, however, that we listen closely to perhaps the closest "friend" of the Italian Foucault.

In concluding his essay "What is a Dispositif?", Deleuze flags the fundamental importance of the interview for Foucault: "These interviews are diagnostics...which lead us towards a future, towards a becoming: the underlying strata and the present day" (Deleuze, 1992a, p. 166). So on the one hand, there is an analytic of power contained in the dispositif found in that which is sedimented, like the precise archives of the 19th century prison. Regarding the analytic of power, Deleuze makes an important distinction: it examines "what we are (what we are already no longer)" (Deleuze, 1992a, p. 164). On the other hand, the diagnostic engages in direct political discourse, not how we are dominated and trapped in what we are but in how we might become. This
struggle, this active and quotidian space between domination and becoming, is a primary plane which the Italian Foucault inhabits. Throughout then, special attention will be paid to the interview and the direct political engagement it allows, in order to augment analytic of sedimented power relations, which the dispositif enables.

This is not to suggest that the diagnostic is only to be found in interviews; rather, it is a mode of thinking. The interview is a privileged site for Foucault simply because it allowed him to make explicit the relays between his archival material and contemporary issues. Several years previous, the Italian philosopher Giulio Preti noted that Foucault's philosophy is "a diagnostic enterprise". While agreeing, Foucault clarified that diagnostic thought is not limited to philosophy (or interviews) but rather “[b]y diagnostic knowledge I mean, in general, a form of knowledge that defines and determines differences...[and that which can] permit a new objective field to appear" (Foucault, 1996b, p. 95).

The diagnostic, then, also addresses the struggle over meaning; differentiating the spaces in the gaps between what we say of what we see and vice versa.

A further point of clarification is in order. The "objective field" that diagnostic knowledge constructs does not signify a neutral space outside struggle. Rather, it indicates particular conditions of knowledge—often understood as "objective" or natural or transcendent—which differentiate, which allow not only a different articulation of what we see but for different objects to become visible. In our historical moment of unprecedented convergence—not only of media conglomerates but of commercial media and constituted power—
the problematizing of such “objective” fields is an urgent need, and indeed a task conterminous with ideology critique. But diagnostic thought does not seek out origins or a transcendental form from which we have been alienated; rather, it looks for “articulated historical content” which enables and constrains possible kinds of knowledge production and subjectivities.

Foucault indicated to Preti that “articulated historical content” refers precisely to that “objective” field of categories, of order and classification, of that which enables and configures representation. What goes under “diagnosis” are those fields of categories, of order and classification; in turn these are regarded as anything but objective and instead as historical constructs. It is in the objective field of articulated historical content that the “consciousness” of the subject is enacted. This is the grounds of Foucault’s rejection of the transcendental. In short, the conditions of possibility of knowledge, and thus of subjectivity and its attendant “consciousness” are not transcendental but always “articulated historical content”. It is in trying to critically understand articulated historical content that processes of differentiating, of becoming take place.

For now I propose following this emerging “diagnostic” by briefly tracking Droit, a philosopher in his own right, who can stand as a cipher for the times, and guide us not only from this first mention of the dispositif to its more substantial explication a few years later, but to the plane which preceded it. In short, before examining the dispositif more rigorously, let us consider the particular conditions of possibility in which the dispositif appears, and in doing so see just what was so incendiary about the suggestion that the “unconscious”
should be jettisoned for "strategy" and that "tactics and dispositifs" be favoured over "the signifier and its chains". In short, what follows is a brief diagnostic of the becoming of the Italian Foucault.

"Je n'ai jamais été freudien, je n'ai jamais été marxiste, et je n'ai jamais été structuraliste"

Near the end of his life Foucault was able to state confidently "I have never been a freudian, I have never been a marxist, and I have never been a structuralist" (Foucault, 2001m, p. 1254). While I am claiming for the Italian Foucault a strong affinity to a particular type of marxism (while fully rejecting others), this conceptual persona is undoubtedly an anathema to structuralism. So what exactly of the structuralist Foucault was being breached through the introduction of the dispositif?

Before 1968, Foucault was operating on a wholly different plane. There is no doubt The Order of Things and its focus on the construction of the knowledge systems of "labor, life, and language" was deeply indebted to, or at least in profound affinity with the ethnology of Levi-Strauss, and the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan both of whom were keymasters of structuralism. In the journal La Quinzaine Litteraire, published 15 April 1966, Foucault made this perfectly clear:

Levi-Strauss demonstrated—about societies—and Lacan demonstrated—about the unconscious—that "meaning" was probably a sort of surface effect, a shimmer, a foam, and that what ran through us, underlay us, and was before us, what sustained us in time and space was the system...Lacan's importance comes from the very fact that he showed how it is the structures, the very system of language, that speak through the patient's discourse and the symptoms of his neurosis—not the subject...Before any human existence, there would already be a discursive knowledge, a
system that we will rediscover (Foucault as quoted in Eribon, 1992, p. 161).

At the minimum then, Foucault and his structuralist fellow travelers shared a common challenge: undermining the privileged conceptual status of "man", of the "individual" that emerged in modernity, of the a priori subject as the natural foundation of knowledge. At the same time, Foucault was already recognizing that we only ever exist—in Althusserian terms—"always already" in the middle of things, in an already-existing "discursive knowledge" or "system".

Regardless, Foucault always made disavowals, and he was resistant to such categorization. Some three years later, he stated:

When you ask those who are classified under the rubric of "structuralism"—like Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Althusser and the linguists, etc.—they answer that they have nothing in common with one another, or very little in common. Structuralism is a category that exists for others, for those who are not structuralists. It is from the outside that one can say that so and so are structuralists. You must ask Sartre who the structuralists are, since he thinks that Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, Dumézil, Lacan and I constitute a coherent group, a group constituting some kind of unity that we ourselves don't perceive (Foucault, 1996f, p. 53).

One thing which links both these quotations, beyond conflicting relations to structuralism, is the presence of Jean-Paul Sartre. In the former, he was contrasting Sartre's passion for "politics" with his passion for "systems". This divergence turned on Foucault's proclamation of the "death of man" which Sartre denounced as an abdication of political responsibility.

This contretemps continued through the interview in which further clarification was made. Regarding the "death of man", Foucault was distinguishing his project from that of phenomenology—which was closely
associated with Sartre. The focus of phenomenology is on human experience and the manner in which conscious perception is organized. For Foucault, the problem was that phenomenology “tries to grasp the significance of daily experience in order to reaffirm the fundamental nature of the subject, of the self, of its transcendental functions” (Foucault, 1991, p. 31). This brings us back to Foucault’s insistence on seeking the articulated historical content.

Phenomenology then, with its emphasis on the conscious perception of human experience was what “Foucault’s structuralism” was seeking to problematize, and eventually, he would historicize that “conscious experience” in the dispositif. The “man” of which Foucault famously proclaimed the death sentence was not fated for a spectacular demise à la Damiens of Discipline and Punish but for a gradual fading away due to a lack of conceptual efficacy: with “a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge...one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea (Foucault, 1994, p. 387).” This “death”—as outlined in the final pages of The Order of Things—was neither an anthropological or sociological observation nor an empirical fact; it was a radical reconceptualization with methodological effects.

The arrangements cited for effacement were “labor, life, language” as knowledge systems—constructs in which we understand the “alienation” of our labour in exchange, the essential and determining nature of our body, and the generalizable logic of language and the objectivity it ascribes. These positivities provide the epistemic space in which “human experience” finds the conditions in which it is possible to unfold.
These arrangements of knowledge, their purported great constants and essential characteristics were the precise targets of the structuralist Foucault. What was at stake were the substance and presence they provided for the a priori subject and the liberatory potential and politics their epistemic “truth” seemed to offer. This was the “19th century dream” the “structuralist” Foucault sought to shatter: “man” constructed as an object of knowledge:

so that man could be liberated by it from his alienations, liberated from all the determinations of which he was not the master, so that he could, thanks to this knowledge of himself, become again or for the first time, master of himself, self-possessed. In other words, one made of man an object of knowledge so that man could become subject of his own liberty and of his own existence (Foucault, 1996f, p. 52).

Parenthetically, it must be emphasized that this is not to suggest the emergence of a new subject which is no longer an object of knowledge or site of the exercise of power. Rather, it is to problematize both the a priori assignation of this transcendental subject with its essential (and hence alienable) characteristics; and, the manner in which that liberation was to come about.

As his 1969 interview—“Foucault Responds to Sartre”—indicates, he remained in struggle with Sartre over the kind of politics that flowed from their respective grids: “[the philosophy of Sartre] finally had to tell you what life, death, and sexuality were, if God existed or not, what liberty consisted of, what one had to do in political life, how to behave in regards to others, and so forth” (Foucault, 1996f, p. 51). In that interview, Foucault shies away from what he sees as Sartre’s “totalizing enterprise”; instead he goes back to the aforementioned “diagnostic” aspects of his work: “to say what the present is, and how our present
is absolutely different from all that it is not, that is to say, from our past” (Foucault, 1996f, p. 55). Such diagnostic activity is taken up across the board: in practice, in interviews, and in what he generalizes as “autonomous philosophical activity” which examines the present not for origins or what is essential, but for difference. When he was differentiating himself from Sartre, however, the actual relays between this philosophical diagnostic and political action remained unclear. Indeed, Foucault’s more “political” diagnostic remained largely out of site, and there remains a profound ambivalence about engaged political action, that of a decidedly non-Italian Foucault. When asked if his work was the opposite to Sartre’s which “encouraged people to action and engagement, he responded with a reproach: “insofar as we bring theory and politics more closely together, we refuse this politics of learned ignorance that I believe characterizes the one that is called engagement.” And finally, “we realize that every form of political action can only be articulated in the strictest way with a rigorous theoretical reflection” (Foucault, 1996f, p. 55).

Nonetheless, one could certainly wager that this other Foucault was being erased; the arrangements of knowledge which predicated structuralism were already crumbling, and the sea was rushing toward the shore without a subject. The efficacy of this Foucault was quickly fading; there was an urgent need, expressed in part in ’68, that demanded a response with a call that grew ever louder. To understand that call, we can turn back to Roger-Pol Droit’s questioning of the Foucault that was becoming “Italian”.

31
Foucault takes to the streets!

Many terms which have now dropped out of favour will be revived, and those that are at present respectable will drop out, if usage so choose, with whom lies the decision, the judgment, and the rule of speech (Homer, Ars Poetica).

During May '68, Droit was writing his exams in preparation for university. Just like Foucault, he attended the famed Ecole Normale Supérieure, although at the Fontenay/St Cloud campus rather than Rue d’Ulm. It was here he fell under the double influence of Althusser and Lacan. This grounding in a structuralist-infused Marxism and psychoanalysis were grids in which Droit would eventually find himself trapped: “[it was] a period defined by grids: grids in the sense of a conceptual framework of elucidation. We had the feeling that if we could just find the right overlay we would see what was invisible without a grid” (Droit qtd in Dosse, 1997a, p. 298). The rise and fall of this “grid” and the intertwining of a lesser-known figure like Droit with Foucault and others is visible in the two-volume book History of Structuralism by François Dosse. This masterful work comprehensively surveys the vicissitudes of the structuralist movement through an intellectual and institutional history, emphasizing the efficacious relays between structuralism’s methodological soundness found in “science” and the institutional need for the arts and humanities to morph into the more epistemologically sound social sciences, especially in an increasingly technocratic France.

For now what is in question is how the political efficacy of structuralism waxes and wanes after ’68. A famous epitaph of that era was “Structures don’t take to the streets.” This claim, however, was strongly contested, and for some
time thereafter it was difficult to know which side of the debate Foucault was on. For example, at Foucault's lecture in 1969 to the French Philosophical Society Lacan interjected to say "If the events of May demonstrated anything at all, they showed precisely that structures had taken to the streets!" (Dosse, 1997b, p. 122). Soon after, Foucault invited Lacan, who was without institutional standing at any university, to lecture at the experimental university Vincennes. It was here that Lacan vituperated once again in response to students who rebelled against his lecture: "What you long for as revolutionaries is a master. You will get one!"

Vincennes is the site where a new form of heterogeneous elements came together once again. The Centre Experimental de Vincennes was a new university set up explicitly as a state response to the near-revolution of May '68. Often called the "anti-Sorbonne" it was an experimental site of post-secondary education which rejected the traditional curriculum, stressed interdisciplinarity, and saw many radical experiments (both successes and fiascoes) in pedagogy. Foucault was in charge of establishing the philosophy department, and one of his first appointments was Gilles Deleuze. Dosse notes that Foucault was also involved in establishing the psychoanalysis department, and while Lacan was blocked from taking a position there by Jacques Derrida, his presence remained strong. His son-in-law Jacques-Alain Miller—who acted as a sword-carrier for structuralist psychoanalysis—taught in the department and his daughter Judith Miller worked with Foucault in philosophy. Indicative of the university's radical culture, she was known to hand out credits to students simply "on request," proclaiming: "I will do [my] best to make sure [the university] functions worse and
worse. The university is a state apparatus, a fragment of capitalist society, and what appears to be a haven of liberalism is not one at all" (Miller qtd. in Macey, 1993, pp. 228-29).

While Foucault only remained at Vincennes for two years—until his elevation to the College de France—it seemed to have a transformative effect, manifested in a strongly political turn. The kind of political turn taken, however, was complicated. While Foucault remained strongly influenced by structuralism, there was a more self-conscious engagement with marxism in his work:

I returned [from Tunisia] to France in November 1968. I had the impression that [May '68] had all the same been profoundly engaged and coded by a marxist discourse from which very little escaped...At Vincennes, during the winter of 1968-69, to say in a loud and intelligible voice 'I am not a marxist' would have been very difficult (Droit, 1975, Trans. mine).

In the following chapters there will be a more sustained consideration of Foucault's complex relationship to various marxisms. Here the point is that the waning of the structuralist grid coincided with the rise of various more radical marxisms outside of Communist Party orthodoxy. That Foucault operated amidst this milieu can be seen in interviews like "On popular justice: A discussion with Maoists". Here Foucault speaks voluminously of "the masses", "the proletariat" and even "armed struggle". However, his fluency in the parlance of his times was more an expression of engagement with marxist discourse than it was an expression of engagement. For example, in challenging the prospects of a "revolutionary battle under the ideology of the proletariat", Foucault states:
you will grant me that what is thought by the mass of the French proletariat is not the thought of Mao Tse-Tung and it is not necessarily a revolutionary ideology. Moreover, you say that there must be a revolutionary state apparatus in order to regulate this new unity between the proletariat and marginalised people. Agreed, but you will also grant me that the form of state apparatus which we inherit from the bourgeois apparatus cannot in any way serve as a model for the new forms of organization (Foucault, 1980b, p. 27).

Questions of organisation, state apparatuses, and relays to "the proletariat and marginalised people" did occupy Foucault increasingly in the early 1970s. By 1971, a year after leaving Vincennes, Foucault found himself in the middle of new sites of struggle. Along with Deleuze, he established the Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons. Their first pamphlet delineated the radical plane that would become familiar to the Italian Foucault, reading "[t]hese are intolerable: courts, cops, hospitals, asylums, school, military service, the press, television, the State" (Cited in Eribon, 1992, p. 224). This was the period in which a more political, and even "engaged" Foucault became visible—indeed, one who would reach a very public rapprochement with Sartre, even marching by his side at various demonstrations, and by working with him actively in Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons. There were other radical projects from the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Immigrants, to the Chronicle of the Workers' Memory—a stillborn project featured in the inaugural pages of the alternative Parisian paper Liberation. In all, Foucault was in the middle of rearticulating his relationship between the intellectual and militancy. In 1972 he more fully explicated this shift in an interview with Deleuze which appeared under the title "Intellectuals and Power."13
The constitutive role Deleuze plays in the conceptual composition of the Italian Foucault is clear in this interview. Deleuze begins their discussion by reconceptualizing theory and practice, arguing that “[p]ractice is a set of relays from one theoretical point to another, and theory is a relay from one practice to another.” He goes on to suggest that the panoply of local issues in which an intellectual participates should be understood as “a system of relays within a larger sphere, within a multiplicity of parts that are both theoretical and practical” (Foucault and Deleuze, 1996, p. 74-75). Two points must be noted here. First, theory and practice are presented as being autonomous and equal with no priority of one over the other; but neither are they subsumed into a new whole—a relay is not a synthesis. Second, if the bounds of theory and practice result from the particular composition of relations in which the intellectual is situated, it is not possible to determine a priori a privileged point from which she is to operate—hence Foucault's turn to being a "specific intellectual" which intervenes in local and particular struggles. This "engagement", this growing interest in power as relations which traverse from the local to the global demonstrates how far Foucault had diverged away from the hermetic abstractions of structuralism toward actual political engagement.

I want to return later to Foucault's comments in the interview discussed above. But for now, two more points must be made which identify the key sites in which Foucault was engaging in, problematising, and extending the marxist grid. First, Foucault is beginning to reconceptualize power as something relational and
diffused, and as a necessary addendum to an analysis of knowledge systems which are themselves constitutive of contestation:

Isn't this the difficulty of finding adequate forms of struggle a result of the fact that we continue to ignore the problem of power? After all, we had to wait until the 19th century before we began to understand the nature of exploitation, and to this day, we have yet to fully comprehend the nature of power. It may be that Marx and Freud cannot satisfy our desire for understanding this enigmatic thing which we call power, which is at once visible and invisible, present and hidden, ubiquitous (pp. 78-79).

Second, Foucault is coming to understand that struggles are articulated on myriad axes, dispersed in a microphysical dimension: “any of the countless, tiny sources—a small-time boss, the manager of low-income-housing, a prison warden, a judge, a union representative, the editor-in-chief of a newspaper” (p. 79). This terrain, which is very familiar to the Italian Foucault, not only introduces a polyvalency to struggle but foregrounds the importance of taking sides in what surely can be understood as political engagement: “to speak out on this subject, to force the institutionalized networks of information to listen, to produce names, to point the finger of accusation, to find targets, is the first step in the reversal of power and the initiation of new struggles against existing forms of power” (p. 79). Speaking out was a way of life at Vincennes, and as we will see, there too it was manifested on myriad axes.

**From structures to strategies**

The battle over the department of psychoanalysis at Vincennes, which captures much of the waning of structuralism and its contestations with marxism, continued to intensify after Foucault’s departure. By 1974, many believed a coup
was being orchestrated by Lacan to take over the department, as Jacques-Alain Miller’s position had been consolidated. This struggle did not pass unnoticed. And so again Droit appears, this time as a mole. By now, Droit’s Althusserian-Lacanian bona fides had begun to slide: “I arrived at a moment when structuralism reigned in all its glory. That all ended around 1975 in the clericature and caricature of a world that had waned” (Droit qtd. in Dosse, 1997b, p. 139). For some, the “clericature and caricature” was now embodied in the figure of Lacan. For Droit, taking sides and pointing fingers was something he too had taken up. As the Lacanians prepared the ground for a takeover, Droit leaked the story in his column for Le Monde, calling it “a purification” and a “Vichyist undertaking”. One effect of this public exposure was that another appeal circulated in protest, this time signed by Deleuze, among others, wherein the take over was called a “Stalinist operation...Every kind of terrorism involves cleaning house: washing the unconscious seems no less terrible or authoritarian than brainwashing”. Dosse outlines the entire episode in great detail and continues the narrative with a vengeance:

Henceforth normalized by its local Husak [Stalinist puppet installed in Czechoslovakia by Moscow after the Soviet invasion that followed the Prague Spring], Jacques-Alain Miller, the department of psychoanalysis of Vincennes operated in a strict Lacanian orthodoxy. In 1969, Lacan had warned: “You will find your master” and the students naively thought he was thinking of Pompidou. He was in fact talking about himself. Psychoanalysis at Vincennes once again became an orderly structure, which triumphed over the agitation to restore the hierarchy (pp. 150-51).

An “orderly structure” that was hermetically sealed and hidden in discursive formations was the conceptual realm from which Foucault was
definitely departing. Droit too was ready to take flight. His memory of the structuralism that Foucault had fired broadsides at in their 1975 interview was the frightened one of a survivor. "I had lived this period of the sixties and seventies as something terrifying. It took me some time to understand (I needed to leave in order to understand) that thinking could be extremely joyful, playful, invigorating, whereas what I had retained from my structuralist battles was that thinking had to be very solid, rigorous, abstract, and cold, that everything that could be carnal was unthinkable" (Droit qtd. in Dosse, 1997b, p. 272). His line of flight took him back to a high school classroom where he taught for seven years, wrote nothing, and read only texts that pre-dated Shakespeare. When he finally "returned" his thoughts had turned to the exclusion of Eastern thought in Western philosophy. More pertinent to this project, he eventually returned to Foucault and is currently writing a book on his work. Droit has returned to Le Monde and to a professorship at the Centre National de la Reserche Scientifique. In September 2004 he edited an eight page supplement in Le Monde marking the 20th anniversary of Foucault's death. In it was a previously unpublished interview between Droit and Foucault also from 1975. The full text of the interview reveals the growth of an "Italian" Foucault. The interview also reveals the conceptual pyrotechnician who called for the shift to strategies, tactics, and the dispositif self-identifies in precisely that manner. When asked by Droit how he can be defined, he responds, "I set off fireworks. I fabricate things that in the end service a siege, a war or destruction. I am not for destruction but I am for our ability to move, for our ability to advance, for our ability to bring down walls" (Droit, 2004).
This echoes what Deleuze had stated in his interview with Foucault a few years earlier: "[n]o theory can develop without eventually encountering a wall, and practice is necessary for piercing this wall" (Foucault and Deleuze, 1996, p. 74). By 1977, there had been considerable movement around numerous walls as the Italian Foucault was now in full effect. The site where the new conceptual fabrication of the dispositif gets discussed in detail for the first time was familiar terrain—Vincennes. The interlocutors were not necessarily "friends" of the Italian Foucault, but we need to remember that for Deleuze and Guattari, the realm of conceptual persona includes "rivals" and "competitive distrust" around the fabrication of concepts. It is appropriate then, that the interview in question—which would be published in the Lacanian journal *Ornicar?, Bulletin périodique du champ freudien*14—is with Jacques-Alain Miller and other members of the newly purified psychoanalysis department.

"The Game of Michel Foucault"

Dispositif had been mentioned a few times by Foucault after the Droit interview. The first was in a contribution to a book on the origins of the modern hospital where it is deployed in an early exploration of a realm that Foucault would eventually call biopower: "The biological traits of a population became relevant elements for economic management, and it is thus necessary to organize around them a dispositif which assures not only their subjugation, but the constant increase of their utility" (Foucault, 2001e, p. 18, Trans. mine). He also mentioned in a German interview which reconsidered his work on madness, noting that the "mad" are not outside power; rather, "they are caught in the
network, they are shaped and function within the dispositifs of power" (Foucault, 2001, p. 77, Trans. mine). And again, his emphasis was that there is no transcendent or unchanging “truth” that the “mad” can speak; that madness is only articulable and visible within particular power-knowledge relations. This was not a simple rearticulation of a thesis of domination; it is not that we are all trapped in dispositifs of power that allow us only to speak “their” truths. Instead, the systematic nature of the discourse which produces truth can always be reconfigured, reutilized, and deployed elsewhere. In short, “truth” also functions in games of strategy and is thus always reversible; resistance, then, is always already inscribed in any dispositif and the truth it produces. So begins Foucault’s game, his gambit is that truth is not a hidden a priori thing to be discovered by a hermeneutic reading (or in this case through psychoanalysis) but instead an effect of the strategic game among relations of forces to be played.

That Foucault was already deep in this strategic game was apparent in his interview with Droit the previous year. Therein he laid his plan bare:

In order to set off fireworks, one is first a geologist. He looks at the lay of the land, its folds, its faults. Where is it easy to dig? Where are sites of resistance? He looks to see how the fortresses are implanted. He scrutinizes the undulations that we might use for hiding or for launching an assault (Droit, 1975, Trans. mine).

It remains a speculative assertion that “psychoanalysis” was the softest ground for digging and the easiest site for an assault. Nonetheless, his interview with his former Lacanian colleagues from Vincennes reads at times like an assault, and it is where he explicated his new concept of the dispositif with explosive force.
Here, too, he emphasized the game, reflected in the French title of the original interview: “Le jeu de Michel Foucault”. Inexplicably, Foucault’s preliminary remarks are omitted in the translation which appears in *Power/Knowledge*. In the original interview, Foucault emphasizes the game: “It seems to me that this is the first time that I have met with people that really want to play the game which I propose to them in my book” (Foucault, 2001f, p. 298, Trans. mine). This game is comprised of relations of power and of knowledge; and therein such relations, are fundamental to the constitution of any dispositif: “The dispositif is therefore always inscribed in a game of power, but it is also always linked to one or many limits of knowledge, which emerge from but equally condition the dispositif” (p. 300, Trans. mine). Power and knowledge, then, are primary constituents of the myriad elements which make up the dispositif.

**Identifying constitutive elements of the dispositif**

The primary focus of Foucault’s interview with Jacques-Alain Miller et al. was the then-recently published first volume of *History of Sexuality*, and its overturning of the repressive hypothesis—i.e. that “sexuality” was not an “ideology” imposed by the Victorians to repress the masses but that it was a particular dispositif through which a normalized (and, consequently, abnormal) sexuality becomes visible and articulable. The first line of questioning is about the methodological function of the dispositif in regards to a “dispositif de sexualité”. Foucault responds with his most sustained description: it is “firstly, a resolutely heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures.”
scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid” (p. 299, Trans. mine). Thus dispositifs are always in the middle of things, comprising a complex “a system of relations” of discursive and non-discursive elements. We can see that the dispositif brings together heterogeneous elements that have distinct registers: from the materiality of institutions, to the regulation of juridical processes, to the expression of what elsewhere might be called ideology, and, finally to the techniques and practices of particular subjectivities. There is a complex composition to these distinct elements; yet this heterogeneity, in part, is designed to go beyond the reductive schema of an all-determining mode of production. This shift to more complex causal relations reflects Foucault’s inexorable turn to seeing power as diffused, decentralized, and arranged in microphysical relations. Methodologically, this means not just examining each element of this heterogeneous composition, but focusing on the effects of a given dispositif—in terms of what we can say, see, or be.

This raises the challenge of understanding the precise nature of the interconnection between these heterogeneous discursive and nondiscursive elements. Foucault acknowledges this is no easy task: “it is like a game, the changing of positions, the modifications of function, which can also vary widely” (p. 299, Trans. mine). Three things should be immediately emphasized: first, with the dispositif there is no a priori causality or determination—that is, there is no non-discursive base from which the discursive emanates; nor is there a transcendental subject which provides a normative matrix to coordinate those
effects. Indeed, the utility of the dispositif comes to those for whom it answers a particular need. Unraveling the complex relations that bring about this need is one way of proceeding if there is neither an originary subject nor an unchanging, objective, transcendent truth. Second, these discursive-nondiscursive elements do not emanate from a singular source, like the mode of production. Nor are those heterogeneous elements linked in any inherent or originary way; instead, they are compositional in particular relations. So, for example, the famous discursive formation of the panopticon can at one time serve as a programme for the prison while later it can guide new techniques and practices to gather a digital data shadow through the cookies that accumulate surfing the internet. Third, while it will be taken up in the following chapter on power and marxism, it must be made explicit that Foucault is deploying the complex relations that comprise the dispositif as a means of getting beyond a juridical or economic conceptualization of power:

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” (Foucault, 1996c, p. 235).

This quote risks further confusion. It has been alleged by some that Foucault used the dispositif, in part, to commit “parricide” against Althusser who was his supervisor in his early student days. Althusser, in rendering his marxism both more structualist and scientific, spoke of ideological and repressive state “apparatuses”. The complexity of the relationship of Foucault to Althusser is deserving of its own study.¹⁵ For now, I simply want to differentiate dispositif from
apparatus (which in French is a different word: “appereil”), noting that for Foucault the latter is contained in the former. Indeed, this is an opportune moment to clarify the quotidian, as opposed to Foucault’s conceptual, definition of dispositif. La Petit Larousse Illustré defines dispositif as follows: 1) “an ensemble of parts which constitute a mechanism or some sort of apparatus; 2) an ensemble of measures taken, the means put to work for a determined goal; 3) an arrangement of means which adopt a military formation to execute a mission; and, 4) a legal term denoting a part of a judgment in which the tribunal’s decision is expressed preceding the motives that justify the decision taken.”

Even in its everyday usage then, the dispositif is something more than just an apparatus. It is not simply a non-discursive thing, a mechanism or apparatus like a particular state formation such as the school. There are always discursive components—“an ensemble of measures” or “an arrangement of means”; and, those measures or means are brought together for a particular reason, a determined goal or mission. In short, there is always a “functional” aspect to a dispositif. Yet there is one more definition which I omitted that further nuances the term dispositif. In theatre, the spatial organization of the set is called a “dispositif scénique.” Metaphorically, at least, this sense of spatial deployment is useful for understanding how a dispositif allows us to “see” that of which we “speak” and in turn to speak of what we see. Furthermore, it indicates that there is nothing natural, transcendent, or necessarily permanent about a dispositif; rather, it is the set design of myriad historical stages, an assemblage that has come together at a particular historical moment for a reason.
So there is always a purpose to the spatial deployment, to the particular composition of any dispositif’s heterogeneous ensemble. Dispositifs then, are assemblages which come together always in response to an “urgent need”. Foucault emphasizes this fundamental characteristic of the dispositif: a “formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need. Thus the dispositif has a dominant strategic function” (Foucault, 2001f, p. 299, Trans. mine). In this interview we can evince the political makeup of the Italian Foucault, the one with clear lines of affinity to and shared diagnostic concerns with marxisms. The example he offers of an urgent need is “the assimilation of a floating population found to be burdensome for an essentially mercantilist economy: there was a strategic imperative acting here as the matrix for a dispositif which gradually undertook the control or subjection of madness, mental illness and neurosis” (p. 299, Trans. mine).

Instead of any singular causal determination, we can instead think of the “first moment” of any given dispositif: as a strategic objective in response to an urgent need. And once it is assembled, a dispositif is reproduced through a “double process” of “functional overdetermination” and “strategic elaboration”. The first moment of this process again is reminiscent of Althusser. However, Althusser’s overdetermination was meant to offer a more sophisticated reading of the mode of production as being displaced throughout society in a multiply determined manner.

Freud initially used overdetermination to understand “deep” meaning, displaced in dream content and only decipherable in a hermeneutic reading
aided by psychoanalytic scientific techniques and practices. Althusser, in turn, posits the “scientific” position of a proper Marxism through which these overdetermined processes can be understood. Foucault, on the other hand, deployed the dispositif specifically to do two things: first, to move beyond the singular causality ascribed to the mode of production; and second, to reject such hermeneutic pursuits. On this point the credo he stated in the Droit interview bears repeating: “Substitute the logic of strategies for the logic of the unconscious; replace the privileged place accorded to the signifier and its semiotic connections with an attention to tactics and apparatuses.” But while Althusser conceived of overdetermination as having different levels of articulation— the economic, the political, the ideological—they all remained contained in a singular complexly structured totality. Dispositifs, however, are as numerous as there are social fields. So, for Foucault, the dispositif is not a matter of a contradiction between “imaginary” conditions in relation to “real” conditions of existence. It is only through dispositifs that the ‘truth’ of any real is produced.

What is most important about the “functional overdetermination” is that “contradictory” effects are to be fully expected, not something that needs to be smoothed out or overcome in a dialectical process: “thus each effect, positive or negative, wanted or unwanted, enter into resonance or contradiction with each other, and call for a renewal, for a readjustment of the heterogeneous elements that surface here and there” (p. 299, Trans. mine). In short, it is expected and positively understood that the “programme” of a dispositif and its “real” manifestation will always be marked by unexpected effects and gaps.
The second part of this double process is a perpetual process of “strategic elaboration”. As noted, contradictions are a constitutive part of the dispositif; and, its reproduction is always guided in part by unintended effects and consequences. Foucault offered the example of imprisonment as outlined in *Discipline and Punish*—“the dispositif which at a given moment was made into the measure of detention which appeared to be the most efficacious and reasonable instrument that could be applied to the phenomena of criminality” (pp. 299-300, Trans. mine).” Yet what unforeseen effect did the prison produce?: the emergence of the “delinquent milieu” which produced new “criminal” techniques, practices, and subjectivities. On the one hand, we can see a recasting of the dynamic which plays out in relations of power—unforeseen effects emanate from the potential for resistance which are always prior to the deployment of any given dispositif. The understanding that resistance comes prior to strategies of domination is a point of great conceptual resonance with autonomist thought. On the other hand, it is through this dynamic of resistance met by strategies seeking containment that strategic elaboration plays out. For example, from this unforeseen effect of the delinquent milieu emerged diverse political and economic practices such as the categorization of and institutions for juvenile delinquents. A more contemporary example of this can be seen in what many observers of the state intelligence community refer to as “blowback” (Johnson, 2000). For example, the initial dispositif of geopolitical containment was the Cold War which reheated with the Reagan administration’s covert forays into Afghanistan to fund the mujahadeen as “freedom fighters” against the Soviet
Union. From this, it can be argued that a kind of “jihad milieu” emerged as an unintended effect. When this culminated in September 11th, there was a reutilization of this milieu in the current war on terror, whose techniques, practices, and relations of power and knowledge have proliferated for “diverse political and economic ends”. In short, the reproduction, expansion, and changing composition of a given dispositif are not dependent upon a singular class or group of people in a star chamber. Rather, strategic elaboration is the manner in which the strategic game of power plays out.

Another point Foucault was at pains to emphasize in this presentation of the dispositif is the fundamental manner in which it differed from the episteme. This shift is constitutive of the political nature of the Italian Foucault. In his interview several years previous with Preti, the specific “scientific” nature of the episteme was made clear: “When I speak of epistemes, I mean all those relationships which existed between the various sectors of science during a given époque” (Foucault, 1996b, p. 96) like those between math and physics or linguistics and biology or even evolution and the social sciences. In short, epistemes are a matter of the relationships and communication among the various sciences. By 1977 such linguistic concerns of structural relations were no longer adequate. The matrix of “the episteme, knowledge, and discursive formations” which figured so prominently in The order of things and The archeology of knowledge was now seen as a trap: “I was in a dead end. Now, what I would like to do is to try to show that what I call the dispositif is something much more general than the episteme” (Foucault, 2001f, pp. 300-301, Trans.
mine). One major difference is the more heterogeneous composition of the dispositif with both discursive and nondiscursive elements.

Retrospectively he defined the episteme as "the strategic dispositif that permits the selection among all the possible statements those that can be acceptable within, I won't say a scientific theory, but a field of scientificity which would allow us to say: this here is true or false" (p. 301, Trans. mine). Again, the two major difference between the episteme and the dispositif is that the former is exclusively discursive, and, that it denotes only scientificity not truth—unless one is thinking in terms of scientific validity.

Another point of clarification is necessary, between the discursive and nondiscursive. When asked by Miller why nondiscursive "institutions" are not discursive—given that they are "signifying ensembles"—we can more clearly see the political Italian Foucault. His response delineates this Foucault from the one contained in the pages of *The order of things* or *The archeology of knowledge*: "But I don’t believe it is very important to make such a distinction given my problem is not a linguistic one" (p. 302, Trans. mine). Hallmarks of an earlier Foucault have dropped away: a definitive shift from the structuralist terrain and its contours defined by "science"; and, purely linguistic concerns are not adequate to questions of power and the complex struggle of relations in which it functions. As for institutions, Foucault likens them to "every kind of more-or-less constrained or learned behaviour...in short, all the field of the nondiscursive social is an institution" (p. 301, Trans. mine). Pressed on this point by Miller, Foucault dismisses the importance of differentiating in isolation a discursive domain which
signifies from a nondiscursive domain which functions. Instead, he again emphasizes the relations; what is of interest are the gaps and differences, the degree of conformity between the discursive plan or strategy, and its nondiscursive material implementation. These elements can only ever signify or function in relation to one another. Thus the discursive is the plane on which particular kinds of statements can be made. If we take as an example the aforementioned criminality, the discursive form could be 18th century penal law: its substance delinquency, laws, regulations, and architectural planning. The nondiscursive of criminality would be prisons, juvenile detention, not to mention barracks, schools, and factories. Finally, there are all the various subjectivities found within.

The dispositif, then, is a methodological frame: what we can see, what we can say about what we see and vice versa, and what we can be can only ever transpire or have any meaning as a result of the complex interplay of these relations. The exact nature of these relations and the causalities therein is something that is not given in advance; nor is there a singular key or explanatory model that can be applied to all dispositifs. It is the effects, and the regularity of their reproduction, however, that comprises the diagnostic (and hence political) aspect of the dispositif. This is a double articulation, if you will—the dispositif both as a concept methodologically employed, and as a complex set of relations which produce meaning. One could say that the dispositif is a method that offers a plane of expression and a plane of content that allows us to speak of that which we see, and to see that of which we speak. Thus, regarding the dispositif as a
method for scholarly inquiry, it might be said that it is a "methodology without guarantees". Even in regards to the difference between the object of "criminality" examined in *Discipline and punish*, and the new focus on the dispositif of sexuality Foucault comes back to the strategic game: "That is what is at play in the game, and if there will be six volumes, it is because it is a game" (p.312, Trans. mine).

**Not a “delusive” appearance but a “fabrication”**

In other words, the game of the dispositif is the interplay of relations. For some, the thought of a "methodology without guarantees" is extremely unpalatable. For some in the French milieu in which it arose it seemed tantamount to blasphemy; it is important to remember here that structuralism as a method augmented its institutional standing precisely because it was guaranteed as a science. Psychoanalysis was no exception; as a method and a practice, the surer its scientific foundation, the more it could flourish. Miller’s shock at Foucault’s dispositif, then, is not surprising: “Yes, you accentuate with pleasure the artificial character of your procedure. Your results depend upon your choice of reference, and the choice of references depends on the conjuncture” (p. 314, Trans. mine). Foucault had provoked this consternation in part by emphasizing that methodological uncertainty always preceded the dispositif. He gave the example of how he initially thought of “sex” as a pre-given datum upon which the dispositif—the discursive and institutional formations— was grafted. But as his research progressed, this notion became untenable. “So I turned the thing upside-down. It was a game, because I was not quite sure...” (p. 313.
Trans. mine). Foucault describes his eureka moment in which the elements of the heterogeneous ensemble came together, in his realization that “sex” itself was produced by the dispositif of sexuality. So the discursive formation of sexuality was initially applied to the body, the sexual organs, the pleasures, and the relations themselves, in turn producing “sex”. It is this heterogeneous ensemble which is overlaid by the dispositif of sexuality “which produces, at a given moment, like the keystone of its own discourse and perhaps its functioning, the idea of sex.” It is not falsity, then, but fabrications which produce “truth”.

There are implications to be considered. Namely, that any given dispositif, in this case sexuality, is that which provides its own verity. This is a far cry from the structuralist paradigm of which Foucault may have never been a member of but from which he nonetheless differentiated himself. To say that this verity results from the complex interplay of these heterogeneous elements which have come together in response to an urgent need is to emphasize the “game” but not in terms of it being an anything-goes playground free-for-all. For the stakes in this game are precisely truth. And the game is a different way of noting that the dispositif can only ever be understood in the midst of struggle, inscribed in a play of power. But that power is only ever related to particular coordinates of knowledge which both support that knowledge but are also supported by that power. As Foucault states clearly, “This is the dispositif: the strategies of relations of force supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge” (p. 300, Trans. mine). So the game of the dispositif is the strategic play of these lines of force. And it is that strategic play in the middle of any given heterogeneous
ensemble that marks the dispositif as a methodology as well. Recalling the Droit interview, Foucault stated this clearly: "In the end, method is nothing other than strategy".

For Miller, this laying bare the strategic nature of the methodology of the dispositif was seemingly too much to bear. On top of the "artificial character" of the dispositif, he was troubled by the implication that it is all a matter of appearances. Foucault's answer is short but instructive: "It is not false appearances, it is a fabrication." This distinction is critical in order to appreciate how the dispositif is differentiated from some usages of ideology. A dispositif is never interested in determining the verisimilitude of appearances; a dispositif never "represents" anything falsely or accurately. The concept of the dispositif is only about fabrication, never about falsity. The fabrication is precisely the heterogeneous ensemble; the only verisimilitude is in trying to identify the elements which have already come together in response to an urgent need. The fabrication is that ensemble which expresses, not represents, the complex relations and strategic interplay of all those elements. These fabrications, these dispositifs are expressive of a complex network that enables us to see and speak, and which plays out through a logic of strategies and tactics not a theory of the unconscious and signifiers.

Miller, perhaps unwittingly, in expressing his consternation brought the Italian Foucault to the surface: "Okay, and this fabrication is motivated by what you want, your hopes, your..." Foucault responds in the guise of his conceptual persona: "That's it, this is where the political or polemical objective [of the
dispositif] appears." And with needling irony he concludes, "But polemics, you know I never do that, and I'm distanced from politics" (p. 314, Trans. mine).

That distance would have to be measured in a curious manner. In September that year, Foucault participated in the "Forum de la 'deuxième gauche' à Paris". This was a different kind of heterogeneous ensemble, gathering intellectuals, activists, and others on the left who had rejected not only the centralized, hierarchical structure of the French Communist Party, but representational politics in general. The urgent need that they were responding to was the "Programme commun", a coalition on the left between the communists, socialists, and the radical left that came together with the goal of winning a majority in the French National Assembly. By September 1977 this coalition was on the verge of breaking apart; among other things, participants in the "deuxième gauche" were considering what could be characterized as more microphysical political options. At almost the exact same time, there was a similar gathering in Bologna, a forum which brought together autonomists, and another heterogeneous ensemble of the extra-parliamentary left.
CHAPTER 2: CRISIS: (MARXIST) FRIENDS AND RIVALS OF THE ITALIAN FOUCAULT

There are two evocative historical figures that link the Italians and Foucault in terms of their reconceptualizations of the dynamic of power. One is a worker, forced to emigrate from the Mezzogiorno (Southern Italy) and work in the factories of Torino, Milano and other industrial cities in the North during the 1950s and early 1960s. It was the spirit of autonomy and recalcitrance of such workers that helped to inspire autonomist thought in Italy. In the words of one such worker: “The factory is a prison without air... the sun, the fresh air, these are beautiful things, my friend, and when I am dead who will give me back the days that have been stolen from me in the factory?” (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 225). The other historical figure is one whose voice is rescued by Foucault from the archives, where he made a mark in “infamy” only because of his extraordinary spirit of refusal and undiluted desire for autonomy. In 1840, amidst capitalist industrialization, he was forced to stand in judgment because of his opposition to the commodification of his labour power:

**Judge:** One must sleep at home.

**Béasse:** Have I got a home?

**Judge:** You live in perpetual vagabondage.

**Béasse:** I work to earn my living.

**Judge:** What is your station in life?
Béasse: My station--to begin with, I'm thirty-six at least; I don't work for anybody. I've worked for myself for a long time now. I have my day station and my night station. In the day, for instance, I hand out leaflets free of charge to all passers-by; I run after the stage-coaches when they arrive and carry luggage for the passengers; I turn cart-wheels on the avenue de Neuilly; at night there are shows; I open coach doors, I sell pass-out tickets; I've plenty to do.

Judge: It would be better for you to be put in a good house as an apprentice and learn a trade.

Béasse: Oh, a good house, an apprenticeship, it's too much trouble. And anyway the bourgeois...always grumbling, no freedom.

Judge: Does not your father wish to reclaim you?

Béasse: Haven't got no father.

Judge: And your mother?

Béasse: No mother neither, no parents, no friends. free and independent.

...Hearing his sentence of two years in a reformatory, Béasse pulled an ugly face, then recovering his good humor, remarked: 'Two years, that's never more than twenty-four months. Let's be off then.'

Here we can keep the spirit of Béasse in mind and go directly to crossroads between Foucault and Italy in 1976-77. This will help contextualize the "walls" of theory and praxis the Italian Foucault was trying to overcome at that time.

Theoretical and political interventions in power relations

We've already seen that for Foucault, the relationship between theory and praxis was a transversal rather than hierarchical one; and, that when one reaches a theoretical impasse, new concepts are necessary to move forward and
vice versa for praxis. In resonance with similar practices in everyday life in Italy, the 1970s had been a long period of political experimentation for both Foucault and the radical left in France. We also previously noted that Foucault (along with his "Italian" fellow-travellers Deleuze and Guattari) saw himself working in the mode of the "specific intellectual"—that is, as intervening in local struggles in specific relations of power. Although Foucault used the categories of "specific" and "general" to conceptualize the field in which the intellectual operates, he did so not to privilege one modality over the other; rather, it was because he saw the intellectual in medias res, in between the local and the global, the specific and the general. In short, this is the ground of the micropolitical. Rather than a simple inversion of the value of the "micro" over the "macro," micropolitics unfold in the midst of relationships between different social and economic groups, through the family, through specific localities, through cultural expression, and through different subjectivities—in relations which, to varying degrees, are always articulated between the local and global.

The diffused nature of such theory and practice has long been a point of contestation and misunderstanding between Foucault and various Marxists. When we consider a specific instance of such contretemps shortly, it is important to keep the following in mind. Foucault himself was very aware of the real limits to specific-intellectual activism and localized struggle. He was questioned at length on this and its relationship to Marxism in June 1976 by Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino—both of whom have remained among Foucault’s most thoughtful Italian interlocutors. The following quote appeared the
following year in Italy in *Microfisica del potere: interventi politici*, a text that was very influential among the more creative wing of autonomia, such as Bifo and Paolo Virno:

> [T]he specific intellectual encounters certain obstacles and faces certain dangers. The danger of remaining at the level of conjectural struggles, pressing demands restricted to particular sectors. The risk of letting himself be manipulated by the political parties or trade union apparatuses that control these local struggles. Above all, the risk of being unable to develop these struggles for lack of a global strategy or outside support (Foucault, 2000a, pp. 129-30).

This leads neither to an about-face nor a simple reprivileging of the general, nor to inchoate diffusion. Two things can be noted here. The first harkens back to that previous Italian—Gramsci—as it addressed the specific role of the intellectual. Foucault suggests one of the ways the specific intellectual’s “position can take on a general significance, and that her local, specific struggle can have effects and implications that are not simply professional or sectoral” is by working within and against “the politics of truth in our societies….The intellectual can operate and struggle at the general level of that regime of truth so essential to the structure and functioning of our society” (p. 132). The implications of operating—in subversion or support—in a “regime of truth” will be kept in mind as we proceed.

Now let us consider the aforementioned in relation to theoretical and political interventions in power that were taking place in 1977. Within the realm of representational politics and the pursuit of State power, some five years previous, the Socialist party joined with the French Communist Party (PCF) and the Radical Left under the “Programme commun”; as the 1970s progressed, the
PCF increasingly chafed in its junior role in the coalition. The month of September 1977 was somewhat of a watershed for a coalition that could no longer hold. That was when the PCF chose to reassert its ties to the Soviet Union, making it even more of an anathema to both the socialists and to the radical left.

Amidst this crisis, in early September there was a forum of other forces on the left who were looking beyond State power. Foucault was in attendance at this conference, although true to his theorization of the specific intellectual, he participated only in the workshop on community medicine. As the editors of *Dits et Écrits* noted, even in this time of a more radical Foucault, he remained largely an outsider and his militancy seemed to unfold with one eye askew. “He had always affirmed his skepticism of the strategy of self-managed socialism, his hostility of the national-Leninists of the Programme commun, and the operational weakness of the opposition between the State and civil society” (Defert and Ewald, 2001, pp. 329-30, Trans. mine). Nonetheless, there he was at a forum held by the left-wing magazine *Le nouvel observateur* charged with the double task of 1) taking stock of the social and political experiments which unfolded in the aftermath of May ’68 and had attempted to modify both social and economic relations in education, health care, working conditions, city life, and the environment—a trajectory that went beyond State power; and 2) contrasting those experiments with those on the left who sought to affirm their political and cultural autonomy through representational politics—specifically, the Programme Commun which pursued State power.
This brings us to the heart of what has long been a central struggle on the left: namely, the pursuit of radical social and economic transformation through existing liberal democracy (via Leninist means or otherwise) or through autonomist extra-parliamentary action. Such particular struggles in both France and Italy circa the mid-70s mark the historical plane of the Italian Foucault. For some time Foucault had been devoted primarily to the extra-parliamentary trajectory that looked beyond State power. He noted that during the two days of discussion and debate, not a single person among the 30 participants in the community medicine forum once mentioned the upcoming French elections. “[This development] is important and significant. Innovation no longer comes from the parties, the unions, the bureaucrats or politics. They no longer ask political theory to say what is to be done, and no longer need guardians. This change is ideological and profound” (Foucault, 2001a, p. 330, Trans. mine). In this interview which was subsequently published in La nouvel observateur, Foucault was asked whether this “total refusal of politics” and “repugnance of constituted power” was unsettling. He responded in the negative. On the contrary, he was buoyed by the “grand movement” of the past 15 years—a veritable “cultural mobilisation” from his perspective. “Politically irretrievable: they sense well that at no moment would the nature of their problems change if the government were to change. And, for that, I rejoice” (p. 331, Trans. mine).

Electoral change did come about. In 1978, in-fighting between the then divided Socialists and Communists allowed the right to take that year’s legislative elections. Yet by 1981, the Socialists were swept to power and by then
Foucault's insouciance regarding electoral politics was no longer so apparent. Of course, that does fall outside of the general time frame in which the Italian Foucault appears. But as this conceptual persona was always already a kind of bastard, his words following the Mitterrand victory are offered as a kind of spectre that haunts the debate that will follow regarding the State and power and resistance:

To me it seems this election was felt by many to be a kind of victorious event; it is said to be a modification of relations between those who govern and the governed. Not that those who are governed have taken the place of those who govern. After all, what happened was a change in the political class... We must exit from this dilemma: where one is for or one is against. After all, we can both stand up and face one another. Working with a government implies neither subjugation nor total acceptance. One may both work and be recalcitrant. I even think the two go together (Foucault, 2001c, pp. 998-99, Trans. mine).

In subsequent pages, there are two points that should be kept in mind: first, that with the Italian Foucault there are no "pure" actions against dominant power nor are there singular positions of dominator-dominated given their relational composition; and two, that subsequently, there is less concern over purportedly contradictory actions that would lead to "reformism." In short, it is not a matter of either/or when it comes to State or microphysical power—indeed, increasingly it is about the composition of those complex sets of networked relations.
Nicos Poulantzas: Friend/rival of the Italian Foucault

Concepts can never have enough friends and the dispositif is no exception. Again we come back to this basic point stressed by Deleuze and Guattari:

For if the philosopher is the friend or lover of wisdom, is it not because he lays claim to wisdom, striving for it potentially rather than actually possessing it? Is the friend also the claimant then, and is that of which he claims to be the friend the Thing to which he lays claims but not the third party who, on the contrary, becomes a rival? Friendship would then involve competitive distrust of the rival as much as an amorous striving toward the object of desire. The basic point is that the two friends are like claimant and rival (but who could tell them apart?) (Deleuze and Guattari, 1996, p. 4).

I want to propose another friend of the Italian Foucault, surely a rival, and a claimant of a new conceptualization of power. Nicos Poulantzas was in the middle of his final striving toward a renewed understanding of the state at the very time Foucault was seemingly reaching an impasse with radical praxis which had leavened his extraparliamentary activities throughout the decade. Like another friend, the Italian Mario Tronti, Poulantzas remained a member of the Communist Party. Yet his work marked a progressive disillusionment with any Leninist vanguardism by the Party and a growing enchantment instead with new social movements. As one observer noted, "In the last years of his life (he took his life in October 1979) he constituted perhaps the last, fragile link between the Marxist left and surging post-Marxist ex-Left in France" (Therborn, 1987). Here it is not merely the fragility of those links but the important affinity between the not-so-felicitously named "Marxist" and "post-Marxist" left. Even an avowed communist like Poulantzas recognized that the pursuit of any pure filiations with
Marxism was a weak endgame: “we cannot ask Marxism (this time, the “true” Marxism) to provide an infallible formula, purged of all deviations, with which to ensure a genuine transition to democratic socialism” (Poulantzas, 2000, p. 23). More importantly, Poulantzas was increasingly influenced by Foucault in the 1970s, an important conceptual development not only noted by many (Hall, 1980; Jessop, 1985) but also clearly evident on the surface of State, Power, Socialism. For example, in regards to the inscription of state techniques and practices on the political body, Poulantzas writes: “Foucault’s elaboration has considerable value, since it furnishes a materialist analysis of certain institutions of power. Not only does it sometimes concur with Marxist analyses—a point which Foucault is careful not to see, or state—but in a number of respects it may even enrich them” (Poulantzas 2000, p. 67).

What gave Poulantzas such deep resonance for many in the 1970s was his reconceptualization of the state as a complex set of institutions and material practices with its own relative autonomy. Others were disturbed by what they saw as a displacement of class struggle. A reductive summary of the debates around his work might be divided on the predictable axis of what is to be done: proponents looked for a heterogeneous array of action largely through new social movements; detractors decried what they saw as the omission of class struggle and working class movements.

I would like to link Poulantzas to the Italian Foucault by further contextualizing the former within that longstanding postwar debate within Marxism over the State. Very briefly, there was a public contestation of
considerable import from the late-1960s to the mid-1970s between Poulantzas and British Marxist Ralph Miliband which played out largely in the pages of the *New Left Review* (Miliband 1970, 1973; Poulantzas, 1969, 1973). Poulantzas proceeded from the orbit of an Althusserian structuralism that criticized earlier critical accounts for their emphasis on class and ideology (a "problematic" of the subject) and posited the relative autonomy of the state due to an institutional separation from capitalist production. The more orthodox Miliband objected that capitalist states are always controlled by pro-capitalist forces, and that the capitalist subjectivities (i.e. particular CEOs, etc.) had material impacts of varying intensities. Poulantzas countered that, because of the structural effects of capital, the state always already facilitated the reproduction of capital, regardless of the intentionality of individual capitalists. In turn, Miliband argued that the ramifications of this assertion was to negate the possibility and space for class struggle. The subjectivities of workers mattered too. More notably, he argued the Poulantzian position was insufficiently contradictory—the emphasis on the "reproduction" of the relations of production underplayed the state's position as a site of contention and struggle. This debate remained unresolved upon the untimely death of Poulantzas, although the influence of the "structuralist" position began to wane in state theory.21

The role of the state, struggle/resistance, and power are the salient points I would like to draw out of this debate in relation to Poulantzas' conceptual engagement with Foucault. There is a longstanding summary of this debate that originally appeared soon after the suicide of Poulantzas.22 Stuart Hall identifies
the struggle of Poulantzas to emerge from Althusserian orthodoxy which came about largely through his contradictory and sometimes antagonistic theoretical engagement with Foucault. Althusser himself was both the source of commonality and differentiation. Poulantzas picks up on Foucauldian language like "discourse", "discipline", and "techniques of knowledge", among others. Hall, however, regards the attempts largely as a failure, especially because of Poulantzas's insistence on the crystallization of Foucauldian power in the organizational framework of the State. Due to the manner in which it focuses the question at hand, it is worth quoting from Hall at length:

[Foucault] is developing a different problematic—one, moreover, which is, at several key points, theoretically inconsistent with Poulantzas's framework of 'classical Marxism'. Foucault is not simply pointing, in particular instances, to the proliferation of discourses. He is advancing a theory of their necessary heterogeneity. Similarly, Foucault's 'abstract diagram of power', present everywhere in the positive face of power, and in the microstructures of all types of social relations, is explicitly counterposed to the concept of power radiating from a complex centre. The capitalist state is largely missing from this schema, not by inadvertence but by design. Thus it is not possible, theoretically, for Poulantzas to take these concepts on, only 'correcting' them by reintegrating them into a more conventional conception of the state, state power, and class relations (Hall in Poulantzas, p. xiv).

What underlies most of this "different problematic" is marxism. The very conceptual persona of the Italian Foucault is an expression of productive relations between Foucault and marxism, although the trajectory of the latter is always at odds with more orthodox positions. Poulantzas is of special interest because he enables a conjunctural analysis of these conceptual tensions. Before delving in detail into Foucault's "methodological precautions" vis-à-vis power, I'd like to sketch out the lines of affinity and divergence of Poulantzas the friend and
rival. I present this not as a definitive critique nor as the marxist frame. Instead, this friend and rival is presented as a serious interlocutor who expresses the distance—which is both near and far—that remains between those positions. This distance can provide further contextualization not only for Foucault’s own complex relationship with marxism, but to emphasize the heterogeneity of marxism itself, which is expressed further through the divergent particularities of the autonomists that comprise the “Italian” of my conceptual persona. To map that ratio of distance, I will present what moves and troubles Poulantzas vis-à-vis Foucault. After doing so, we will turn to the work of Foucault in response.

The state

Poulantzas’s marxist bottom line, if you will, begins with a caveat: “Power is not at all reduced to, or identified with, the State—contrary to the assertions of Foucault and Deleuze that, for marxism, “power is state power…” No, as with the social divisions of labour and the class struggle, relations of power go far beyond the State” (Poulantzas, 2000, p. 36) As mentioned, Poulantzas himself was already in a longstanding dispute over the role of the State within marxism, and thus was seeking to clarify his position as well—an engagement with multiple friends and rivals. As such, Poulantzas offered the following as basic marxist propositions. First, the “cornerstone” of power in a class divided society is class power. Second, “political power is primordial” in its effects on other fields of power even though it is “grounded” in the relations of production. Third, there are “distinct fields of power” including the economic and the political. Finally, “power is pre-eminently concentrated and materialized by the State, which is thus the
central site of the exercise of power” (p. 45). In short, we have class power, political power, and, of course, economic power all in the forefront and condensed in complex relations in the State.

The notion that the State is the central site from which power either emanates or within which it is condensed remains a central distinction between Foucault and the marxism of Poulantzas. Yet Poulantzas brought a nuanced and sophisticated perspective to what comprised what he called “State-Power”—especially via the vectors through which it was expressed in capitalist corporality. However, these vectors remain linked to his marxism: “[t]he political technology of the body has its primary roots in the frame of reference of the relations of production and the social division of labour” (p. 67). Poulantzas is steadfast on this point. The only grid of intelligibility is in “reference of the relations of production and the social division of labour.” Arguably, this marks the main site of tension between Foucault and those on a more marxian trajectory.

This point is clear with Poulantzas’s assertion that Foucault’s “compatibility” with Marxism can proceed, but “[t]wo conditions have to be fulfilled.” First, “we must have a correct conception of “the economic” that grounds the institutional specificity of modern power.” The idea put forth by the rival is that Foucault is not concerned with “relations of production and social division of labour they entail.” What Poulantzas wants to clarify is the relationship between the “economic” and “techniques of power-knowledge” which constitute individuals at a given historical moment. Suddenly the “friend” momentarily reappears: “here Foucault is perfectly correct...[the link cannot be understood] if
"economic" is held to designate exclusively or principally the sphere of circulation and commodity-exchange—a designation that a certain kind of Marxism has long attempted to convey (p. 69). Key affinities are expressed here. Poulantzas was following a more Foucauldian trajectory: through questions of "capitalist corporality" and of "political techniques of the body". In both instances, Poulantzas evinces two things: first, an awareness of the growing importance of subjectivity and its increasingly fundamental role within the economic, in general, and the expansion of capitalist markets specifically; and second, of the conflation of material and discursive lines. Both inflections, it should be emphasized, are what I am arguing precisely are taken up in the dispositif.

The second point that must be met, according to Poulantzas, is that the "complexity" of spatial and temporal matrices which comprise the State’s relationship to “relations of production and social division of labour” must be fully examined. In short, in what ways is a specifically capitalist time and space instantiated in the State form? This echoes the concerns of Fernand Braudel and the longue durée historians. It also resonates with Marx’s original insight into the processes through which capitalist market relations get inscribed in time and space through formal and then real subsumption. To clarify this point, both Poulantzas and the historians wanted to differentiate multiple spatial and temporal dimensions, and in both cases were heavily influenced by structuralism. Here, Poulantzas lays charges that Foucault reverts to abstract and “almost metaphysical diagrams” while he proceeds to sketch out the specific temporal and spatial characteristics of the modern totalitarian-fascist State.
Regardless, there are a few more salient points here. The first is to recall that Greece had only recently emerged from a long anti-democratic period, and the fascist military dictatorship of Giorgios Papadopoulos. Even more important, in his examination of totalitarian and fascist states, Poulantzas disassociates any possible connection between their manifestation and “class struggle”. Instead, fascist and totalitarian states come about “precisely because the roots of evil are lodged in the very heart of the relations of production, the social division of labour, and the material framework of the State” (Poulantzas, 2000, p. 74). This renders the gaps between Poulantzas and the Italian Foucault into a yawning chasm. It should be kept in mind when we discuss what Foucault means by the polyvalency and iterability of power relations—are there really a priori dominators and dominated? Another question to be asked is whether that will to domination or exploitation is something mystically transferred from specific relations of production or division of labour? In short, questions that haunt Poulantzas’s interpretation are ones directly addressed by the Italian Foucault: is there not an inherent capacity in all of us for domination, or is it simply an “other” that gets inscribed upon bodies that are advantageously positioned in relation to capital through the social division of labour?

An expression of crisis: Class and resistance in Poulantzas’s Foucault

I want to conclude this framing of the Italian Foucault via Poulantzas by reconsidering elements which partially comprise the ongoing crises between
theory and practice—and which concomitantly express both the affinity and gaps between marxisms and Foucaults: the State, class, and resistance.

What is striking is that these tensions remain today, despite the ever increasing prominence and efficacy of new social movements and extra parliamentary practices. Of course, by no means do these crises always play out on lines of cohesion and divergence between marxisms and Foucaults, but it remains instructive nonetheless. Consider the following as a kind of laundry list, identifying key aspects that remain in crisis today. At times, Poulantzas is in line with Foucault—not to mention wide swathes of non-Leninist marxisms. Power, he writes, is not a "quantifiable substance held by the State" but rather "a series of relations among the various social classes" (p. 257). As well, radical change in relation to the State requires "the autonomy of the struggles and organizations of the popular masses" (p. 259). Then Poulantzas is seemingly sympatico with his Italian friends, stating that as the State withers away via increased autonomous political organizing and activities; the centralized form is gradually replaced by an array of "self-management networks". But there remains great unease and uncertainty over this process. Presumably for Foucault, and certainly for "new libertarians", the state is not only an anathema but it can be broken into pieces, "scattering it among an infinity of micro-powers" (p. 262). A problem remains, however: "the Leviathan-State is left in place." In short, what is to be done about the actual transformation of the State?

Then the rival reappears but the crisis remains the same. Foucault had just "rejoiced" at the complete disregard for parliamentary politics on the part of
those engaged in local struggles and actions. But Poulantzas kept a practical eye with a centralized focus: “The question of who is in power to do what cannot be isolated from these struggles for self-management or direct democracy” (p. 260). And what would the effect be of the increased autonomous activity: “all that remains is the instrumental State which you capture cog by cog or whose command posts you take over” (p. 258). This was, however, a process of radical social transformation which had more in common with Eurocommunism (as practiced by the PCI and PCF) than with the “Italian” autonomous movement or with “Foucault”. After 1977, one would be hard pressed to find Foucault speaking of socialism as an avowed goal, via “the democratic road” or otherwise.

Then there is the role of class. Here Poulantzas was largely at odds with Foucault. He was set on presenting a precise basis of power, namely the mode of production as expressed through class, exploitation through the labour process, and the state apparatus. The effect of this precise basis for power—as determining or causal, in complex relations or otherwise—remains a point of contestation. But for Poulantzas, despite his abiding interest in new social movements, there was no contest. He insistently repeats this point: “it is the primacy of the relations of production over the productive forces that give their articulation to the form of a process of production and reproduction” (p. 26). Or again,

We may even conclude that, in a society in which the State utilizes all power (e.g. phallocracy or the family) for the purposes of relaying class power, every struggle, be it heterogeneous to class struggles properly so called (e.g. the struggle between men and women), acquires its characteristic meaning only to the extent that class struggles exist and allow other struggles to unfold. (I am
leaving untouched the question whether these other struggles may be effectively articulated to class struggles, and whether such articulation is desirable.) (p. 148).

Poulantzas is too deft to insist upon an iron law of causality here but despite his attempts to develop a non-reductive heterogeneous view he remains centrally in the Marxian tradition. I have already noted how the dispositif also addressed, at least in part, this thorny question of causal relations, albeit with different conclusions. Still, the problem of causality continued to haunt the Italian Foucault.

A final axis on which to measure both the similarity and the distance between Foucault and Poulantzas is through the role of resistance. There are many other marxist rivals of Foucault who never tired of putting him in the pillory for his alleged conceptual disavowal of the possibility of resistance. Terry Eagleton, for example, espouses a similar critique, albeit in less nuanced terms. He was also scandalized by the pervasive and constitutive capacity of power relations:

But if this is so, what is there 'left over', so to speak, to find this situation so appalling? What, including one Michel Foucault, could conceivably protest against this condition, given that all subjectivity is merely the effect of power in the first place? If there is nothing beyond power, then there is nothing that is being blocked. categorized and regimented, and therefore absolutely no need to worry. Foucault does indeed speak of resistances to power; but what exactly is doing the resisting is an enigma his work does not manage to dispel (Eagleton, 1991, p. 47).

Indeed, for if Foucault insists on the ubiquity of power relations and avoids a determining centre, then where in this immanent field, does resistance take hold?
What has already been articulated by the Italian Foucault—that resistance comes first—can remain bracketed for now, as its expression has fallen largely on the deaf ears of such friends and rivals. For example, Poulantzas writes: "For if power is always already there, if every power situation is immanent in itself, *why should there ever be resistance? From where would resistance come, and how would it even be possible?*" (Poulantzas, 2000, p.149). The efficacy of resistance might have been in question for Foucault. But the possibility of resistance surely was not. Recalling the quote that begins this chapter, the ubiquity of power is not because domination is so omnipotent, but because it faces recalcitrance and resistance at every turn. What was a “trap” and a crisis, however, is the ongoing process of transformation of relations between domination and resistance. While the latter might be the dynamic which precedes the former, there remained the question of the continued rearticulation of asymmetrical relations.

Here too there are gaps with Poulantzas, who notes that while Foucault is in line with marxism in that “power is by nature relational and that struggles-resistances are never absolutely external to power” they are merely “two strictly equivalent poles of a relation: resistances have no basis” (p. 150). One must ask here whether Poulantzas wants to give a different ontological status to “resistance?” For, arguably, resistance is only ever “resistance” because of its position in relation to a more dominant array of forces which can reproduce itself in an efficacious manner.
But is it a matter, as Poulantzas claims, that this reduces the efficacy of Foucault only to “guerilla war” and to the “scattered harassment” of power? And does it lead “irresistibly to the idea of a Power-Master as the prime founder of all struggle-resistance...[wherein] struggles are originally and constitutively corrupted by power, of which they are a mere duplication, or even legitimation” (p. 149). Such questions and crises of thought and action signal a good time to go back to a distant Italian point which anchors a through-line for understanding resistance in the views of the Italian Foucault. This entails leaving Poulantzas for two more friends and rivals of the Italian Foucault’s. Notably, Mario Tronti and Sergio Bologna will be presented as a forbearer and contemporary, respectively, through their reconceptualizations of struggle, continuing to link Foucault to the themes of class and resistance. To do so, there will also be a necessarily schematic but focused overview of the autonomist movement. And it will conclude with events of ’77, bringing us back, not only to the conference in Bologna inspired by the “Appeal against the repressions in Italy” that Foucault signed, but the crisis that engulfed so much of the theory and practice of that time.

**Back to the future? Mario Tronti, labour and resistance in 1964**

Mario Tronti was perhaps the original talismanic figure in the broadly diverse movement of Italian autonomist marxist thought. But he was also a largely unreconstructed—at least in practice—upper-case M Marxist and PCI party member for most of the 1960s and 70s. By positing the working class as the source of power, he demonstrates far greater affinity with Poulantzas than
Foucault. He would still talk in terms of a “proletarian science”; more surprisingly, he was largely ambivalent about the autonomous organization of labour. It is surprising because back in 1964, in the new journal Classe Operaia (Working Class) Tronti turned marxism on its head, as it were. It is his Copernican revolution that marks Foucault’s atavistic relation, and it began with the following declaration:

We too have considered in first place capitalist development, and only afterward the workers struggles. This is an error. It is necessary to invert the problem, change the sign, and begin again: and the beginning is the struggle of the working class.

That is to say, resistance comes first. But this is not a simple relationship or a theoretical platitude meant to fortify working class practice. Instead it is presented as a complex relation. On the one hand, this relation is asymmetrical—i.e. working class struggle explains capital and capitalist society. On the other hand, working class struggle can be seen as a motor of development for capital. In short, it is the dynamic capacity of labour that is the force capital seeks to exploit; workers, however, are a resistant force and capital must always rearticulate its networked formation in order to contain that struggle. Throughout the long and contested history of autonomist thought and practice, as capitalist production was constantly being rearticulated to utilize that dynamic force, there was an urgent task: how can working class struggle become a force of rupture for capital?

This was a central question for the autonomist movement, from the very beginning when it was called operaismo. But what exactly is operaismo—which
translates rather unsatisfactorily as “workerism”? For what is now called
autonomia [autonomism] cannot be understood without some sense of the
history of operaismo from which it sprang forth. In his landmark introduction to
the English-language world of Italian autonomist marxism, Steve Wright’s
Storming Heaven offers a comprehensive overview, certainly the most rigorous
English-language source amidst a relative paucity of information. As Wright
noted, the origins of operaismo lie with various dissidents from both the PCI and
Socialist Party. Initially, they reconsidered Marx’s critique of political economy to
gain a better understanding of Italy’s rapidly changing industrial landscape—
widespread Fordist production; massive internal immigration from the peasant
South to Northern factories; and the recalcitrant spirit of Southern workers.

The early 1960s saw a flurry of new and diverse forms of workers’
struggles that spurred this new theoretical tendency into being. Some of these
actions were led by a small, but highly organized and long-radicalized cadre of
workers. These actions were often wildcat strikes, autonomous and
independently organized. But such struggles were also the result of a rich history
of radical politics in Italy. Many of these were militants from the Italian Resistance
in WWII; ex-shop stewards, ex-local leaders of the PCI who had broke with those
hierarchical organizations in search of greater autonomy and horizontal
organization. As Sergio Bologna noted, these struggles

were the result of a highly sophisticated political history, of workers
cadres and militants who had passed on the inheritance of a certain
political culture to workers groups. And, therefore, they had
succeeded in creating systems of struggle, maybe very partial, very
local, but which were already politically mature organisms
(Cunninghame, 1995).
*Operaismo*, then, was not, as Bologna emphasizes, a movement comprised by "political elite" as an active subject of struggle, suffused with ideas, knowledge, and strategy, that worked on a passive subject, a mass of workers only with inchoate desires and tensions. There was always a diversity of struggles. These "microsystems of struggle", as Bologna retrospectively called it, were not only the result of highly politicized cadres of workers. The phenomenon of autonomous struggle was not so straightforward. There was also a more "spontaneous" element of resistance being expressed. It was in order to better understand this autonomous struggle that the early autonomist journal *Quaderni Rossi* [Red Notebooks] was established.

Writing about the mass immigration within Italy from the rural south to the industrial north, noted historian Paul Ginsborg highlights the autonomous spirit of resistance of the internal migrant labourers, bringing a spirit of dissatisfaction and protest to the northern factories. As he report:

One foreman in a Turin factory said ‘the most difficult to deal with are the southerners, because they are the ones who get angry most often and who protest the most...[many small factories] had witnessed strikes of differing duration and outcome. Very often there had been no trade union organization in the factories; young southerners had taken the lead spontaneously, gradually persuading the rest of the workers to follow them (Ginsborg, 1990. p. 250-51).

This was the working class struggle that capital worked to contain profitably. This was the resistance that not only came first, it came without the guiding hand of party elite. And therein lie the roots of the crisis that would envelope the autonomist movement: autonomy without organization. As already
noted Tronti often drifted out of the Communist Party but always seemed to make his way back into its hierarchical centre. His practice was one of a struggle between autonomy and organization. And that struggle is expressed in his theory. Reflecting in 1965 on that recalcitrant spirit of labour, Tronti again waded into the crisis between autonomous action and the perceived need for political organization:

A prerequisite for this period of transition is political organization, the party, with its demand for total power. In the intervening period there is the refusal—collective, mass, expressed in passive forms—of the workers to expose themselves as 'a class against capital' without that organization of their own, without that total demand for power (Tronti, 1980, p. 29).

But beyond the struggle between autonomy and organization, Tronti was also trying to unpack the dynamic networked power relations between labour and capital. After all, it is the productivity of labour—even as it is expressed in resistance—that enabled the very existence of a class of capitalists. In other words, it is that productive capacity of labour which produces capital. The autonomy and organization was in relation to the bedeviled process whereby that productive labour is rearticulated in the production of capital. As long as this process continues, despite the proliferation of struggles, the working class remains "a class against capital". It is only in such particular sets of relations that the working class signifies as a class. The antagonism is structural, contained in the process whereby surplus value is attained through labour's productive capacity. What Tronti and autonomia struggled for was the transition of these complex networked power relations. The aforementioned transition is for the working class to become "a class in and for itself".

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The conceptual reversal made by Tronti—to think of labour before capital—needed more widespread valorization:

Namely, that the workers become, from the first, 'a class for themselves'—that is, from the first moments of direct confrontation with the individual employer—and that they are recognized as such by the first capitalists. And only afterwards, after a long, terrible, historical travail which is, perhaps, not yet, completed, do the workers arrive at the point of being actively, subjectively, 'a class against capital' (p. 29).

Tronti’s focus was on the temporal, organizational, and subjective gap between workers as a “class for itself” and as “a class against capital”. Asking questions similar to those of Lukacs, Tronti wanted to understand how the working class would transform its power into its own, and not as a dynamic source for capital. Hence, according to Tronti, there was a need for organizing. The working class played a complex role as that which both articulates capital and potentially forces its dissolution. For Tronti, then, within the complex relations of capital, the working class alone provides the coherence of that network, and can bring about capital’s divergence and eventual breakdown. Yet the knowledge of this particular double-articulation of the working class was not widely held or understood. There was a need for self-valorisation, which in part consisted of the construction and circulation of knowledge. Affinity to Foucault’s method of genealogy must be flagged here. Tronti was insistent upon the need for the diffusion of knowledge of the working class’ material composition as part of capital: “it must recognise itself as a particular aspect of capital, if it wants to be the latter’s general antagonist.”32
The diffusion of power in the "social factory"

I want to bracket, for a moment, the strong Leninist current in Tronti’s thought. Instead, to conclude for the moment this ongoing crisis between organization and autonomy, I want to highlight the process that Tronti lays out at the conclusion of “Lenin in England”. Struggle comes first—“the workers only need themselves, and the bosses facing them.” But it is the organizational form of labour seeking to rupture these relations, its regularity and continuity, which is “a rare and complex thing.” It’s not that labour cannot organize its struggles as that is a constant part of its dynamic relation with capital. What is at stake is the matter of efficacy: “no sooner is organization institutionalised into a form, than it is immediately used by capitalism (or by the labour movement on behalf of capitalism).” Then we reach an insight—which had already been heralded by Marx with the concept of the “real subsumption of labour”—that not only informed autonomist theory and practice through the 1970s, but one that also preceded Foucault’s own understanding of power which becomes increasingly diffused through micro-relations in everyday life. As struggle gets “institutionalised into a form” and capital rearticulates it to its own profitable ends, the antagonism of those relations gets displaced to other levels. There is a branching out, a divergence of those relations—from the factory to society in general.

As such, Tronti looked to the “total process of accumulation” with a much broader understanding of the reproduction of the working class as something that fully transcends the factory to include the home and all of society. There are two major ramifications: one is that the working class is not limited to workers but
includes students, women at home, and the unemployed; the second is that this broader understanding of "social capital" brought the "cultural sphere" to the forefront. Again, this is a conceptual turn that anticipates much of Foucault's eventual understanding of power.

In *Operai e Capitale* (*Workers and Capital*), Tronti extends the locus of power from the factory to society wherein the latter is subject to the former's logic of domination in order to extend the extraction of surplus value. In the "social factory" thesis in which general social relations become moments of production: "the whole of society becomes an articulation of power; in other words, the whole of society exists as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination over the whole of society." (Tronti qtd. in Wright, 2003, p. 38) Suffice to say that with little difficulty one could see in Tronti's concept a liminal zone between Foucault's disciplinary institutions (i.e. the factory) and social production diffused throughout the biopolis. More concisely, for Tronti, as real subsumption continues, capital's productive nodes proliferate outside the factory into everyday life, meeting resistance at every turn, forcing the continued dispersal "productive" sites through the social factory. Equally, with the onset of the biopolitical, Foucault sees a constant proliferation of concrete mechanisms of power, expanding concomitantly in a race to match the resistance that dispositifs always already face. Hence, "autonomy" is also central to Foucault's analysis of the microphysics of power. Indeed, that autonomous agency, in the form of resistance, is the "motor" which propels the accretion of power/knowledge relations on a capillary level. But this is getting us ahead of ourselves.
We can now come back to 1977 and turn to another friend of the Italian Foucault, Sergio Bologna. His article of that year, “Tribe of Moles” remains basic reading for anyone who wants to understand the radical social ferment in Italy during that decade. We would do well to remember that in Italy, it is said May ’68 lasted a whole decade; that is, after the “Hot Autumn” of 1969, there continued the social liberation of Italian students and youth combined with decidedly militant political practices.

In particular, there were myriad autonomist manifestations—Potere Operaia, Lotta Continua, Manifesto, Avanguardia Operaia—that all emerged in the wake of the “Hot Autumn” of 1969. Tronti’s contributions had already radically reconceptualized power: worker’s struggles came before capitalist domination; and the locus of power had been diffused from the factory to society. The Hot Autumn marked yet another conceptual turning point, this time in autonomist politics through the new focus on more “subjective” political issues. One clear such manifestation was Lotta Feminista (Women’s Struggle) which dropped a conceptual bombshell on the notion of production with its “Wages for Housework” demands. But the struggle between autonomy and organization continued. Indeed, Potere Operaia—of which Antonio Negri, Sergio Bologna, and Bifo were all initial adherents—itself was never a single party, true to the ambivalent, if not tortured relationship to organization that marked the movement. In practice it did not emerge with Leninist aspirations. Instead, it was “to parallel in certain striking ways that of German ultra-leftism during the early Weimar Republic. Anti-
parliamentarian, contemptuous of work within unions, committed to an
insurrectional perspective…” (Wright, 2003, p. 131). Nonetheless, it was never a
“mass” movement in any way, never numbering more than about 5,000 militants.

What marked *Potere Operaia* conceptually, was a “discovery” of the *Grundrisse* in 1971 which provided a new frame for understanding these
emergent political subjectivities. It is important to note the conceptual significance
of this shift to the *Grundrisse*. What makes it so different is the move away from a
critique of political economy in *Capital* which serves to “annihilate subjectivity in
objectivity, to subject the subversive capacity of the proletariat to the reorganizing
and repressive intelligence of capitalist power” (Negri, 1991a, p. 19). This entails
a clear extension of what Tronti had put forward: the productive and creative
capacity of labour is what comes first. This “subjective approach” also expresses
the possibility of a positive and constructive vision that flows out of labour
power—as opposed to it being exclusively a site of exploitation and alienation.
Yet this subjective determination of class identity—as opposed to it being simply
an objective category—was an anathema to more orthodox Marxists and to the
PCI.

This subjective determination was expressed across the breadth of the
social factory, by students, women, industrial labour, precarious workers, and the
unemployed. Despite the protests from more orthodox positions, many in the
autonomist movement remained committed to understanding the concrete
circumstances of this expansive class. There was an analytic focus on the
“technical composition” of the social factory—an examination of relations of force
within the labour process and detailing of the modifications of that process. But an understanding of that subjective realm—something increasingly of interest for Foucault during the same period—was a little more elusive.

Throughout the 1970s, those increasingly politicized subjectivities engaged in battles of varying intensities with institutional sites of power, be it capital, the state, the police, the university, or the party. Yet the relationship between the factory and society, and the worker to these new political subjects was hotly debated in a divisive manner. For Negri and others, the increasingly militant struggles of workers—their seizure of the FIAT Mirafiori plant in 1973 being among the more dramatic—swung them decisively toward the factory and working class. And by that same year, *Potere Operaia* had collapsed and *Autonomia Operaia* rose from its ashes. This did not, however, mark a return to orthodoxy. It was the “operaio sociale” or social worker that was the new focus. *Autonomia Operaia*, more an “archipelago” of diffuse and heterogeneous theory and practice than a party, sought to root itself directly in neighbourhoods and factories. While the idea was for “class direction” of action, *Autonomia Operaia*’s assumption was of increased militancy: “The only path possible is that of attack” (Cited in Wright, 2003, p. 153).

Sergio Bologna looked at the ground of the “social factory” and saw a tribe of moles burrowing through, emerging in struggle in the small factory, in the university, at the massive FIAT Mirafiori plant, and throughout the streets. For Bologna, this is what was most important: the “cycles of struggle” were no longer solely undertaken by the mass worker in the factory: “here we find instead a set
of recompositional mechanisms that start, precisely, from a base of dishomogeneity" (Bologna, 1980, p. 51). Thus the single mole of Marx's proletariat has given way to a "tribe of moles"; this entails a diffusion of struggle against capital. Here we see the sites of resistance that spring up wherever power relations seek to dominate throughout the social field—a notion central to Foucault.

Bologna saw this too, calling it "a system of struggle that is itself also infinitely decentralised" (p. 55). Looking back, we can see his important conceptual gestures slouching toward what Foucault would call biopower, and what Deleuze would later dub "control society" (Deleuze, 1992b). Recasting Foucault's dispositifs of power, Deleuze famously stated that while in disciplinary society, "you were always starting over again" (you're not at home, in school, etc. anymore); in the control society "you never finish anything" as disciplinary institutions are diffused on a subjective level throughout society. With Bologna's analysis, steeped in engaged political practice, we might again rewrite Foucault. this time in Italian: non finisci mai di lottare (you never finish struggling). The multiple fronts of that struggle exploded into an ongoing series of pitched battles by 1977.

**September '77: The movement in crisis**

Sometimes those battles were among the moles, who, at the very minimum, burrowed diverging paths. For example, by 1975, both Bologna and Bifo had left Autonomia Operaia. The latter became prominent in the strain of autonomia that was most interested in, and influenced by Foucault, Deleuze and
Guattari. To continue the overly schematic representation, in this case the emphasis was on autonomy over organization. This “creative wing” was strongly represented in the city of Bologna, home of both the pirate station Radio Alice and the journal *A/Traverso*. Bifo was a prominent member of this very contemporary line that anticipated in form what would eventually be known as new social movements. Central to the “creative wing” was a refusal of traditional militancy and the Party-form. In the March 1977 issue of *A/Traverso*, just before Bologna became a battle ground between students and the State, it wrote:

> The attitude of sectors of Autonomia operaia organizzata (with a capital A), a military behaviour of violence and aggression toward comrades, toward youth and women, drawing themselves up in military formation, signals a profound incomprehension of the new elements that this movement expresses (Wright, 2005).

Around that time, the journal also laid out a new political project: first, to construct a new language of revolution (albeit one enamoured with elements of Mao and Dada); second, to develop participatory media in order to facilitate the “horizontal organization of struggle”—as exemplified by Radio Alice. As well, this was the time of overt ties to Foucault, and when the conceptual persona of the Italian Foucault, as it were, traversed the historical plane. According to Bifo, Foucault’s impact began in 1974-75 and culminated in the “Movement of ’77”:

> The connection between Foucault and autonomia is made in the concept of the microphysics of power; the abandonment of the strongly political framework of the social movement; and, the understanding of the revolutionary meaning of sexuality, and daily life, in social history (Berardi, personal communication, January 24, 2003).
The effect of these lines of affinity (with Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari) was that "a new front was opened in the struggle against the State. Thus new forms of totalitarianism were seen developing as the historical left was assimilated by the apparatus of power" (Berardi, 1980, p. 159). Power, then, was no longer exclusively in the realm of the working class; the logic of domination was not something objectively inscribed in the capitalist class; and the political exceeded the placeholders of labour and capital. Yet these concepts were by no means shared in that ever-diverse autonomia movement.

This chapter began with a brief account of the September '77 meeting that Foucault attended in Paris. Later that month, a similar but different conference was held in Bologna. It was similar because it was an exploration of extra-parliamentary politics—and the conference was inspired by the "Appeal against the repressions in Italy". The conference was different because of the more explosive political terrain in Italy at that time, and the radical marxist politics that remained very much on the table. Outside of the factional strife within autonomia, were the extremely antagonistic relations between the PCI and the movement. In part, this was due to the Historical Compromise that had been pursued by the PCI since 1975. It was partially justified by the Communists on the grounds that the Chilean coup of 1973 had proven the treachery entailed in a pursuit of revolutionary politics by parliamentary means. With the military and the US perceived as immanent threats, "the PCI needed to prove it had become a loyal, democratic and pro-NATO party, thereby it collaborated to impose so-called 'Austerity', a.k.a. 'the Policy of Sacrifice', i.e. deflation and cutting down of
expenses as made necessary by the oil crisis and the beginning of the end of
fordism" (Blissett, 1999). The enmity the PCI held for the autonomists was
already shown in the Prologue. The situation was not helped when the PCI
leader Enrico Berlinguer called the conference participants "untorelli" [plague
bearers]. Bologna was a city long under PCI rule, and was considered a "model
city" by the party. As Ginsborg notes, "[t]he Bolognese PCI responded with a
supreme example of "repressive tolerance". Food, lodging, meeting spaces and
the main piazza of the city were all made available by the local council, which
knew that it would be denounced whatever it did" (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 383).34

So while all the 70,000 or so conference participants were contained
within this "repressive tolerance" there was also the continued struggle between
organization and autonomy—characterized by one participant, Maurizio Torrealta
as "a superimposition of two groups of people and two different cities of
language" (Torealta, 1980, p. 105). Some 8,000 or so participants were decidedly
more militant, if that term can be used to describe their more antagonistic, almost
military bearing. This included most members of Autonomia Operaia. As
Torrealta notes, "[t]he disposition of men and things is always the result of
strategies for war and control." Those 8,000 or so militants shut themselves off in
the Bologna Palasport, a local sporting arena where the Bologna Virtu, a team in
the Italian Basketball League, plays to this day. In those days, however, it was
the site of different struggles: "[it is] a place designated for athletic (agonistiche)
events (agonism etymologically derives from agon, the war song that Greek
combatants sang dedicating themselves to death)" (p. 105).35 According to
numerous accounts, it was indeed a "squalid" event, with clashes, chairs smashed over heads, in an internal "battle for hegemony". This sad spectacle prompted the following from Sergio Bologna: "The echoes and the clashes in Bologna had hardly died away when everyone whipped out their Lenin masks from behind their backs—in particular the Workers’ Autonomy (Autonomia Operaia)" (Bologna in Lotringer and Marazzi, 1980, p. 56). Perhaps these militants were familiar with Foucault’s 1976 College de France lectures which proposed “war as a grid of intelligibility” given their devotion that weekend to debates over armed struggle and “the feasibility of civil war” (Wright, 2003, p. 212). One thing seems certain. It is hard to find much affinity between such “sad militants” and the Italian Foucault. Surely they had not read, or if so, not taken seriously Foucault’s introduction to the Anti-Oedipus, which states:

Do not think that one has to be sad in order to be militant, even though the thing one is fighting is abominable. It is the connection of desire to reality (and not its retreat into the forms of representation) that possesses revolutionary force (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, pp. xii-xiv).

Still, the other 90 percent of participants were not debating over armed struggle, representing the working class, or State power. This majority remained “nomads” in the city, gathering in squares, “conducting discussions and seminars in thousands of small groups, passing out the little illegalities that had been produced for the occasion (fake train tickets, drugs, keys to open telephone coin boxes and traffic lights, etc.)” (Torealta, 1980, p. 105). There was music, street theatre, dancing, in a broad and libidinal expression of those new political subjectivities. But upon such a stunning denouement, perhaps a more accurate
moniker would have been "tribes of moles". The divisions, in conjunction with external pressures from the PCI, the state and capital accelerated the demise of the "Movement of '77". The anticipation which had filled the air, that the convention would extend interest "in the Italian revolution as a forerunner of things to come" (Berardi, 1980, p. 159) was now only true for the latter part of that hope. The tribe dispersed with prospects lessened and in an ominous spirit:

The procession that closes the Convention, imposing and evocative, parades for hours and hours. Despite the aggressive slogans shouted out, there was no clash with the police. It all ended with a keen sense of bitterness, disappointment, frustration that people took back to where they lived and struggled. Everyone intended to continue, to move ahead, but no one knew where to hide from the same dramatic question: ahead how, ahead where? (Balestrini and Moroni, 1997, Trans. mine)

What was ahead was undeniably bleak, at least in the shorter term. By the following spring, the Red Brigades had become the new face of the Italian radical left with their kidnapping and murder of Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro, leaving most affiliated with autonomia scurrying for cover. In his Aut Aut interview (held in February 1978), Foucault made a rather prescient comment, given what Antonio Negri and 300 other autonomisti would soon face:

it has to do with a judiciary procedure, and one which has acted out a very precise role in all the trials, those of Moscow, those of the post-war democracies; that is, the role of saying: since you are nothing more than one and the same enemy, we shall ask you above all to account not only for what you have said, but also for everything you have not said, if it is one of your so-called allies or accomplices who had said it. Hence a totalization of sins on each of the accused heads (1996e, p. 256).

On 7 April 1979, the judicial arm of the Italian state indiscriminately grabbed 300 people associated with the heterogeneous movement of autonomia.
including Antonio Negri. Jail, exile, and public opprobrium effectively ended the autonomia movement.

Still, while certain practices had ended, other ideas lived on and developed. While the depth and breadth of the crisis cannot be underestimated, this was by no means the end of certain tendencies developed in that movement. Within three years of the conference, a major book was published trying to make sense of what had happened in a foreword-looking manner. The influence of Foucault is manifest in the concept of the "post-political"—which was used in the title of this important collection, *Italy: Autonomia, Post-Political Politics*. Christian Marazzi, one of the editors, carried forward not a sad militant’s dream of “armed struggle” but a new dream of different politics:

it is also true that side by side with the crisis of the political, we have an increased politicization of people, a different way of 'making politics,' this is more concrete, specific, and tied to local needs (health, housing, schools, education, etc.)... For there the 'end of politics' involves a search for new political areas of struggle, new territories for the massification of the struggle. In Italy, the French theories, like those of Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, and Baudrillard too, are immediately translated into the Movement's language, that is, into concrete struggle (Lotringer and Marazzi, 1980, pp. 10-12).

What we will look for in the coming pages are some of the more networked and nuanced concrete struggles that would emerge in the wake of the debacle; and affinity as opposed to antagonism will take on a prominent new role.
CHAPTER 3: BOULAINVILLIERS, AND WAR/STRUGGLE AS LINES OF FORCE

You know very well where we found our idea of class struggle: we found it in the work of the French historians who talked about the race struggle (Foucault, 2003, p. 79).

While he never stated it in precisely those words, Marx did credit the French "race historians" for helping him conceptualize class struggle. This historical line of affinity plays an important role in the theses of Foucault's 1976 College de France lectures. That he misquoted Marx can be read as one of the more obstinate lines comprising the Italian Foucault:

I often quote concepts, texts and phrases from Marx, but without feeling obliged to add the authenticating label of a footnote with a laudatory phrase to accompany the quotation. As long as one does that, one is regarded as someone who knows and reveres Marx and will be suitably honoured in the so-called Marxist journals. But I quote Marx without saying so, without quotation marks, and because people are incapable of recognizing Marx's text I am thought to be someone who doesn't quote Marx (Foucault, 1980b, p. 52).

There is a more serious aspect to this refusal which can help explicate a key element of the 1976 College de France lectures:

Marx, for me, doesn't exist like that. I mean to say the sort of entity constructed around a proper name, and which refers now to a certain individual, to the totality of his writings...We can make up Marx like an auteur, localized in a unique discursive appearance, always susceptible to analysis in terms of originality or internal coherence (Foucault, 2001, p. 38-39, Trans. mine).
We can see in this refusal a reflection of Foucault’s own longstanding struggles contra official forms of Marxism; the intended effect should be clear—as a tactical intervention, a playful insurgency or counter-history against an officially sanctioned and monolithic Marx. The example above is less a quote and more of a paraphrase from memory by Foucault. It comes from a letter Marx sent to Joseph Weydemeyer. Largely an historical footnote now, Weydemeyer was an important node in Marx’s international network of incipient revolutionaries—a former officer in the Prussian army, he ended up in America and remained a close comrade and correspondent with Marx. Indeed, the genesis of “The eighteenth brumiare of Louis Bonaparte” was as a series of articles Marx wrote for Weydemeyer’s New York-based German-language newspaper Die Revolution.

The link is felicitous because it demonstrates a fundamental articulation of historico-political discourses with struggle—an example of horizontal or transversal relays between theory and practice. The conceptual persona of the Italian Foucault was steeped in a praxis of political struggles. The successes of those struggles were not always readily apparent. In 1976, Foucault’s own radical politics seemed to be reaching an apogee. And perhaps not surprisingly, his theoretical endeavours at that time expressed the antagonism of the day but with a counterintuitive flair. What is expected—or at least what can be read in tandem with the intensity of extra parliamentary political struggles in Europe—was his famous inversion of Clausewitz’s aphorism. The Foucauldian reversal is as follows: politics is a continuation of war by other means. I want to demonstrate
how this view functioned as an analytic of power in the radical practices animating the milieu of the Italian Foucault; and, how it continues to open an incisive line of inquiry for state and juridical forms. In short, the point is to show how, in particular, war acts as a line of force constitutive of the dispositif of sovereign power. But war is only broadly intelligible if it is considered in relation to struggle, its permanent other. This binary struggle transpires both within and over sovereign power; in the following pages we will consider its beginnings in the so-called "race war" to illustrate its historical transformation into "class struggle". In either case, it comprises a radical critique of sovereign power but one that is limited by its containment within a binary schema of antagonisms.

As such Foucault’s 1976 “Society must be defended” lectures should not be read as a dismissal of sovereign power; rather, they emphasize a reconfiguration of lines of inquiry to include that on which the attendant state and juridical forms are constructed. By examining the “blood which has dried on the codes” of sovereign power, the open methodology of the dispositif (i.e. the need to historicize and contextualize the heterogeneous lines which comprise it) can go to work. This is because a dispositif (in this case, of sovereign power) only ever expresses discursive formations in the middle of their networked array of non-discursive formations; hence the need to always examine the “institutions, architectural arrangements, regulations, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical propositions, morality, philanthropy, etc” (Foucault, 1980b, p. 194).
War, by its very nature, aggressively pursues a radical rearticulation of social, economic, and political relations. So the dispositif opens a connecting line of inquiry from genealogy to war to struggle. Enter Foucault's counterintuitive mobilization—or perhaps “friend” of the concept is more appropriate: Henri de Boulainvilliers, Comte de Saint Saire. He is an unexpected source; one who presents war as the historical lens for understanding the composition of sovereign power. As importantly, it is through this grid of intelligibility that the relations configuring that war-struggle can be changed—through the tactical production of knowledge. Throughout we will see how the historico-political discourse (one immersed in practice) emerges as a critical/tactical alternative to the philosophico-political discourse (one immersed in theory). That is, a history that takes sides in struggles past and present; not an impartial supposedly neutral abstraction.

Hobbes versus the Levellers and Diggers or philosophico-political versus historico-political discourse

In the previous chapter, the depth and breadth of extra parliamentary politics was emphasized. Foucault’s commitment to such struggles became evident with the Groupe d'Information de Prison to the 1977 Deuxième Gauche meetings in which he refused all but a micro-focus on local action on health and medical issues. In Italy, autonomia had only ever pursued non-state alternatives which included disavowals of both the PCI and the centralized and hierarchical trade unions. I believe there are important relays between such radical practice and Foucault’s examination of the theories of “race wars”—a discursive and
political instrument which coded a historical knowledge of struggle. The term "race" is used here in an early modern sense. The term neither refers to an historical racial othering in support of slavery or to anti-Semitism; nor was it a pseudo-scientific biological term. In the literature of the time, "race" was an early modern discourse mobilized in debates around sovereign power which emphasized power's historical composition. This gives it a particular value as an analytic of power, as it offers a way to understand how—or better still, to recall the asymmetrical foundations of struggle on which—the sovereign state can justify itself in terms of rights. The "race wars" examined in the following pages are from 17th century England (the Normans and Saxons) and 18th century France (the Franks and Gauls/Romans). Not only does the literature of these struggles serve as a critique of sovereign power, it introduces and then unsettles radical political discourses of struggle. Reading this literature inspired Foucault to propose a radical point of departure: "The State is nothing more than the way that the war between the two [race] groups in question continues to be waged in apparently peaceful forms" (Foucault, 2003, p. 88). Thus the inversion of Clausewitz: "politics is a continuation of war by other means."

An historical target for Foucault was Hobbes, whose philosophico-juridical discourse was always in support of a strong, centralized, authoritative state. While one thinks of a social contract between citizens and the Leviathan state, Hobbes did recognize the ubiquity of war as an a priori condition on which the state is constructed. But this is a radically different bellicose foundation from the one put forth by the concept of "race wars". For Hobbes the erstwhile
permanence of war is born of the fundamental equality between all people. If there were natural disparities between people, if social conditions were truly asymmetrical, then war would cease, as the strong would gain absolute victory over the weak. However, Hobbes characterizes the human condition as one marked by differences which are “tiny, ephemeral, minute, unstable, disorderly, and undistinguished” (Foucault, 2003, p. 91). Because the socio-economic field is shaped only by such modest asymmetry, even those who are weaker never give up. It is curious to think about the unintended effects of such a view: resistance will always flourish because of the uncertainty of minor differences. So in Hobbes there is always already the possibility of resistance for his “(political) bodies in motion”. Foucault does not consider such implications but it would make for interesting further study.

What interests Foucault about Hobbes is his bona fides as a state philosopher and the ingenious method in which he effaces the historical fact of war and struggle by making it into a abstract characteristic of the human condition. In short, how Hobbes washes the blood off an historico-political discourse by rendering it into an abstract philosophico-political discourse. There is a complexity to the Hobbesian model of sovereign power which acknowledges the historical fact of “real battles” and subsequent “winners and losers” that cannot be presented at length here. But a few points should be made. First, if we remember that there always remains the possibility of resistance, even in defeat, there equally remains the threat of the resumption of war on the part of the victors. For Hobbes, this impasse is resolved not through the institution of
relations of domination; rather it is through a political calculation on the part of the vanquished. That is, the vanquished decide they would rather live in obedience than potentially face death in a resumption of war. “It is fear, the renunciation of fear, and the renunciation of the risk of death. It is this that introduces us into the order of sovereignty and into a juridical regime: that of absolute power” (p. 95).

Sovereignty takes the form of an upper-case S State, represented by the mythical beast of the Leviathan. This is a benevolent giant but one carrying a heavy and deadly club. The state is at once a threat and a protector keeping us safe from what Hobbes posits as the natural condition of *Bellum omnium contra omnes.* In short, sovereignty is a dispositif of power which produces a reassuring ontology: it holds in abeyance both an everyday and historical reality that would otherwise be nasty, short, and brutish. Instead, we see a surface of legitimacy where the “natural state” of struggle has been soothed by the civilizing common sense of a social contract.

This discursus on Hobbes comprises a line that contextualizes the emergence of historico-political discourses on struggle in relation to war. There are two examples Foucault cites to make his point. The most prominent and unexpected is the Comte de Boulainvilliers. The other is perhaps more expected: the Levellers and Diggers of the English Civil War. It is the Levellers and Diggers to which Hobbes is directly linked in struggle. Both reference the Norman Conquest of England in 1066. The Levellers and Diggers construct a radical historico-political discourse of “race war”—the defeated Saxons suffer under the Norman yoke of sovereign power. Hobbes, on the other side, spoke the voice of
sovereign power. Foucault notes how in the *Leviathan* the target was the actual Norman conquest, his discourse was deployed to eliminate its historical fact (pp. 110-11). Hobbes did not want the historical fact of conquest to figure in his theory of sovereign power; only the metaphysical possibility of struggle and conquest. Thus struggle is ahistoricized through an abstraction which reduces it to the natural laws of the human condition.

The different voices that the philosophico-political discourse of Hobbes was directly seeking to silence, however, were grounded in an historical knowledge of struggle—a kind of knowledge that would signify and be valorized in genealogy, first by Boulainvilliers, and later by Foucault. Amidst the chaotic brutality of the English Civil War, there were shockingly progressive and surprisingly modern political discourses which emerged. For example, there was Thomas Rainborough, an officer in the most radical wing of the New Model Army and a leading figure of the equally radical political organization the Levellers. Four years before Hobbes formalized his thoughts on sovereign power in the *Leviathan*, Rainborough uttered the following at the famed Putney Debates of 1647:

> For really I think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he; and therefore truly, sir, I think it's clear that every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government; and I do think that the poorest man in England is not bound in a strict sense to that government that he hath not had a voice to put himself under (Cited in Linebaugh and Rediker, 2001, p. 104).

This kind of radical discourse was quickly silenced, in practice by Cromwell, and in theory by Hobbes. But Foucault sees something more at work
here. Hobbes is not simply countering the Levellers, the Diggers, the radical factions in the New Model Army—all those who enunciated a discourse of radical democracy that we still struggle for today. Instead it is conquest itself, or the ability of such historical knowledge to function within political struggle. War and conquest undoubtedly may have occurred but they lose all ontological status—at least politically-speaking—once the State is settled upon a social contract. In a Hobbesian dispositif of sovereign power, political subjects can neither see nor speak of the specific historical conquests that led to the composition of material and discursive formations in which they are enmeshed. War, as an historico-constitutive line of force is effaced. Indeed, to do so carries the grave risk of reviving those nasty and brutish struggles which were eliminated by the emergence of sovereign power. Thus, the social contract in which the then-vanquished-now-citizens purportedly enter, renders them mute, unable to enunciate their collective historical struggles in a way that readily signifies within this dispositif of sovereign power.

As a state-philosopher non pareil, Hobbes invokes a politico-philosophical paradigm for what can legitimately function as a political discourse. Some things must be stressed here. First, we need to question the difference between a philosophico-political discourse (an ahistorical abstraction) and a historico-political discourse (knowledge of the asymmetrical relations on which that state is founded). In this instance, the former seeks to sediment and stabilize existing networks of relations; the latter seeks their radical rearticulation. Second, for politico-philosophical discourses to function, a particular production of knowledge
is necessary. This point will be explicated at length when we turn to
Boulainvilliers in the section on genealogy. Third, if that politico-philosophical
discourse is dominant, then for resistance to have any efficacy there is a
fundamental necessity for the production of counter-knowledge. We can look for
such counter-production in a historico-political discourse. More specifically, that
is the task of a genealogy. Foucault situates the content of such knowledge as
precisely the target of the Hobbesian philosophical political discourse:

Leviathan’s strategic opposite is, I think, the political use that was
being made in political struggles of a certain historical knowledge
pertaining to wars, invasions, pillage, dispossessions, confiscations, robbery, exaction, and the effects of all that, the
effects of all the acts of war, all these feats of battle, and the real
struggles that go on in the laws and institutions that apparently
regulate power (Foucault, 2003, p. 98).

The Levellers, Diggers, and other radical factions of that day operated with
a living memory of many such struggles. There are two primary axes on which
those struggles rest. One—and this one becomes increasingly crystallized as we
move toward Boulainvilliers and then the French Revolution—is of the
bourgeoisie against the nobility. The other is around the historical fact of
conquest itself. In both cases, struggles play out within a binary schema.

The latter of these two axes can be seen in a demand of the Levellers that
there be a reform of juridical practice: laws should henceforth be written and
enforced in the vernacular; that is, in English, not French or Latin. And here we
can see how “race” initially functioned: as a marker of historical struggle. The
Norman Conquest, after all, was carried out by Normans: William the Conqueror
was the French Duke of Normandy—having set sail from the continental side of
the Channel. This conquest lives on today in the very language of this text and its particular admixture of Germanic, French and Latin grammatical structure and vocabulary. What "race" allowed then, was a coding of domination: Norman nobility over the common Saxons. This was a non-systematic coding of race and why it interests Foucault is that it functions both as a discursive and political instrument. What it codes and makes intelligible is a historical knowledge of struggle, specific events of violence, war, and conquest.

Still, from the beginning, there were multiple articulations of the discourse which related race to the Conquest—that is, there was never a singular binary schema in which it signified. In the earliest days of colonization, a pro-Norman nobility tract, eponymously named *Apologia pro regibus*, defended the displacement of indigenous people in the New World on the very grounds of the Norman conquest—i.e. as Normans acted in England, so will Europeans act in the Americas (p. 102). We can see at work here what Deleuze remarked about dispositifs of power—we need not undertake a hermeneutic reading for hidden content; all that can be said is inscribed on the surface. In effect, what this proto-modern tract on sovereign power explicitly emphasizes is its foundation and justification via domination and conquest. That state sovereignty was a limited perspective for understanding power relations was scrawled in bold indelible ink across the surface of the political discourse of that era. Small scale and local narratives of conquest and domination were what gave substance to the myriad constitutional debates and battles that raged in 17th century England, as the sovereign parameters of that nation-state were being reconfigured from absolute
monarchy to radical and reactionary forms of parliamentary democracy. Indeed, for more moderate parliamentarians of the English Civil War, the historical fact of nonrebellion demonstrated that it was not so much a Norman Conquest as a transferal of Saxon power. Hence parliamentary rule was the only form that could give the sovereign state legitimacy. Presaging a Hobbesian logic, these moderates of the era predicated their assertion with a question that surely has haunted "vanquished" people the world over time immemorial: "How do you expect—they say—a few tens of thousands of wretched Normans, lost in the lands of England, to have survived, and to have established and actually maintained a permanent power?" This is followed by the decisive shoe that all too often never drops: "They [the Norman conquerers] would simply have been murdered in their beds the night after the battle" (p. 104).

Already, then, even within a binary view of power there is a polyvalence to race as a political discourse, but it is not always mobilized in the valorization of struggle. Its use by the nobility and parliamentarians are not only more in line with the unexpected genealogical use by the Comte de Boulainvilliers, they also demonstrate the lack of any decisive moment or origin for this particular discursive formation. Instead, it emerges in response to an urgent need and subsequently undergoes various tactical transformations.

But how was this early historico-political discourse used in a manner resonant with the plane on which the Italian Foucault operated? The radical theory and praxis of the Levellers and Diggers was used neither to justify nor to moderate sovereignty. Instead, it was used to implode the very concept of
sovereign power from within—to smash the "Norman yoke" as it were. What a
historico-political memory of the Conquest enables is a realization that
sovereignty is an instrument of power that invokes a state of non-right. For the
radical pamphleteers of the era, English laws of sovereignty "must be regarded
as tricks, traps, and wickedness" (p. 107, Emphasis added). English laws of
sovereignty promoted vested interests and oppressed the people. They allowed
for a racialized stratification of society—a Norman king and nobility ruling over
the Saxon people. Again there was a state of non-right invoked by such
sovereign power wherein "Robbers, Rogues, and Thieves" enjoyed a wartime
regime of occupation, confiscation and pillage (p. 108). Moderate
parliamentarians looked back and saw non-rebellion and thus an orderly
continuation of power. For the Diggers et. al. this demonstrated the difficulty in
being able to see or speak of struggle when enmeshed in sovereign power; in
turn, they saw nothing but resistance, the flipside of a war that sovereign power
had never stopped waging. This war on war only ends with the liberation from all
laws—which invoke a state of nonrights.

The Diggers, Levellers, and the other radicals from the English Civil War
disappear from Foucault’s lectures almost as quickly as they appeared. In part,
he asserts, this is because their subsequent discourse lacks sophistication. But
there are a number of concluding points to his lecture. The first is that “race war”
has entered into historico-political discourse, enabling mobilization of a historical
knowledge of struggles as a political strategy around the composition of
sovereignty in the emergent modern state. State and juridical forms, the
institutions of sovereign power, were beginning to be interpreted via those historical struggles.

A political discourse cannot simply begin with a question of right and sovereignty. Instead there is a second point: a counter-reading of a rebellion, insurgency, and resistance can elevate it to the status of a kind of absolute right. Resistance, then, is acknowledged in radical discourse as an absolute right. This resistance is not predicated on the inability to rebel or the need for a new social order; rather, it is an expression of the key constituent element of sovereign power itself—war. Whether it is England circa 1650 or Europe circa 1976, something remains the same: “War is a permanent trait of social relations, like both a framework and secret of institutions and systems of power” (Foucault, 1997, p. 96, Trans. mine). Foucault then makes his final statement: this is what Hobbes tried to negate then, and “dialectical materialism” seeks to negate now.

For the latter, the Italian Foucault would undoubtedly be referring to the apparatus of the PCI against the students and autonomists on the streets of Bologna in 1977 and elsewhere across Italy.

As an addendum, there is one more line to this radical critique to consider, but it is presented by Foucault as an endgame. In this particular lecture we find an expression of the impasse that the Italian Foucault had come up against. Essentially it is this: if the Digger logic goes deeper, then within relations of power one can always find the domination of some over others. This brings us back to the neverending struggle, to complex sets of shifting relations of domination. This is presented as an important discursive breakthrough. At the
same time, a problem remains: although Digger logic seems sound, "it never really gives rise to either a historical analysis or a coherent political practice" (Foucault, 2003, p. 109). So for at least the former, we can now turn our attention to Henri Comte de Boulainvilliers.

As Boulainvilliers's nobility declines, the bourgeoisie also rises

Boulainvilliers's historical context is one in which the very function of history was undergoing a radical transformation. Until then, history had been a tool of sovereign power or in the realm of "the rituals of power...a sort of ceremony, oral or written, that must in reality produce both a justification of power and a reinforcement of that power" (p. 66). History demonstrated the legitimacy of the ruling royal family, memorialized the greatness of the current regime, or circulated examples of said glory in living laws. In short, this tool of sovereign power—this discourse of the King's head embodied—was comprised of both juridical and magical elements all in service of the tactic of subjugation and domination (pp. 67-68). It is this unidimensional function of history that will be bifurcated. In short, a new historico-political discourse will emerge, one that seeks to cut off the King's head.

What remains particular about Boulainvilliers's epoch of the early 18th century are the subjects of subjugation and domination exercised by sovereign power. The rise of Absolute Monarchy under the Sun King Louis XIV was a blow to the social and economic standing of the French nobility. From Boulainvilliers's perspective, they were the most prominent "victims" of this shift in the composition of sovereign power: "[d]eprived of real power, paraded like tame
peacocks at Versailles, nobles gradually developed an identity crisis...In the eighteenth century, a “noble reaction” took place” (Bell, 1996, p. 93).

What is of interest here are the discourses of these "aristocratic reactionaries", in particular, the counterintuitive example of Comte Henri de Boulainvilliers which animates Foucault’s “Society must be defended” lectures. While this constitutes a temporal gap from the Italian Foucault, I want to demonstrate clear lines of affinity. In the following sections, the example of Boulainvilliers serves to further unpack three critical lines. First there is war as a grid of intelligibility—which unsettles the ahistorical foundation of sovereign power. That is, war—and its ever-present other struggle—are a constitutive line of force of sovereign power. Second is a radical rearticulation of genealogy—as a methodology which valorizes the historical knowledge of struggles as unexpectedly deployed by the aristocrat Boulainvilliers. Finally, there is the polyvalence of such discourses—how they undergo tactical generalizations or transformations.

Who was this unexpected contributor to what emerged as a counter-history—the valorization of an historical knowledge of struggle in relation to sovereign power? Boulainvilliers was born into old nobility in 1658 in Haute Normandie and after his formal education ended he pursued his noble “glory” as a military officer until his father’s death in 1697. Afterwards, he serves his family by giving up the sword to take up the pen and, in turn, emphasize in his writing the importance and ubiquity of the sword as the source of sovereign power. The work he produced over his life is not that of a crude reactionary.
Renée Simon, a mid-20th century scholar who began the ongoing rehabilitation of Boulainvilliers, categorized his intellect as follows: “From Descartes he took the method, the taste for clear and distinct ideas, but he abandoned it in physics to join Huyghens and Newton. He sympathized with Malebranche, worked on comparable lines to Locke, even if he was not his disciple; indeed, he himself was an Empiricist too...He was not a Spinozist but at the same time he contributed substantially to the understanding and dissemination of Spinozism” (Cited in Buranelli, 1957, pp. 475-76).40 The link to Locke may be a curious one, given that he is associated with the “social contract”; but unlike Hobbes, and in resonance with Foucault’s Boulainvilliers, Locke’s Two Treatises of Government acknowledges the “natural right” of citizens to rebel against an unjust regime. Hence the complexity of Boulainvilliers’s thought should be clarified before turning to Foucault’s reading.

Boulainvilliers and the “Radical Enlightenment”

For Foucault, the importance of Boulainvilliers lies in his construction of an historico-political discourse—which contextualizes asymmetrical power relations as opposed to abstracting them through a philosophico-political discourse. However, others have cited Boulainvilliers’s importance as a philosopher. Intellectual historian Jonathan I. Israel, in his masterful opus Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750, identifies Boulainvilliers as a radical philosopher, and it is worth briefly examining here because it helps to further historicize the emergence of new kinds of political discourses. Foucault notes that until the turn of the 18th century that history had
been in the service of sovereign power and that philosophy likewise serves to keep the King’s head attached to the sovereign body. Israel identifies another function of philosophy: as “the serving-maid of theology”. Boulainvilliers, then, is part of a dispersed group of radical thinkers who began to use philosophy to unsettle sedimented political power, especially in regards to its transversal religious foundations. As well, the recognition of the transversal relays between theory and practice was a part of Boulainvilliers’s mien: “the philosophes—of whom Fontenelle and Boulainvilliers were the first in France to acquire European reputations—suddenly discovered that they too could exert a practical impact in the real world” (Israel, 2001, p. 10). What is even more striking is how Boulainvilliers—like Foucault circa ’77—was also in a time of “crisis”.

Part of the crisis—the concomitant rise of science and philosophy and decline of theology—is well-known to students of the Enlightenment: “Because these activities were subjected to the claims of confessional theology, and practiced in institutional contexts directly or indirectly under ecclesiastic supervision, princes and parliaments could safely ignore philosophy and science as something largely peripheral to the business of government” (p. 24). In short, during the early Enlightenment, the walls between radical theory and the practices of sovereign power seemed safely insurmountable.

The first blow to the ecclesiastical foundation of sovereign power (remembering the “divine ordination” of the Absolute Monarchy of Louis XIV) came in the mid-17th century from Rene Descartes. *Cogito ergo sum* initiated unprecedented critical scrutiny to traditional authority and belief. The composition
of this critical recalibration included the development of natural science and mathematics, and a mechanistic world-view that decentred God as an omniscient source of divine causality. Thus we are in an epoch that has long been a central site of inquiry for Foucault—the decentring of “man”. One of the ramifications of the rise of Cartesianism is in political discourse which turns increasingly to “life in this world” as opposed to the deferral of heavenly promise—a line followed counterintuitively by Boulainvilliers.

That the Comte was part of the radical Enlightenment is in part due to his formal education. Louis XIV had issued a royal decree banning the teaching of Cartesian philosophy; yet the Oratorians, a French Catholic teaching order and rivals of the Jesuits, resisted this order and continued to edify students in this radical new philosophy (pp. 38-42). It so happens that at the same time Boulainvilliers was finishing his formal studies at a leading Oratorian college in Juilly north of Paris. One of his teachers was Richard Simon, an exegetical Bible scholar who was caught “between the Scylla or radicalism and the Charybdis of tradition” (p. 451). On the one hand this curious radical was steeped both in Cartesian thought and even the “atheist” Spinoza; on the other hand, he used this burgeoning rational thought to reinforce Catholic faith which he ultimately operated to defend. What is important regarding Boulainvilliers is that he was exposed to a clandestine current of counterknowledge.

It was in such a complex milieu that “radical” thought was circulating during Boulainvilliers formative years. Israel contends that this radical thought—more prominently expressed via Descartes, Spinoza and Diderot—was enabled
by the more fluid social and economic dynamic of large international cities like
Amsterdam and Paris. This is the time that Habermas points to for the
emergence of the public sphere. Coffee shops became a cross-roads for the
advent of the commercial with more open elements of the aristocracy. Interest
among the latter in more radical ideas typically came about because they were in
one way or another somewhat marginalized:

Aristocrats who became *philosophes*, regularly rubbing shoulders
with non-noble scholars, writers, and publishers, as well as
professionals, pseudo-gentry, and bourgeois gentilhommes, were
apt to be detached in some significant way from the traditional
culture and outlook of the nobility. Mostly, they had been disowned
or belonged to a highly fluid, cosmopolitan fringe found in large
capital cities (p. 61).

Some historians have posited an economic foundation to Boulainvilliers’s
alleged estrangement. Much has been made of his purported “poverty”, as if he
were the dissolute and bitter son of a formerly “glorious” noble line now gone to
seed. Historian Harold A. Ellis has written extensively on the life and thought of
Boulainvilliers, and demonstrates conclusively that he was not a *wastrel*. So
there was estrangement to be sure, but it was not at all from the ranks of the
nobility. Boulainvilliers was estranged from the changing order of things in France
circa 1700. The urgent need to which his discourse responds was the continued
displacement of the nobility from the pinnacle of sovereign power.

Thus another point should be made about the network of relations in
which Boulainvilliers was enmeshed before turning to his use of war as a grid of
intelligibility. Many of the aristocrats who embraced radical enlightenment—like
the Italian Count Alberto Radicati or the British libertine the Earl of Shaftesbury—
had more in common with the Levellers and Diggers than with Boulainvilliers. That is, they envisaged the outright destruction of the monarchical structure of the ancien regime as well as its hierarchical socio-economic order. Boulainvilliers, however, wanted to return the nobility to their historical position at the top of the sovereign order of things. What both of these lines of the radical enlightenment had in common was an enemy: the pan-European trend of "the near universal expansion of the monarchical State in the direction of absolutism" (p. 71). A key strand in Israel's overall thesis is the emergence of revolution as a political option, both in theory and practice. England had already experienced a protracted revolutionary period, although never in the radical direction promulgated by the Levellers and Diggers. And in Naples, there had been established a short-lived republic when a popular uprising, led by the fisherman Masaniello, overthrew the Spanish regime and nobility.

One historian demonstrates that this Italian rivoluzioni was instrumental in the changing political discourse of that time. Indeed, before a number of Italians wrote about the Naples uprising and used rivoluzioni in the title, the word had yet to be used to describe the events of England circa 1640s. But Boulainvilliers was no advocate of revolution in response to the political crisis he faced. Nor were the majority of those identified as part of the radical enlightenment, for whom revolution was an unsavoury, and undesirable option. It was the fact that Louis XIV usurped the authority earned by the blade of the nobility that irked Boulainvillier; more specifically it was how absolute monarchy was buttressed by divine right and ecclesiastic sanction. In short, Boulainvilliers was struggling
against the political allies of the King—the clergy and the rising bourgeoisie/noblesse de robe. Thus he was “the first philosophe who rejected the whole ideological apparatus of Louis’ absolutism” (p. 74). How this crisis could be addressed, however, differs in Israel’s reading, who posits Boulainvilliers’s critique as follows: “[he views] absolutism as a form of violence which methodically usurps rights and powers historically vested in a network of lesser institutions and bodies, thereby amassing an illicit and arbitrary power” (p. 75). Furthermore, while he favoured the augmented role of the landed gentry in post-Glorious Revolution England, he rejected the means by which it came about: “conspiracy, treason, and a huge foreign invasion.” This interpretation may raise eyebrows when we consider the crux of his historico-political endeavours—the Frankish invasion and the resultant violent overthrow of Gaulish-Roman sovereign power.

For now, let us leave Israel’s Boulainvilliers in a redoubled crisis following the death of Louis XIV: the failure to arrest the further development of absolute monarchy, the continued rise of the bourgeoisie, and the seemingly inexorable decline of the nobility. Can we see a line here to Foucault in 1977, when the radical politics that seemed so full of promise at the beginning of the decade seemed to be disintegrating in practice? Israel observes:

Boulainvilliers could see no way to rectify the situation. However constituted, sovereignty, in his eyes, could not justifiably be challenged and opposed with conspiracy and violence. Hence there was simply no way to remodel politics and society from below. This left him without any solution to his problem other than philosophical resignation, and recommending the people to be likewise resigned, in the face of a corrupt, deformed, and sporadically despotic Bourbon monarchical state (p. 76).
But back in 1700, Boulainvilliers retained hope for radical social transformation through his development of genealogy as an historico-political discourse; seemingly so did Foucault in 1976 when he spent most of February lecturing on the strategies, tactics, and struggles of Boulainvilliers.

**War as a grid of intelligibility: Sovereign power from the Soissons vase to Damiens**

The relationship of violence to the composition of sovereign power, it would seem, is all a matter of who is valorizing what. For Boulainvilliers, it is a means to reforming the contours of sovereign power into more favourable dimensions. For Foucault, it is a means to not only unsettle the philosophical political foundations of sovereignty, but a radical reconsideration of power itself: “We have to study power outside the model of the Leviathan, outside the field delineated by juridical sovereignty and the institution of the State. We have to analyze it by beginning with the techniques and tactics of domination” (Foucault, 2003, p. 34). What is at issue is power in general. What is also at issue, as much for Foucault as it was for Boulainvilliers, is a question of political practice. Thus it is an issue of the very conceptualization of power in relation to politics: does it rest on a foundation of war or jurisprudence? That is, in terms of domination or a body of laws?

Foucault directly addresses this question of the relationship between war and constitutional law through the story of the Soissons vase. At stake is the rights of the king, the rights of the nobility, and how that relates to the distribution of wealth. And it stands as a well-known historical example demonstrating the
fundamental role of conquest and force in the establishment of sovereign power. Thus we can see this defining characteristic of sovereign power in Boulainvilliers's historiography of the Soissons vase.

The event comes on the heels of the successful Frankish invasion of Gaul, when the Germanic warriors gained control of most of the landmass of modern France. The invasion demonstrates that sovereign power, according to Boulainvilliers—and, later Foucault—was of a different order than that of Hobbes. For it signals the beginning of a protracted crisis that Boulainvilliers's nobility would face as it also marked incipient monarchical power. According to Boulainvilliers, the Franks were a warrior aristocracy (hence the French title noblesse d'épée or nobility of the sword).

Two things are important here. One is that there is a kind of fundamental equality among this warrior aristocracy because they exercised a particular "freedom of egoism, of greed—a taste for battle, conquest, and plunder. The freedom of these warriors is not the freedom of tolerance and equality for all; it is a freedom that can only be exercised by domination" (p. 148). Because of this equality that comes through networked relations of ultimately symmetrical force, there is no king, save a warlord, who is only temporarily first-among-equals, and only thus for the duration of the battle. A warrior aristocracy, then, which enjoys its freedoms due to a particular ratio of force—one that tips the balance into asymmetrical relations in their favour. This served them as conquerors in Gaul, the extent of which was that each warrior claimed his own piece of the land. The conquest, itself, came in the fifth century, when the remaining Roman rump of
Gaul, under Sygarius, was defeated by the Franks. Thus enter Clovis and the second point. For this marked the beginning but also a slow and incredibly protracted—lasting more than a millennium—end for the nobility.

The story of the vase is worth briefly recounting in service of the second point. In dividing up the booty that comes with conquest, Clovis, a Frankish warrior who would eventually be king comes upon a vase. After seizing a vase, a fellow warrior intervened, took the vase, and split it with his battle axe proclaiming: “You might as well be king, but you will share the booty with the rest of us. You have no preemptive rights, you have no prior or absolute rights over the spoils of war” (p. 150). This warrior was voicing the position of Boulainvilliers—the nobility is an integral part of sovereign power, sharing it with and not subject to, the king.

This was a time when king equalled warlord, and freedoms were exercised through domination that was arrayed in more or less symmetrical relations of force among the warrior aristocracy. Yet conquest has its own perils—somewhat echoing Hobbes—namely, the ever-present possibility of a resumption of hostilities by the vanquished. Hence the Frankish military organization remained in tact and the fateful (and likely apocryphal) day occurred perhaps a year later. At a military parade, Clovis saw the same warrior who had denied him the vase. Foucault delivers the coup de grace: “Taking his great ax, the good Clovis smashed the warrior’s skull in, telling him ‘Remember the Soissons vase’” (p. 152). Hence the sovereign power that functions on the basis of military force and an associated monarch as civilian magistrate is established
But there is a worm turning in a sovereign power that rots in the hands of the 
nobility by the time it is passed to Boulainvilliers.

The vase in question in the story of Clovis was not just any vase. It had 
belonged to the local bishop. While Clovis was a pagan at the time of the 
conquest, his care for the vase demonstrates the good terms he had with the 
church even before he converted. And it symbolizes the eventual alliances made 
by Clovis with the Gaulish aristocracy. After their land was seized and socio-
economic positions usurped by the victorious Franks, the Gaulish aristocracy 
sought refuge in the church. And with the conversion of Clovis, another 
foundation of sovereign power was laid. In the process, a new economic order 
was established. The Frankish warriors continued to pursue glory through the 
sword; the estates they occupied were worked by the vanquished Gallo-Romans-
cum-peasants; the former Gaulish aristocracy squirreled away in the church, and 
in the process produced its own "knowledge" that would increasingly become that 
of the king; and Clovis the warrior king became the King.

If the war and conquest of Clovis and his Frankish warriors marks the 
vViolent beginning of sovereign power in Europe, the story of Damiens signal the 
beginning of its end as a dominant dispositif of power. The sorry tale of Damiens 
is a more famous example that Foucault offers on the violence of sovereign 
power, although typically it is not cited as such. The absolute and calculated 
brutality of the opening pages of Discipline and Punish—which graphically 
recount the public execution of Damiens—are typically read as an antiquated 
practice soon to be swept away by the recuperative rationality of corrective
punishment. Regardless of the fact that such dispositifs of power—be they sovereign, disciplinary, or biopower—are never decisively replaced but always operate in emergent, residual, or dominant forms, what the gruesome dispatch of Damiens demonstrates is the spectacular violence that the sovereign manifested through the end of the 18th century.

One could posit that Damiens anticipates the inversion of Clausewitz in the lectures which would follow the original publication of Discipline and Punish in France. Damiens was a regicide whose failed attempt on the life of Louis XIV resulted in his supplice—a public torture and execution as a demonstration of the sovereign's complete power over political subjects. Occurring in 1757, this was the final demonstration of sovereign power in the particular form of the public execution. The gruesome narrative, as recounted by Foucault, is replete with red-hot pincers ripping flesh, molten lead poured over gaping wounds, the tearing away of limbs and burning the remnants at the stake. This graphically demonstrates that the state's monopoly on war can be visited in full force on the body of any sovereign subject deemed sufficiently transgressive.

At this time, sovereign power was intermittently exercised. Nonetheless, it functioned in a unidirectional manner and there was no doubt as to whom (the sovereign) was acting upon whom (subjects). But such displays of sovereign power were facing increasing resistance. The more common interpretation is to see the execution of Damiens as a moment in which sovereign power begins to gives way to a more modulated form of disciplinary power. The major nodes in this particular network of power are the King/Queen and his/her subjects. This in
itself is a methodological step beyond traditional starting points of sovereignty.

From the first pages of *Discipline and Punish* it is clear that sovereign power is not predicated on the contractual relations of *a priori* citizens but as a strategy or relation of force. That is, sovereign power is the power over life itself—the power of the sovereign to take the life of its subjects. Because Damiens attempted regicide, he literally embodied what was already inscribed on sovereign power: a crime against the state was a crime against the sovereign—"it attacks [the sovereign] personally, since the law represents the will of the sovereign" (Foucault, 1995, p. 47).

Finally, the spectacle of Damiens does not reestablish symmetry between the sovereign and his subject. It is a spectacular reminder of the profound asymmetry on which the state is founded, of "the dyssymmetry between the subject who dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength" (p. 49). This, then, emphasizes the juridical form of sovereign power—to take property, time, bodies, and life.

**Theoretical implications of war as a grid of intelligibility**

There are multiple questions to be explored in relation to war. Is it primary in regard to other relations (i.e. of labour)? Does it provide the grid of intelligibility for "antagonism, rivalry, confrontation, and struggles between individuals, groups, or classes"—and if so, is it via a dynamic tension with struggle in an undetermined process continually reconfiguring relations? Are the techniques and strategies of war foundational for political institutions? This is all in addition to questions we have already explored: when, how, and why did war emerge as
Has presented an historical contextualization of Boulainvilliers, let us consider other preconditions for the emergence of the historico-political discourse which not only generates a knowledge of struggle but foregrounds resistance, war, and conquest as that which ascribes sovereign power. The first is that the "State acquired a monopoly on war" (Foucault, 2003, p. 48). This monopolization—which sees knights relegated more to acts of chivalry and less to expensive warfare—is followed by a protracted period of civil and religious wars. As the composition of the State continues to shift in a manner which brings such woe to Boulainvilliers and his ilk, the historico-political discourse emerges. This discourse enables a new understanding of sovereign power—no longer solely though the "valour" of a royal lineage but through the history of invasions, defeats, and the blood that gets spilled in the writing of the state’s juridical codes. Thus what we have already covered this chapter: the establishment of sovereign power in "the blood and mud of battles"; the "victories, massacres, and conquest" all of which have dates—remembered (or forgotten) differently depending on your own trajectory. In short, "the law was born in the burning towns and ravaged fields. It was born together with the famous innocents who died at break of day" (p. 50).

As well, a key point must be restated. One important effect of the emergence of the historico-political discourse on war is the normalization and sedimentation of the binary schema. From Saxon vs. Norman to Gaul vs. Frank
to aristocracy vs. bourgeoisie to labour vs. capital the permanence of war was ontologically inscribed in a two-way battle. Indeed, sovereign power could not cohere as a dominant dispositif precisely because relations became increasingly complex with the emergence of capital and the modern state. Hence the need for, and development of disciplinary power with its augmented capacity to “normalize” subjects in discrete discursive and material spaces ranging from the family to school to the factory to the barracks to prison. Likewise with biopower which begins working directly on populations in abstracted and aggregated form, be it through state demography or the never-ending proliferation of capitalist market relations differentiated by subjectivities. In all cases, these dispositifs of power do not function primarily on binary forms but in networked and polyvalent relations.

**Boulainvilliers’s lasting impact?**

Boulainvilliers was not the first to examine the role of war in history: Herodotus, after all, wrote extensively on the Greco-Persian war as did Sun Tzu in *The Art of War* a century earlier. Let us conclude our remarks on Boulainvilliers by considering what Foucault presents as his most lasting theoretical effect. Primarily, what was new was the notion that *war could function as a general social analyzer.* But how does this function? In order for it to do so, Boulainvilliers posits war as a grid of intelligibility for a) the foundation of right; b) military and state organizational form; and c) the calculation of force (composition).

For the first point, the foundation of right, Boulainvilliers asserts that natural right is a fiction; there is only war and the inequities that result from
conquest. He suggests that history gives us no examples of this natural right, only inequalities that result from war. In this sense, Boulainvilliers is employing a variation of what Foucault would, in the *History of sexuality, Volume 1*, critique as the "repressive hypothesis": namely, freedom as the ability to deprive others of their freedom. As such, freedom is the opposite of an equality derived by natural right. Freedom is only afforded by difference—the asymmetrical relations of force—allowing one group to dominate and vanquish another. This is because freedom itself is predicated on uneven relations. This is why, for Boulainvilliers, history is as such a vital tactical pursuit as it rekindles the collective memory of the aristocracy as to their social and economic preeminence. As such, historicizing obtains fundamental importance for political analysis. The historical force of freedom (gained through conquest) *always* defeats the abstract concept, or natural right, of freedom. The conceptual insight drawn from Boulainvilliers is that the force of history’s "natural law" (that of conquest and domination) will always trump the politico-philosophical abstraction of "natural rights".

Second, Foucault notes how Boulainvilliers emphasizes the important relationship between war and organizational form. For it is not just "conquests, invasions, and battles" which establish relations of force; instead, the organizational form of military institutions allows for two things. First, to establish the relationship of force for actual battle, and second, here we can recall the Frankish invasion and the military formation so felicitous to Boulainvilliers’s aristocratic predecessors, it enables particular articulation of society as a whole, on social and economic axes. Hence, in simplified form, what might be
considered Boulainvilliers's other maxim: "Who has the weapons?" (This is especially true if we consider strategies and tactics as weapons; and it retains value for progressive or radical politics if social and economic transformation, as opposed to outright domination, is the goal.) Foucault brings a finer point to this: "War is a general economy of weapons, an economy of armed people and disarmed people within a given State, and with all the institutional and economic series that derive from that" (p. 160). What is new here is the "generalization of war" as an analytic of sovereignty. Hence the pertinence for Boulainvilliers of the emergence of the much cheaper military formation of archers, which a king could afford in abundance, thus reducing the sovereign's dependence on expensive knights, hastening the decline of the aristocratic noblesse d'épée.

This has another effect, and it suggests that the binary schema of conquerer and conquered was never adequate. Even for Boulainvilliers, while he emphasizes the importance of war via invasion and conquest, the binary of conqueror and vanquished becomes increasingly insufficient. On this point, we can see an uncanny affinity between Boulainvilliers and Italian autonomists nearly three centuries later. Just as radical politics in Italy looked to "class composition" in the 1960s and 1970s, the figurehead of the nobiliary reaction in early 17th century France considered war as a particular composition of force (before and after battle): "The distribution of weapons, the nature of the weapons, fighting techniques, the recruitment and payment of soldiers, the taxes earmarked for the army; war as an internal institution and not the raw event of a battle" (pp. 159-60).
The final point here is one that we have well covered. The centrality of invasions and rebellions was emphasized, not only with Bouainvilliers but the Levellers and Diggers as well. But for the Comte, his line of inquiry became increasingly complex. What he asked was how does the relation or composition of force which was established by battle, which was organized by a general economy of weapons, change over time—to the point of its inversion (e.g. the Frankish aristocracy ranked below the newly ascendant Gaulish bourgeoisie). In short, “Bouainvilliers’s problem is to discover how the strong became weak, and how the weak became strong” (p. 160).

Invasions or rebellions become analytic points of reference in a general calculation of relations of force. This situates the composition of force within a process, taking shape within a dynamic struggle of war—actual and by other means. The interplay of domination and resistance assumes a constitutive role in this process. Bouainvilliers’s contribution was his recognition of the dynamic nature of the process. Still, he also predicates his conjunctural analysis—of the particular form of French sovereign power under absolute monarchy—on the initial conditions of the victorious Frankish invasion and on the establishment of the aristocratic noblesse d'épée. But the very fact that Bouainvilliers was constructing new modes of analysis is due to his acute recognition that things had changed. It is not sufficient to ask simply why a certain army won; rather, it is necessary to ask: what accounted for their reversal of fortunes, this recalculation of the composition of force?
In his pursuit of this practical question, the theoretical function of history changes: "History, in other words, now looks essentially like a calculation of forces" (p. 161). And there is another gradual effect: the binary schema becomes increasingly inadequate to the vicissitudes which mark this process. It is not a duality of forces, but complex networked relations of forces—a heterogeneous ensemble, if you will, that is subject to coherence and divergence. The larger implications of this will be taken up in our eventual turn to network theory, both in trying to better account for processes of transition ("how the strong become weak and the weak strong") and in terms of more complex, iterable and polyvalent relations.

For now let us recap these methodological turns. Inspired by Boulainvilliers, Foucault looks to an historico-political discourse for a more adequate analysis of power. History is vital for an understanding of power. In particular, one should focus on an historical knowledge of struggles (which entails the events of invasion and conquest). Initially, the historico-political discourse is a limited one, expressed in an unexpected particularity—a discourse of struggle through a purported aristocratic reactionary. Initially, a binary schema seemed adequate to its expression. Then it gained further complexity: from a straightforward duality of conqueror-vanquished to a general calculation of forces. There remained the perspective of interest—Boulainvilliers still sought to determine how the (Frankish) victorious aristocracy found itself on the wrong side of history. But in order to do so, he turned to what could now be called, after the fact, a network analysis.
By this I mean that in order to consider a composition of force, myriad relations must be considered. This entails new oppositions, divisions, strategic alliances, tactical formations, reversals of relations, and an ongoing redistribution of forces. When Boulainvilliers looked to the historical past, the lens of a battle between Franks and Gauls was initially adequate. But, he came to see history as a great divider, as that which multiplies, diverges and coheres anew. What once seemed binary now comprises multiple, complex, and changing relations. The specifics of what Boulainvilliers saw was the materialization of a new alliance between the old Gaulish aristocracy—not at least partially ensconced within the church—and the monarch; nimble manoeuvring of the rising bourgeoisie; and the steady decline of peasant support of the Frankish-warriors-cum-nobility as taxation demands become too onerous.

There is a shift from the uncomplicated model of invasion to an analysis of shifting networked relations of struggle. History, which began for Boulainvilliers as a model of invasion and conquest takes on a more complex form: “support networks, alliances, and internal conflicts will now, so to speak, develop into a form of generalized warfare” (p. 162). As an aside, while one could argue that Boulainvilliers—especially in his role of a philosopher of the radical enlightenment—was part of the rise of the early modern “public sphere” he was not in line with the Habermasian vision of transparent rational discourse. That Foucault would elevate him from a historical footnote is perhaps not surprising power, in the form of struggle and domination, is foregrounded; and tactics and strategies comprise the general mode of communication.
It is also curious to think of how Marx reinscribes what Boulainvilliers broke apart—"war as war between one mass and another mass". As Foucault takes pains to emphasize, war, for Boulainvilliers, is ubiquitous, but not on a singular or overarching faultline. Rather, Foucault sees a prototype for his micropolitical analysis of power: "Boulainvilliers makes the relationship of war part of every social relationship, [he] subdivides it into a thousand different channels, and reveals war to be a sort of permanent state that exists between groups, fronts, and tactical units as they in some sense civilize one another, come into conflict with one another, or on the contrary, form alliances" (p. 162).

Part of the generalization of war as a grid of intelligibility, then, comes with a recognition that a binary schema is never fully adequate for understanding the composition of forces at play. In this way, Boulainvilliers could be seen as moving toward what now would be called networks. One other thing was his emphasis on processes of transition, another clear influence on Foucault. As such, Boulainvilliers is not using history to illustrate the continuity of sovereignty and thus its legitimacy—which is the case with sovereign or "state" history. Instead, the disruption of legitimacy—the homeostasis of sovereignty—is not a murky aberration; rather it is "a principle of intelligibility" (p. 163). This brings history itself into the realm of strategies and tactics; or, perhaps more accurately, history finds itself open to new strategies and tactics. From that which demonstrates the continuity and perennial legitimacy of kings and sovereign right, history becomes a tool for those engaged in struggle and on the "wrong" side of power relations. With Boulainvilliers, radical transformation is found throughout the historical
right and sovereign power are not safeguarded by reassuring continuity but marked by disruption, and punctuated by discontinuity. It is the war, invasions, struggles, conquest, domination and resistance that underpin relations of right. In this way, sovereign power is made intelligible through war and struggle; right is dependent upon a particular relation of force, and war/struggle undergoes a generalization, becoming "a grid for understanding right, the economy, taxation, religion, beliefs, education, language, and juridical institutions" (p. 163). This final point further helps explain why this theoretico-practical development was of interest to Marx.

Foucault focused on Boulainvilliers to show how war (domination/struggle) became an historical object. Students of Machiavelli already know this, but for that 15th century Italian, it was a tool only to be used by the sovereign. Now history is no longer that which memorializes, venerates, and proves the existing right of sovereign power. Instead, it undergoes a transformation from a sovereign political object to an historical object of struggle and resistance. That is, a tactical and destabilizing object that can take polyvalent forms, depending upon whose history on behalf of which it is being mobilized. Foucault is careful to anticipate Marx here: when history became "an object of knowledge for a group, a nation, a minority, or a class, it became possible to constitute a historico-political field, and to make history function within the political struggle" (p. 164).

This historico-political discourse becomes a tool for the calculation of relations of force. This calculation, which made struggles visible, required a concomitant production of knowledge; that is, the valorization of a particular
history necessitated its own historical knowledge. Constructing, valorizing, communicating and circulating such knowledge is a permanent practice of struggle. That war, invasion, and general antagonism are constitutive of an ontology of struggle should be apparent. But what we will suggest in later chapters that neither the resultant knowledge nor practice will gain cohesion without equal attention paid to affinity.
CHAPTER 4: RECONCEPTUALIZING A PRODUCTIVE ONTOLOGY OF POWER

Power is not omnipotent or omniscient—quite the contrary! If power relationships have produced forms of investigation, of analysis, of models of knowledge, etc., it is precisely not because power is omniscient, but because it was blind, because it was in a state of impasse. If it is true that so many power relationships have been developed, so many systems of control, so many forms of surveillance, it is precisely because power was always impotent (Foucault, 1996e, p. 258).

Power—in its complex and polyvalent myriad relations—is always both an effect and a constitutive element of any dispositif. For Foucault there were urgent needs to which the dispositif responded, needs that were methodological and political. The dispositif was a conceptual response to the lack of concrete efficacy that came from thinking of power as something possessed by individuals, as residing in state sovereignty, or as something determined by the mode of production. The dispositif stands as a rebuke of the notion that power is monolithic, a singular thing like a club, its action fixed by the iron hand that wields it. The dispositif makes the idea of a purported centre of power problematic. It makes untenable the vision of a single central luminous source which emits power into a variegated spectrum. The dispositif burns all the maps and codes that would guide the dominated to the halls of power of their dominators, allowing them to seize the palace, the throne, and the sceptre which would accord that power to them. The dispositif is not arrayed in a singular apparatus of power that can be taken tout ensemble and then deployed for good instead of bad. Rather.
power and its dispositifs is always a site of contestation; the composition of those complex networked relations of struggle are always changing, cohering and diverging, depending on the particular relations of force at a given historical moment.

An earlier chapter provided a general introduction to the dispositif. In what follows, collateral conceptual effects of the dispositif will be considered, namely around power. Throughout power is being presented as something that cannot be understood adequately through the law and sovereignty, as something neither wholly contained within nor solely determined by relations inscribed in the mode of production. This requires that we question both Marxist and liberal theories of power. Indeed, the purpose of the dispositif is that it allows us to consider power in relation to knowledge (the gaps in between what we can say of what we see, and how we can see that of which we speak), in relation to subjectivity (ways in which we are or are not valorized in relation to power), and in networks of relations of force. In January 1977, Foucault explicitly acknowledged the theoretical and practical walls he himself had encountered earlier in the decade, rendering the episteme an increasingly inadequate concept, particularly in regards to power. These difficulties were what lead him to eventually develop the concept of the dispositif:

I think that in the Order of Things [Foucault's inaugural lecture at the College de France, delivered in December 1970] I mixed up two conceptions or, rather, to a question that I thought was legitimate (the articulations of the facts of discourse with the mechanisms of power) I had proposed an inadequate response. That was a text that I had written in a moment of transition. Until then, it seems to me that I had accepted the traditional conception of power—as an essentially juridical mechanism, that which spoke the law, which
prohibited, which said no, with the entire host of negative effects: exclusion, rejection, barriers, denials, concealments, etc. Now I find this conception inadequate (Foucault, 2001g, pp. 228-29, Trans. Mine).

This chapter will comprise a close reading of the Italian Foucault in order to outline his reconceptualization of power through 1977-8. As I have tried to do throughout, I will situate these theoretical developments on a historical plane. The main arc of the chapter will come from a March 1978 interview with Foucault by the Italian autonomist journal Aut Aut. The interview, “Clarifications on the Question of Power” was in response to what he considered widespread calumny about him from the PCI through numerous popular and party publications. It allows for an “Italian” inflection in the reading of Foucault’s reconceptualization of power. As well, we will introduce the notion of a productive ontology of power via a conceptual friend of the Italians and of Foucault, Michael Hardt. Overall, I will situate this rearticulation of power as something most adequately expressed in network form.

“It is as if, finally, something new were emerging in the wake of Marx”

In September 1977, the very month the “Movement” met in Bologna, bolstered by the appeal signed by Foucault, Aut Aut published an article “Rationality and irrationality in the politics of Deleuze and Foucault.” Its author Massimo Cacciari attacked microphysical and rhizomatic conceptions of power. For Cacciari, a PCI member, these “French intellectuals” gave sustenance to both autonomia and the Red Brigades (he was a former adherent of Potere Operaia [Worker’s Power]). Specifically, Cacciari wrote “What does it mean that
power would not be the property of a class, not subjected to an economic structure, not localized in specific institutions? Do we not carry the risk of opposing to the power of the Moloch-State, the multinationals, Autonomia and the Armed Party?” In turn, he presented the PCI as having taken the “real microphysics of power” which they render “day by day over a long period”.

There are a few things that can productively be taken from this polemic. One is the very real contestation on the left (between autonomia and the PCI) in both theory and practice, which entails competing visions of the “essence” of power and the party form. The other is a more sober consideration of the actual influence Foucault had on parts of autonomia. We will consider those questions primarily through an interview Foucault gave to the very same journal in February 1978, in his “response to certain critiques”—Cacciari, by name, but the PCI. In fact. Using this interview as the chapter’s narrative thread, we will consider the issues and concepts raised therein and make extended reference to related texts for substantiation.

Foucault spends the first part of the February 1978 interview trying both to differentiate his work from Deleuze and particularly, the “new philosophers”, and by emphasizing that, as evidenced by the plethora of movements on the autonomist left, “the theory of radical needs..[is] rather important in Italy today, and of which the PCI would also like to rid itself” (Foucault, 1996e, p. 256). The question is why? For Foucault the answer was straightforward. The Italian institutional needs and political practices (namely, the Historic Compromise and long-term affiliation with Moscow) left it on attack footing. In short, the PCI
attacked him because it refused to consider the “need for a change of analysis”—
because “if it is something new, it is a danger and therefore an adversary.” On
theoretical grounds, it is because the PCI’s “analyses of power held nothing more
than a relatively restricted place in the institutionalized discourse of Marxism” (p
256). Mario Tronti’s presence in the party demonstrates this is not wholly true.
Nonetheless, now is an opportune moment to briefly consider a few of the most
significant (and for some, problematic) things which are “new” in the
reconceptualization of power.

Surely the crux of Foucault’s contretemps over power with the PCI (and
orthodox Marxists in general) lies in the role of the state—just as it did with
Poulantzas. By presenting “new coordinates for praxis” there was widespread
hostility on the institutional left. As Deleuze states concisely, “The theoretical
privilege given to the State as an apparatus of power to a certain extent leads to
the practice of leading a centralizing party which eventually wins State power; but
on the other hand it is this very organizational conception of the party that is
justified by this theory of power” (1988a, p. 30). By 1976 this had become
perhaps the most prominent trope in Foucault’s work. He could not have been
more explicit in his College de France “Society must be defended” lectures. He
begins the “Course summary” by exhorting that the “juridical model of
sovereignty” be abandoned; that we not begin by “looking for the single form or
the central point from which all forms of power derive, either by way of
consequence or development”; and that instead we seek power in its specific
instantiations in everyday life, in its difference and multiplicity. In short, that we
look for power not as a centralized point but as a network: “as relations of force that intersect, refer to one another, coverage, or, on the contrary, come into conflict and strive to negate one another” (Foucault, 2003, pp. 266-7).

This can be seen in the basic thesis of *History of sexuality, Volume 1*: The explicit inflection of examining power through a dispositif of sexuality which is inscribed on the body and is exercised in myriad relations. While some of those relations are with institutional forms, that does not make power an institution or a structure. We should not, therefore, confuse power with the fact that sovereign power and the law function, and have very material effects on our collective bodies. To do so would be to assume that we always start with an “overall unity of a domination...[instead] these are only the terminal forms power takes” (Foucault, 1980a, p. 92). In short, one of the most basic—and most vexing to the PCI, et. al, both for theoretical and practical reasons—is that power is not a “possession”; rather, “[p]ower is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared...[but is] exercised from innumerable points” (p. 94). This is a relatively straightforward critique, and, a position more typical of liberal theories of power, and hence not what is most important in the *Aut Aut* interview.

**An “urgent need” to which not only capital responds**

Foucault’s point is to assert a need to move beyond a singular and totalizing logic of capital as the source of power. There are multiple relations of force that are able to come together and cohere into a network of power at a given moment. Still, his methodology begins with something certainly familiar to marxists (if not communists): “Beginning from those economic and demographic
processes which appear clearly at the end of the 16th century, when the problem of the poor, of the homeless, of fluctuating populations, is raised as an economic and political problem" (Foucault, 1996e, p. 259).

Thus Foucault begins with a specific set of problems—in this case he was referring specifically to madness. But there is a definite, if flexible, orientation to the dispositif as methodology. Typically, it involves identifying an "urgent need" and then delineating the various responses, specifically those that result in a cohesive network of relations. He continues, "an attempt is made to resolve it with an entire arsenal of implements and arms (the laws concerning the poor, the more-or-less forced isolation and, finally, imprisonment of these people—in particular, what took place in France and in Paris in 1660-1661)." But this does not necessitate a strictly instrumental response, or a "simple tautological affirmation...I, reason, exercise power over you, madness." Instead, it is a reflexive dynamic process which plays out in a complex set of relations: "a heterogeneity of power...always born of something other than itself" (Emphasis added, 259).

Still, can this "heterogeneity of power" be strengthened or extended with a marxist inflection? In this case, we can look at other examples where Foucault was explicating the emergence of cohesive networks of relations, of dispositifs of power. He offers two other examples where he references the economic and social problems resulting from the emerging poor and homeless, and wherein specific references are made to the construction of a working class. Although the links remain undeveloped in Foucault's own work, I want to explore the possibility
of finding useful homologies between Foucault’s dispositif of disciplinary power (especially at its limits) and Marx’s concept of the formal to the real subsumption of labour.

**Reading Marx's Formal to Real subsumption through a Foucauldian schema**

Beginning with Marx, in the simplest terms, with formal subsumption, capital simply takes up the mode of production already in existence; with real subsumption, capital completely reforms the mode of production in order to make it more adequate to the logic of capital. This is also the matrix—central to many autonomists—for the *general intellect* which necessarily expands with the real subsumption of labour and *immaterial labour* which is the form of productive activity which real subsumption increasingly depends upon. In short, the process of real subsumption is never complete, because when its factory work is done, as we see around us everyday, society, the lifeworld, all species being, and the globe remain a constant target for expansion.

In “Notebook VI”, which is a continuation of the epic “Chapter on Capital” in the *Grundrisse*, the passage from manufacture to large-scale industrialization is described. This is the historical shift encapsulated in the turn to real subsumption. It is problematic to provide a straightforward periodization here due to the wildly uneven nature of the development of capital. Furthermore, formal and real subsumption can and do coexist on the same spatial and temporal plane. Nonetheless, we can say, for example, that formal subsumption was the process transforming, say, Britain from the mid-15th century to the late 18th
century, while real subsumption continues to this day as capital expands throughout the globe.

In more detail, with formal subsumption, the labour process itself, e.g. guild production, is not altered. What is new is the extraction of surplus value through the extension of the working day. More specifically, under formal subsumption, only “absolute” surplus value is produced—by an intensive or extensive extension of the working day, for which there are physical limits. In short, formal subsumption is capital by partial measures. But as mentioned earlier, varying historical conditions make it clear that such “partial measures” do not reflect the logic of capital. Thus emerges the “logic” of real subsumption: “capital, rather than adapting itself to a given structure of demand or socially acknowledged needs, by revolutionizing production revolutionizes demands and needs themselves, expanding markets, provoking new needs, creating new products and new spheres into which production of exchange values for more value, production for profit, makes its appearance” (Marx, 1992, p. 945).48

So here we see the competitive dynamic of capital, that revolutionizing power recognized by observers as disparate as Schumpeter and Negri. Real subsumption is underlined by capital’s need to constantly transform the means of production in order to augment surplus value. This results in increasingly mechanized production and the imposition of uniform and repetitive tasks on labour. This requires an intensification of factory discipline and a greater hierarchy of labour which does eliminate, for example, the guild producer (such hierarchies must become more mobile in order to offer greater flexibility, but
never so flexible as to undermine class). Finally, increased scientific knowledge, techniques and practices are required to facilitate the never-ending quest for increased productivity through mechanization. Rather than relying simply on an extension of the working day, real subsumption turns to the production of relative surplus value.49

After this labyrinthine journey through Marx's logic we can now turn to Foucault to seek specific affinity or homologous relations. It is clear that the reception of Foucault's reconceptualization of power has ranged from confusion to hostility to excitement. Because there is an emphasis on its decentred and diffused flows, rather than seeing the flexibility and strength of its networked relations, many see its microflows that criss-cross the body as if it were like all those little Lilliputian strands of thread that were used to hold down, to bound and dominate the giant. But, as has been emphasized throughout, Foucault was always adamant that he utterly rejected the "repressive hypothesis" of power. As he states clearly, concluding his first lecture of "Society must be defended": "I have in fact long been suspicious of this notion of 'repression'... [as] it cannot provide an adequate description of the mechanisms and effects of power, cannot define them" (Foucault, 2003, pp. 17-8). We already know that Deleuze emphasizes this: "[for Foucault] the final word on power is that resistance comes first" (1988a, p. 89). Likewise, this is a conceptual key to autonomist thought: "In Foucault, there is an echo of Mario Tronti's interpretation of Marxism... as a workers' resistance existing prior to the strategies of capital" (p. 144). For now, however, let this structural dynamic act as a brief tonic to the dominating logic of
capital just discussed, and the Foucauldian reconceptualization of control will follow. But such brackets cannot fully hold the dynamic component of power and it will be taken up again when we turn to the ontology of power which can be read with the Italian Foucault.

That capital was inscribed in Foucauldian power is clear. A year before the Aut Aut controversy, Foucault had an extensive interview with Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino for Microfisica del potere: interventi politici, a text that was of critical importance in the autonomist diffusion of the Italian Foucault. Therein he expresses clearly the need to account for the logic of capital. But he situates it within a broad and variegated dispositif of power he would eventually call biopower—when population or an aggregate becomes an object for the exercise of power. As Foucault notes to his Italian interlocutors, by the 17th and 18th centuries, a new form of power "begins to exercise itself through social production and social service. It becomes a matter of obtaining productive service from individuals in their concrete lives." This technique of power is new because it demonstrates a "grasp of a multiple and differentiated reality" and an ability to "gain access to the bodies of individuals, to their acts, attitudes, and modes of everyday behaviour." We can see a parallel here with the process of real subsumption in its dispersal through productive processes not limited to the factory. Foucault makes a direct link to capital:
these new techniques of power needed to grapple with the phenomena of population, in short to undertake the administration, control, and direction of the accumulation of men (the economic system that promotes the accumulation of capital and the system of power that ordains the accumulation of men are, from the seventeenth century one, correlated and inseparable phenomena). (Foucault, 2000a, p. 125)

While Foucault is sometimes accused of employing ahistorical analysis, we have been showing that this is a specious charge. Here I want to make further links between the historical foundation of Foucault’s schema of disciplinary power-biopower, and a Marxian analysis of the move from formal to real subsumption. In Discipline and punish, Foucault painstakingly demonstrated the emergence of “disciplinary power” from the previous regime of punishing “sovereign power” in mid-18th century France. What Foucault demonstrates is how discipline emerges, as an idea and a practice, and how it is literally diffused across society in its entirety. New relations of power develop, above and beyond that which had formerly been centralized in the sovereign and state. This is the time when the modern prison emerges in its panoptic architectural formation. Disciplinary power spread in discursive forms as well, in the texts of philosophers, jurists, even by a colleague of Hegel’s (Foucault, 2000b, p. 71). It diffused from prisons to psychiatric hospitals, to convents, to schools, to barracks, and to factories.

To demonstrate how widespread this new dispositif became, Foucault offers a “riddle” to solve by describing the prescribed routine of an actual institution in France in the 1840s:
It was an institution in which there were four hundred people who weren't married and who had to get up every morning at 5 o'clock; at 5:50 they had to have finished washing and dressing, made their bed, and had their coffee; at 6 the compulsory work began, lasting until 8:15 in the evening, with a one-hour break for lunch; at 8:15 dinner and group prayer; retirement to the dormitories was at 9 o'clock on the hour. Sunday was a special day (pp. 73-4).

The fact that it could have been any of those aforementioned institutions is precisely the point. In fact, it describes a day in the life of a factory—a women's factory in the Rhone area" (p. 75).

In this case we can see a clumsy, early attempt at "real subsumption" but really the model is all wrong. This large-scale textile factory was far too expensive to run, too cumbersome, too rigid in its production techniques and unable to respond quickly enough to market fluctuations; indeed, these factors accounted for its demise in only five years. There is factory discipline, but the logic of capital was neither fully expressed nor determinate. Those labouring there received no wages but rather a lump-sum payment annually, collected only upon their departure. Any unintended "relative" surplus value was severely truncated by the high cost of the "necessary labour" as the primeval capitalist had to provide food, lodging, and general care. In short, the costs of the social reproduction of labour were wholly undertaken by the owner.

Foucault's comments seem readily compatible here with an autonomist marxist analysis: "The function of transforming the body into labor power corresponds to the function of transforming time into labor time" (p. 82); and "the worker's labour and the worker's knowledge about his own labor, the technical improvements—the little inventions and discoveries, the microadaptations he's
able to implement in the course of his labor—are immediately recorded, thus extracted from his practice, accumulated by the power exercised over him through supervision” (pp. 83-4). Such homologies, however, should not obscure a basic point of differentiation. Stated simply, Foucault insists that the logic of capital is not the generative site of the logic of domination; indeed, the latter fully preceded and is never fully contained by the former.

If we return to “Le jeu de Michel Foucault” we can see this point emphasized. There he stresses that there is never a singular logic or central site that drives and coheres a dispositif—such as disciplinary power. He offers the example of the beginning of heavy industry in France between 1825-30; in Mulhouse in the Rhine Valley, where there were myriad strategies for “fixing workers”: “putting pressure on people to marry, providing housing, building cités ouvrières, practicing that cunning system of credit slavery that Marx talks about, consisting in enforcing advance payments of rents while wages are not paid until the end of the month” (Foucault, 2001f, p. 306, Trans. mine). So there are local initiatives, like housing, centralized issues, like schooling workers’ children, moral issues, like women’s work and philanthropic discourses, and so on. In short, you have all kinds of support mechanisms (unions of employers, chamber of commerce, etc.) which invent, modify, and re-adjust, according to the circumstances of the moment and place—so that you a total strategy is obtained, which is coherent and rational, but for which one cannot say who conceived it (p. 306, Trans. mine).

Still, there is something else missing here which has been stressed throughout. In recent pages, I have been speaking in the voice of domination and control, wherein people and populations are mere objects for total management.
In the aforementioned, the role of class seems glossed over. Foucault acknowledges that class is "at the centre of the problem" but nonetheless is not "an a priori entity." Instead, it is formed amidst multiple contestations, tactics, struggles, and counter-strategies. In other words, "between the strategy which fixes, reproduces, multiplies and accentuates relations of forces, and the class which thereby finds itself dominant, you have a reciprocal relation of production" (p. 307, Trans. mine). Power, then, is not a force which merely oppresses, and is met by something else, resistance, which struggles against it. To better grasp this dynamic of power; let us take an unorthodox turn to ontology

A productive ontology of power?

Foucault’s 1978 Aut Aut interview begins with an urgent need on the part of the interlocutors. They begin by stating that Italians are primarily interested in the "political effect" of Foucault’s ideas. More specifically, “The concept of resistance can easily function as repoussoir [something that exists only in contrast to or against something else], as the external limit of an analysis which would bring to light in the presence of this concept the notion of Power with a capital P" (Foucault, 1996e, p. 255). In his eventual response, after a lengthy excoriation of his PCI critics, Foucault reaches one of his most enduring and influential points in his reconceptualization of power. It does not emanate from some other source, whatever that may be—i.e. sovereignty, the mode of production, etc. Instead, power is nothing but a network of relations. And resistance is a dynamic always already inscribed in that network of relations: “If mine were an ontological conception of power, there would be, on one side,
Power with a capital P, a kind of lunar occurrence, extra-terrestrial; and on the other side, the resistance of the unhappy ones who are obligated to bow before power" (Emphasis added, p. 260). Instead, power is "born of something else", wherein, on the one hand there are various struggles (e.g. economic or religious), and on the other hand there is a space which opens up in the midst of struggle, where other, and often unexpected power relationships develop.

Here Foucault insists his is not an "ontology of power". Yet there are others—who I am positioning as friends of the Italian Foucault—that insist otherwise. In this unexpected realm of ontology, we can find Michael Hardt, who reads ontology in such a way to give it great affinity with Foucauldian power. To make such an inflection, he utilizes both the 17th century philosopher Baruch Spinoza, and the not-so-unexpected comrade Deleuze. What should be clear from the outset is that in this context, to speak of "ontology" does not entail the search for a transcendent firmament upon which reality rests some singular structure with universal and timeless meanings and values. It is ontology of being without an upper-case B.

There is another compelling reason for this ontological turn. Power relations are born of struggles which are fought out and negotiated by specific subjectivities. As such, more orthodox subjectivities, like the working class, are not preexisting entities but something expressed in particular labouring relations to capital. Now political economy can keenly outline specific structural relations to the mode of production. Historicizing can sketch out the specific lines that comprise the context. But there are many ways of inscribing power into this
complex matrix on which subjectivity rests. A turn to ontology is a gambit to understand a basic dynamic of power in its relationship to the construction of subjectivities. In short, it is as much a practical as a theoretical exercise.

In this section, I will examine how an ontological perspective helps us better understand this reconceptualization of power along the following lines: what is ontological thought; what is a productive ontology of being—which is both immanent and materialist—wherein it is practice that is constitutive of being; and most substantially, what is the ontological struggle between “order and organization” in relation to both dispositifs and power?

Ontological thought carries with it baggage from metaphysics; more typically, it seeks a transcendent and universal precondition of being in a teleological and determinate reality. In Hardt’s usage—and in its application to the Italian Foucault—there is no reference to an idealist ontology. In other words, such an ontological perspective does not reference either a “preconstituted structure of being or any teleological order of existence...[as] no preconstituted order is available to define the organization of being” (Hardt, 1993, p. xiii). This is not the speculative terrain of a Heideggerian ontology which inquires about the possibility of being. Instead it is a positive ontology of being, in the tradition not only of Spinoza, but of Marx. This is because such an ontological inquiry is not an abstract one, seeking the transcendent essence of being. Rather, it is an ontology of power; as such Being is understood in relation to power because it is grounded on our power to act, be affected and affect others: “A positive, materialist ontology is above all an ontology of power” (p. 115).
To posit such a positive ontology of power is not an "antifoundationalist" poststructuralist turn but rather an historicized one. In ontological terms, this means an immanent foundation. Hardt delineates this foundation wherein the "essence" of being, if you will, can be seen in a twofold process of a) productivity: and b) producibility. The productivity of being is its capacity and aptitude to produce; the producibility of being is its capacity and aptitude to be produced. In other words, this is the ability to construct new subjectivities—what, in any given dispositif, Deleuze calls "lines of subjectification"—and the myriad ways in which we take up existing subject positions. One might be tempted here to put this twofold process on the well-known axis of domination (to be produced) and resistance (to produce). And while that is somewhat helpful as a point of comparison, things, of course, are not so simple. The capacity for productivity will be taken up at length in the network chapter in the discussion of the "Soft revolution". What can be stated briefly here is the manner in which bodies come together in new compositions to make a more powerful body. In short, it is the composition of relations which increases or diminishes the power of our subjectivities and our collective ability to act (pp. 99, 117).

The ontological struggle between "order and organization" in relation to both dispositifs and power

In order to unpack this ontological of being—of productivity and producibility—it is necessary to return to the realm of power relations themselves. There is another key distinction Hardt makes in reference to Deleuze. For if there is no transcendent fixity for this ontology of being; if, instead, it is inscribed in
power relations, then it is through power relations that we can better understand its differentiated manifestation in the productivity and producibility of being. As such, there is a key distinction between “foundation” and “causality”. This can be understood more clearly by making a distinction between order and organization. Order is the external imposition of structure against which any composition of bodies (subjectivities) must negotiate, as in an order of being truth, or society. Organization, on the other hand, is precisely the active process of composition of bodies; it is a process that transpires “from below” the imposition of order, the “coordination and accumulation” of encounters. This is precisely the play of forces within an immanent field of relations. It is a site of struggle and contestation: between an imposed order and bodies that push against, and rearticulate that order in a manner that extends the ability to act of those bodies in that particular composition. It is a creative process: “an immanent creation or composition of a relationship of consistency and coordination” (p. xv).

To bring this back to the more familiar terrain of the Italian Foucault, we can turn to Hardt’s reference to Mario Tronti. But before doing so, it is not difficult to see the resonance of this notion with Marx’s famous maxim that we make our own history (“organize” bodies) but not within the conditions of our own making (“imposed order”). Via Tronti, we can see a decisive class inflection on this schema. The imposed order is that of capital and in relation to that it is working class subjectivity that is produced. This is the “Stakhanovite” essence which comprises a dogged but only partial component of a working class subjectivity—one which is productive for capital itself.
Where, within this “essence” is the working class subjectivity that struggles against its condition, against capital? A deeper consideration of the ontology of power undergirding these relations must include that aptitude or capacity of producibility of the working class—of the structural possibility of resistance which is always already inscribed. The ongoing autonomist theme of “self-valorization” can be nicely explicated here. In order to extricate working class subjectivity from the production of surplus value, there must be a refusal of this relation of exploitation. Hence a key autonomist demand—“the refusal of work”—can be seen as an expression of the “producibility” of being. In this case it includes the very refusal of working class subjectivity itself. Hardt quotes Tronti: “In order to struggle against capital, the working class must struggle against itself inasmuch as it is capital...Workers’ struggles against work, struggle of the worker against himself inasmuch as worker” (p. 44). There is nothing transcendent then about the ontology of being for the working class, despite Stalinist impositions (relayed and reinforced by most European Communist parties, certainly in Italy and France). Rather, it is a contested being, through its productivity and producibility—the working class must produce its own subjectivity to struggle against the one imposed by capital. The imposed order of capital is multiply articulated then; and from below, workers coordinate and organize their encounters, in hopes that the accumulation of their struggles will result in a composition of relations that increases their ability to act—and not in an abstract manner but to rupture the relations of exploitation in which they are
enmeshed. The ontology of being, then, achieves coherence in “a critique of order and an affirmation of organization” (p. 18).

As with a microphysics of power, then, an ontology of power is an individuated but collective process predicated on multiple, complex relations, wherein it is bodies, or being, that act as points of articulation, as transversal relays, as nodes comprising the network or grid of intelligibility. Deleuze, writing about Spinoza, states as much: “In order to really think in terms of power, one must pose the question in relation to the body” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 257). We already see how antagonisms animate this ontology—i.e. against the imposed essence of working class subjectivity. But such antagonism is adequate only in terms of identifying that which is undesirable in a produced subjectivity that preexists any active composition of relations. Here we can get an idea of how far such an approach to ontology takes us from metaphysical questions about the possibility of being; with the foregrounding of power, it becomes a far more material question of the impossibility of a certain kind of being that is imposed, and hence the need for creative resistance, composition, and valorization of different kinds of being. Antagonism will not suffice here; the failure to recognize the constitutive dynamic of joyful practice by many adherents was surely a factor that contributed to the ill-fortunes of the autonomist movement by the end of the 1970s. For Hardt, via Deleuze, via Spinoza, highlights a very different logic necessary for the composition of bodies: common notions—or, what throughout I have been calling affinity. This point will be extended in the following chapter, as
it is an integral component of the “Soft Revolution”. For now it is necessary here to continue this thread on the productive ontology of Being.

**Affinity, “natural right” and the organization of bodies**

Encounters amidst a given imposed order need affinity or common notions if they are not to remain chance and fleeting. This is at the heart of Spinoza’s political project (especially as interpreted by Deleuze): become active (seek collective encounters), become adequate (forge common notions on the basis of affinity), and become joyful (the resultant effect is an increased capacity to act). But as Hardt notes, such a schema remains in the domain of ethics. To understand this process in political terms, he turns to Spinoza’s passage through the juridical domain. But unlike Foucault’s examination of sovereign power, the focus here is on “natural right”. Nonetheless, there are profound implications in this Spinozist passage that greatly illuminate and enhance the reading of Foucault’s “Society must be defended” lectures, especially in respect to Boulainvilliers’s critique of sovereign power.

Spinoza’s proposition is simple: the “natural right” of any given body extends only as far as its ability to act. It is important to recognize that with Spinoza, while he always starts from the simplest composition or “lowest point of social organization” (i.e. one body), the expectation is that the body will be in composition with other bodies; the organization of those bodies is the terrain of politics and ethics; and the ability to act therein is the space of freedom. After 1977 especially, there is a strong relevance here for Foucault, especially as it was the path he increasingly followed. As his appetite for 70s-style radical politics
waned (along with the “Movement” in Italy) he turned toward the “lowest point of social organization,” not in isolation, but as a necessary starting point. Eventually, he would identify that starting point as a “critical ontology of ourselves...an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time an historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them” (Foucault, 1997a, p. 132). But, Foucault does not remain in the domain of ethics. First, there is the need for “the labor of diverse inquiries” to better determine the kinds of “limits” imposed on us through the “order of society and truth”. Then, most importantly, once these limits have been rendered problematic: “[t]hey have their practical coherence in the care brought to the process of putting historico-critical reflection to the test of concrete practices” (p. 133). But, such a “political” project is also at the limits of the radical practices of the 70s, no doubt informed by the failures and frustrations of that time.

So, on the one hand, there is a line from Spinoza through Deleuze which reaches the problem of “natural right” in the following fashion: begin with a critique of imposed order, a process driven by antagonisms, and pursue the affirmation of organization as guided by common notions. One the other hand, we can see a similar passage in Foucault, especially after his extended inquiry into sovereign power in 1976. In another lecture, on Kant’s “Was ist Aufklärung” and given to the French Society of Philosophy in 1978, Foucault begins with an intractable critique of imposed order, an antagonism expressed as follows: “how not to be governed like that, by that, in the name of those principles with such
and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures" (Foucault, 1997b, p. 28). His first definition of critique is concisely stated: “not like that, not for that, not by them”. More specifically, and with an inflection that retains great affinity with the autonomist impulse, he emphasizes a “general characteristic”: “the art of not being governed quite so much” (p. 29). Upon taking questions after this lecture, he insists this is not an abstract expression of incipient libertarianism, as it is supported by “the historical practice of revolt, the non-acceptance of a real government on the one hand, or, on the other, the individual experience of the refusal of governmentality” (p. 73). Such actual historical refusals bring Foucault to the consideration of natural law. That is, there is this critique, this refusal because the imposed order of law is perceived as unjust or illegitimate. When the potential of this refusal turns (or at least threatens) to revolt, “then a monarch, a magistrate, an educator or a pater familias, will have to submit...[this is] the problem of natural law” (p. 30). This kind of critique, which results in autonomous insubordination, is ultimately in response to the compositional form of governance, of the “imposed order”. As such, it is a practical question regarding sovereign power.

The Italian Foucault, Spinoza, Deleuze, and Hardt: An adequate composition of bodies?

For now, let us return to the central trope of this dissertation: the construction of a conceptual persona for Foucault and an accompanying theoretical toolkit. Because concepts can never have enough friends, perhaps the composition of Hardt, Deleuze and Spinoza can be of assistance in
understanding this productive ontology of power which is animated only by practice? Furthermore, can we gain insight as to how an adequate composition of bodies can be organized in an efficacious manner?

Spinoza politicizes the concept of natural right with his insistence that it is coextensive with the power of bodies, meaning that all transcendent impositions (like sovereign power) are open to contestation. This means power in the name of duty, moral order, tradition, or any other force external to the field of immanent relations is always susceptible to the force, the power, the *natural right* of any given composition of bodies—that is, the resultant extension of its individuated and collective ability to act. Indeed, Spinoza names this dynamic of an ontology of being: *conatus*. In Book III of *Ethics*, Spinoza identifies what he sees as the core or constant dynamic of being: “Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being...[and this striving] is nothing but the actual essence of the thing” (Spinoza, 1994, p. 75). Striving to preserve and to extend our being is *conatus*.

It is worthwhile to consider the modality of *conatus* here. Throughout *Ethics*, there are scholia, a section distinct from the dizzying chain of propositions, proofs, and corollaries which comprise the work’s “geometric form”. Deleuze categorizes scholia as “setting out the practical struggle against sadness, expressing itself at each point by saying ‘such is the case’” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 345). There is an important scholia which follows the proposition where *conatus* is introduced. For some, this scholia would situate Spinoza and the concept of *conatus* on the pinnacle of a “slippery slope” of relativism. For others.
it is simply a sober and incisive recognition of the implications of being on an immanent plane. He notes that we desire that which we feel—rightly or wrongly—will extend our bodies. "From this then, it is clear that we neither strive form nor will, nor want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it" (p. 76). Given the myriad ways in which complex power relations comprise our ontology of being—both produced and able to produce—this surely offers some insight as to why "working class subjectivity" does not always struggle "against itself"—in short, why workers of the world have yet to unite into a global subject engaged in revolutionary struggle.

For Spinoza, at least, conatus drives us to struggle beyond the present order of things. And just as with Foucault, for whom "natural right" is expressed in the efficacy of critique against the "present order", with Spinoza it is that which seeks "the freedom from order, the freedom of multiplicity" (Hardt, 1993, p. 109). But there is no teleology here; conatus does not necessitate any striving toward revolutionary subjectivity. If we account for the perspectival implications of conatus in immanent relations—c.f. Boulainvilliers and the "aristocratic reaction"—then there are "no guarantees" in a productive ontology of power. Hardt acknowledges as much: organization as "a continual process of composition and decomposition through social encounters on an immanent field of forces...[proceeding] without any predetermined design, on the basis of the interaction of immanent forces" (p. 121). Is there any way the dispositif can help us in this ontology of power without guarantees?
**Dispositifs as “ontological machines”, or “Renverser” Hardt**

There is a brief but curious reading of the dispositif by Hardt. In his concluding remarks on the difference between order and organization in the ontology of power, he severely truncates the concept of the dispositif. Here he has situated the dispositif as that which “imposes order”—“[d]ispositifs or deployments, structure a social order from above, from an external space of transcendence” (p. 121). This, in turn, necessitates a multiplicity of organization by social bodies seeking freedom from the weight of dispositifs. In short, the dispositif, both as a deployment of power and as the imposition of a social order, is situated in struggle against the multiple organization of bodies from below, as assemblages of power, weighing down the possibilities of practice. This is certainly one way to situate the dispositif in this process of ontological construction. It is, however, fully incompatible with the reading of the dispositif by the Italian Foucault. Furthermore, it is incompatible with other readings of the dispositif by Hardt—particularly in relation to another friend Antonio Negri. So we will proceed looking for further lines of affinity with a goal to clarifying the process of a productive ontology of power.

It is appropriate to substantiate this ontological turn in our consideration of a Foucauldian reconceptualization of power with reference to Hardt and Negri. Their highly influential books *Empire* and *Multitude*, after all, are like the unnamed elephants in the room of this dissertation. That is because both Foucault and autonomist marxism feature prominently in the foundation of those works. In *Empire*, their use of political theory is with recourse to ontology; in turn
this ontological perspective shines light on the social productivity and creativity of the multitude. For them there is a twofold importance of a political ontology of power. One is critical and deconstructive; that is, to “reveal an alternative ontological basis” in the creative capacity of the multitude by “subverting hegemonic language and social structure” (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 47); the second is constructive and ethico-political for the production of alternative political subjectivities. In short, a case could be made that they too have their own “Italian Foucault”—although that would be another project.

More importantly for our purposes, elsewhere, Hardt situates Negri’s turn to ontology as the result of Foucault’s impact on philosophy. The positive and productive reception of Foucault—along with many autonomists—stands in stark contrast to the PCI’s vendetta. Furthermore, there is a generous and flexible reading here insofar as it is acknowledged that Foucault never overtly positions his work as presenting “a constitutive ontology”. Nonetheless, Negri is able to read such a “positive foundation” in Foucault’s work, much like we have done up until now. Hardt does so much in the same manner but by explicitly situating this “positive foundation” in relation to the dispositif. When we remember that the dispositif is a heterogeneous ensemble of discursive and nondiscursive lines, then we can see an expansive surface on which lines of subjectification—or being—can be inscribed. Thus there is no hidden transcendental realm that we must discover in order to witness the ontological foundation of being; rather it is expressed in a composition of relations, in the heterogeneous ensemble of the dispositif, through its links and nodes. In the unpublished chapter “Remark:
Renverser Foucault: Negri’s constitutive ontology”, Hardt situates being as “flattened out on the surface of the world, in the mechanisms, disciplines and deployments which positively constitute real practices and desires” (Hardt, 1991). Later we will offer perhaps a more adequate model by casting this ontological matrix in network form. In that case, being is not something “flattened out” but rather a dynamic flow through that heterogeneous ensemble which can be understood as a complex set of relations, through links and nodes that let us see and speak, and understand ourselves in relation to the world in which we find ourselves in the middle.

I have been emphasizing that, if we think in terms of dispositifs, then by definition power is not that which represses or “says no”—which is not to say that there are not established or sedimented “orders” which limit our ability to act. Rather, a dispositif, as part of a productive ontology of being, comprises a matrix of signification for ourselves and the world around us. In Hardt’s terms: “the horizon of the world (the limits of our thought and action) in a specific epoch weave together to form the fabric of being” (Hardt, 1991). In short, any “effective transcendental of an age” are an effect of the cohesion of dispositifs which give them form. Finally, the dispositif contributes to a political ontology of power because being is founded through practice; hence, subjectivities are always already imbued with intentionality.

But, Hardt situates the dispositif in a problematic schema—one that is at odds with its usage herein. He positions the dispositif as natura naturans (literally, “naturing nature”). This is a rather complex Spinozist term whose
original usage in *Ethics* matters little here, save that it situates the dispositif as a "constitutive agent". In other words, the dispositif is that which "imposes order", a dominating power of "subjugation". This would put the dispositif, within the ontology of power, on the side of "productivity"—that which imposes/produces subjectivity. On the other side there is us, and we, as "social subjects are restricted to the role of *natura naturata* (constituted and determined agents" (Hardt, 1991). This is the realm of "producibility"; as such, our capacity and aptitude is limited to being produced.

Hardt establishes this schema to demonstrate how Negri—just like Marx did to Hegel—turns this Foucauldian ontology of power on its head. Thus Hardt makes his claim for the need to *renverser* Foucault. The idea is that Negri inverts this ontological process by recognizing the constitutive role of our collective practice and labour. This takes back the role of *natura naturans* from the dispositif. In other words, we, as subjects, restore our productivity, our aptitude and capacity to produce being. In short, "[I]ke Foucault's, Negri's ontology is political in that it has a positive foundation in the material and historical field of force that is constituted by the exercise of power" (Hardt, 1991). The purported difference is that with Negri, ontological constitution comes through the organization of the practice of bodies/social subjects.

The point of this excursus is not to point out inconsistencies in Hardt's early work. Instead, it is to emphasize the productive role of the dispositif, and to recall that it is not simply a heterogeneous ensemble of domination. Part of the whole point of conceptualizing power through the dispositif is to emphasize the
immanent relations which comprise that heterogeneous ensemble in the first place; an ensemble that is always in part made up by lines of subjectivity. In other words, we, as subjects, are not "outside" dispositifs, preexisting and reformed due to the weight its external order imposes on us.

Foucault was clear about this in relation to sexuality: "I start with the dispositif of sexuality, a fundamental historical given, which is the obligatory starting point for any discussion of these issues. I give it serious consideration and I take it literally. I do not place myself outside of it, because it is not possible to do this" (Foucault, 1980b, p. 218). The ontology of power of the Italian Foucault, then, is not metaphysical. It is productive because being is produced through practice. Practice and subjectivity are intelligible because they are expressed within myriad dispositifs. Such a reading is wholly incompatible with Hardt's where there is an external space in which subjects—which have an active capacity for "productivity"—suddenly lose that capacity through the imposition of a dispositif.

Let us turn to Deleuze in hopes of some further clarification on this question of power. One of the advantages of his influential essay, "What is a Dispositif?" is that it was written in 1989. With the benefit of hindsight, he was able to identify the critical role played by crisis—in both theory and practice—in formulating the dispositif in the first place. There can be no doubt that Foucault's earlier work, be it on madness, or discipline and punishment, was tipped in the direction of domination. But this conceptual trap of power as domination was the "urgent need" to which the dispositif responded. Indeed, the heterogeneous lines
that make up a dispositif are not like the iron bars of a prison cell; they are more like the lines that link different nodes in a network—and such complex relations are always open to rearticulation, to further cohesion or divergence. In Deleuze’s reading, “the lines in a dispositif do not outline or surround systems which are each homogeneous in their own right, object, subject, language, and so on, but follow directions, trace balances which are always off balance, now drawing together and then distancing themselves from one another” (Deleuze, 1992a, p. 159). At an earlier historical moment, within a Foucauldian archive one could speak of hard lines of sedimentation; but within a dispositif, there are always lines of “breakage” and “fracture”. In short, dispositifs always leak; they are always in process, sometimes attaining greater cohesion, other times, breaking apart into new formations.

Most importantly, there is not a singular modality for the subject in a dispositif. Both natura naturans (the capacity of being for productivity—to produce subjects) and natura naturata (the capacity for producibility—to be produced) are in play within a dispositif. Thus there are different lines for subjects. Yes the fact that there is cohesion for a dispositif to begin with means there are lines of subjectivity therein—something which already signifies and, in that sense, normalizes being. But Deleuze insists on lines of subjectification. Here again we can say “finally something new”. This is the productive reconceptualization that comes out of crisis; subjectification is what offers a way out of the crisis which results from power as domination, as that which imposes. Subjectification works “in order to stop [dispositifs] from becoming locked in
unbreakable lines of force which would impose definitive contours” (p. 161).

Hence there is a shared imperative which informs both the dispositif and the entire oeuvre of autonomia, right back to its roots of operaismo. In short, Negri might have imagined a need to renverser Foucault, but there was never any such need for the Italian Foucault because the dispositif always recognized that ontological constitution comes from the organization of the practices of bodies/subjects.

“Nobody knows what a body can do”

As always, there is a kind of caveat in this complex process. Both modes of being—its productivity and producibility—are contained in the dispositif. As such, “a line of subjectification is a process, a production of subjectivity in a dispositif: It has to be made, inasmuch as the dispositif allows it to come into being or makes it possible, functioning as a line of escape, which escapes preceding lines, and escapes from itself” (p. 161). A line of subjectification is not a homogenous bloc, a heavy weight that hobbles the subjects upon which it bears down; rather, there is a desirable lightness of being with the dispositif which comes from the structural fractures and forced ruptures through which subjectification can flow and always find something new.

So “subjectification” is possible but not guaranteed. This resonates with the general oscillation which runs throughout this dissertation: it rises with the fervent hope and expectations that come from reenergized theory and practice—"finally something new"; and it falls with the setbacks and enervations of crises that arise from walls, both in theory and practice, which appear, at least
temporarily, insurmountable. But, if we consider these vicissitudes in ontological terms, there is great reason for optimism. If power relations are expressed in complex compositions of relations, then the differential dispersion of the ability to act depends on the particular form of power. In addition, if the “right” of a given body depends upon its ability to act, then the particularities of its composition will be determinate. Similarly, if the political is the “art of organizing encounters”, of composing relations, then this is an ongoing process, albeit one of struggle and contestation. There is a Spinozist maxim that is useful to keep at hand, and pulled out like a lantern when the situation is darkest and most dire. This is the Spinozist “declaration of ignorance” which is meant in the most positive way, for there is always hope in that which we do not know (which is always already our state of being). Paraphrasing, it states, “Nobody knows what the body can do, but the mind never ceases to be amazed at what it does.”57
CHAPTER 5: THE DISPOSITIF AND THE RISE OF NEW FORMS OF NETWORK POWER

[A dispositif is] a resolutely heterogeneous ensemble, comprised of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions, in short: the said as well as unsaid, these are the elements of the dispositif. The dispositif itself, it is the network which can be established between these elements. (Foucault, 2001f, p. 299, Emphasis added)

So far I have constructed the Italian Foucault and the concomitant conceptual toolbox primarily by examining the events and texts in which the dispositif emerged in medias res. This was not done as a philological exercise, but to allow the concept to emerge with augmented theoretical and practical efficacy for our historical moment. Naturally, everything has changed since 1977 but so many things remain the same. We are still in the midst of that ‘distant roar of battle’ that marked the crisis point in the conclusion of Discipline and Punish. That roar is not simply from the US military (nor from the increasingly ‘robust’ Canadian forces); nor is it solely from the various insurgencies in South America which are rearticulating lines of sovereign power in an innovative admixture of new and well-worn tactics and strategies; it is from a multitude of bodies, some ‘infamous’, others ‘sad militants’, some in desperate conditions, others simply not wanting to be governed ‘in this way’. The roar is often angry but sometimes just exasperated. The search for new politics takes many forms; but for many a commonality is that these new compositions cannot be contained in a binary
schema. Antagonistic relations, structural and otherwise, have never gone away. The fact that the global gap between rich and poor increased again in 2006 speaks to that; structural relations between labour and capital may be complex and multifaceted but a fundamental antagonism does remain. Affinity, however, has been a modality of relations explored and emphasized throughout this dissertation. To move forward it is useful to consider the possibility and limits of "affinity" as a constitutive element of the productive ontology of power. More specifically, I will consider what kinds of composition of bodies are possible in network formations. In order to do so, I examine the "network," not necessarily as a singular and distinct dispositif of power—as in its sovereign or disciplinary form—but as a way of understanding dispositifs, or power relations themselves, particularly in this historical moment.

It is important to begin by very briefly and schematically covering the past 30 years to bring 1977 to 2007. This will be done thematically to trace the development and increasing prominence of network power. As such, our quick points of reference will be threefold: neoliberal globalization as casted by Manuel Castell's 'network society'; the new form of rhizomatic and richly-networked resistance of the Zapatista; and the decentralized new social movement of IndyMedia. Of course, each of these examples are complex subjects deserving of their own postgraduate examination, as has been done by some of my colleagues. My purpose here is to productively extend the trope of network as a link to the Italian Foucault and dispositif.
The second section will be to present a new round of friends and concepts for the key conceptual persona in this dissertation: the Italian Foucault. This will be done to augment the theoretical capacity of the dispositif and to test its adequacy with variations of network thinking. This will be done primarily through a detailed overview of network theory as a potential means of sharpening the dispositif as an analytic tool, including Bruno Latour on Actor-Network theory.

**Contextualizing network power: Castells and networks of globalization**

A new economy emerged in the last quarter of the twentieth century on a world-wide scale. I call it informational, global and networked to identify its fundamental and distinctive features and to emphasize their intertwining... It is global because the core activities of production, consumption, and circulation, as well as their components (capital, labor, raw materials, management, information, technology, markets) are organized on a global scale, either directly or through a network of linkages between economic agents. It is networked because, under the new historical conditions, productivity is generated through and competition is played out in a global network of interaction between business networks. This new economy emerged in the last quarter of the twentieth century because the information technology revolution provided the indispensable, material basis for its creation. (Castells, 2000, p. 77)

Networks are the central trope in Castell’s three-volume opus *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. It is an empirically-grounded, interdisciplinary examination of globalization, which is radically reconfiguring economic and social relations. For Castells, there is a fundamental link between the concept of a network—a complex set of interconnected nodes—and our contemporary form of capitalism as neoliberal globalization. Neoliberal globalization can be characterized as follows: the rule of ‘free market’ ideology:
dismantling the social services of the 'welfare state'; widespread reregulation (i.e. telecommunications) in favour of corporate interests; privatizing formerly public sectors of the economy; and making the labour market more 'flexible' by reorganizing the labour process through high technology and by giving the collective worker less legal protection. Indeed, that flexible rearticulation of labour from above was vigorously implemented in Italy in the late 1970s and was a major factor in the collapse of autonomia.  

Castells targets two unique characteristics within the broader field of neoliberal globalization particular to the network society. The first is the predominance of new technologies—primarily Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) via computing and telecommunication. Second, information has become central, especially in its digital form which can be generated, stored, and manipulated in heretofore impossible ways. This is what he calls the 'informational society/economy' which has a networking logic inscribed in its basic structure. In particular, Castells identifies information as a raw material, flexibly processes primarily through ICTs, via a network logic. In short, this treated flow of information through networked relations is central to capitalist productivity and power (p. 21). Specifically, he notes: “the core of the transformation we are experiencing in the current revolution refers to technologies of information processing and communication” (p. 30). Like steam or electrical power were to previous stages of the industrial revolution, so to are ICTs to our informational economy.
Furthermore, networks are posited as that which define the social and economic morphology of our historical moment; and, it is ICTs that act as the primary diffuser of the network form. The ever-increasing constitution of social and economic relations in network form is the site where Castells situates power relations. If you are outside of that network flow you are outside the productive capacity of those power relations. Indeed, it is the asymmetrical formation of these networks which exacerbates global disparities between rich and poor, both through exclusion (i.e. sub-Saharan Africa) and inclusion (i.e. maquieldoras and Chinese free trade zones). This is where Castells situates his new concept—the ‘space of network flows’ which now supercedes the ‘space of places’; this space of network flows is itself heterogeneous, comprised of corporate lines, proprietary lines, and open lines. Contestations over social organization play out in these corporate, semi-public, and public flows; and resultant network formations are rarely discrete and limited to one or the other.

What is most important here is that a network logic traverses not only economic forms, but technology, culture, and institutions. As the borders of nation states become more porous, a more overt network form and logic take hold in neoliberal globalization. Multi-national corporations (MNCs) continue to adapt to a more flexible, decentralized global organizational form, in terms of their production and financing. This entails a complex process wherein production becomes increasingly localized while consumption is increasingly global. ICTs are central to this rearticulation of markets on a more networked global scale. As mentioned, information becomes an increasingly important
commodity for MNCs and the global economy, giving it both speed and flexibility for which networks are the most adequate form. A caveat is necessary. Networks are not a new phenomenon, and Castells is careful to point that out. Nonetheless, they have taken on a new defining role. And because of the aforementioned 'informationalization' this not only results in new forms of networks, it also makes it the defining morphology of our time.

New compositions of bodies: Zapatistas, new social movements and IndyMedia

One of the key elements of the ontology of power discussed in earlier chapters is the capacity for ‘productivity’ that comes from new compositions of bodies. The possibilities for such compositions expand exponentially in our network society. Because so much of the discussion of power thus far has been very abstract it seems necessary here to examine two well known examples of the productive possibilities for new networks and forms of power (both of which encapsulate new social movements): the Zapatistas and IndyMedia.

On the first of January 1994, one of the key juridical devices extending neoliberal globalization, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was implemented. But, the promulgation of NAFTA was interrupted by a limited peasant insurgency in southern Mexico. Had the Zapatista limited their struggle to one against the materiality of sovereign power—like seizing government buildings in regional villages—it would have quickly been snuffed out—and it is unlikely to have provoked the literally thousand of books and articles (in English alone) that have resulted from its strategic communicative turn. Within days, the
vastly numerically and militarily superior Mexican army began massing in Chiapas, the centre of the insurgency. But, the Zapatista did not revive older models like pirate radio to circulate their message locally. Instead, they extended preexisting affinities and alliances with myriad local and transnational NGOs. This allowed them to form highly coordinated and interconnected transborder linkages, just as NAFTA meant to facilitate for capital.

However, the Zapatistas sought to form a very different composition, a network of affinity that Harry Cleaver dubbed an ‘electronic fabric of struggle’ (It should be noted that there is a profound Italian autonomist connection here. Cleaver is one of the most prominent American scholar promulgating autonomist theory). They were able to form a network of indigenous people and their supporters via NGOs, and by utilizing what was then an embryonic-internet through various list serves, and first-generation networks like UseNet and Peace Net. This allowed the Zapatistas to spread news of the insurgency, which was largely ignored by mainstream media. It also facilitated ‘electronic civil disobedience’ as these networks were used to disseminate information, mobilize support, and coordinate joint action (Cleaver, 1998). And by the end of 1994—arguably the year the internet broke—the Zapatistas had not only become this emergent network’s most famous radical denizens, they had also forced the Mexican state into a position of negotiation, and unwittingly established a new model for struggle.

There are a few things that should be emphasized. The first is that—pace Castells—Chiapas is not an otherwise ‘networked node’ in the Informational
Society, neither rich in high-tech capacity nor an expected source of ‘knowledge generation.’ The second is that their struggle was successfully able to articulate complex network of the local and the global, connecting poverty, land rights, justice, exploitation, environmental protection, women’s rights, and democracy. This was made possible because of the material composition of bodies—highly interconnected and locally organized indigenous people in Chiapas—was linked with another immaterial composition—myriad other self-organized networks ranging from NGOs on the ground to church groups to students to what Cleaver called ‘regions of cyberspace sympathetic to grassroots revolts in general’ (Cleaver, 1998). Overall, then, the Zapatistas stand as a vigorous new manifestation of what Bologna called the ‘tribe of moles,’ popping up in wildly far-flung holes due to the unprecedented expanse of the ‘electronic fabric.’ This was a new organizational form of struggle and insurrection that was both autonomous and rhizomatic. This is the final point to make in this contextualization. This innovative design not only came from below, it used ICTs to link together a nonhierarchical and noncentred, indeterminate network structure, rhizomatically connected just like blades of grass in a field.

But we should be careful here. Just because these new material-immaterial networks are in a horizontal and non-hierarchical form does not mean that we can permanently exit relations of command and control toward consensus and coordination. After all, despite being riven with new lines of affinity, this remains a network of struggle. Capital, the state, and the military were all keen watchers of the Zapatistas. It cannot be surprising that the US took
active interest in the Zapatista insurgency and its new strategic deployment of ICTs, especially given its direct threat to NAFTA and neoliberalism. As such, it commissioned research from the RAND corporation, and two reports were produced, The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico in 1998 and Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy in 2001. Constituted power was prescient regarding the possibilities: “The greatest risk is a plethora of social network, guerilla and criminal wars. Mexico’s security (or insecurity) in the computer age could be, increasingly, a function of network wars of all types” (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1996).

It was the possibility that this particular insurgency could become a new model—‘Change the World without Taking Power’ (Holloway, 2002). This was the other element in this ensemble which was of concern: NGOs were not seeking political power; rather, to invigorate civil society, to make it a forceful counterbalance to the state and market in a new struggle over public policy. The Zapatista uprising was a full five years before the Seattle WTO protests and the RAND report one year earlier. New social movements, and their increased network capacity were now on the radar of capital, the state, and the military—and networks and alternative media become new watchwords. The terrain of struggle was shifting away from the shopfloor and factory to civil society itself. Resistance is no longer something confined to the site of work and it in not something that is limited to a particular point in space-time. The ‘space of flows’ has become a space of contestation. This is what RAND calls ‘netwar’ which it acknowledges as a threat to sovereign power, precisely because it is neither
geopolitically contained nor even tied to a situated genealogy of struggle: "A new generation of revolutionaries and militant radicals is also emerging, with new doctrines, strategies, and technologies that support their reliance on network forms of organization" (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1996).

Here is where the Rand corporation reports conflate very different actual compositions of bodies with their mediated network organizational form, linking al-Qaeda to new social movements to Columbian drug cartels. This is because "[t]hey all feature network forms of organization, doctrine, strategy, and technology attuned to the information age" (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001). The failure of this logic is to ascribe a commonality from this network form; it is, rather, that there is an ongoing strategic elaboration, which entails both expected and unexpected effects. This network form is contested, in multiple sets of relations, from above and from below, but in positions which are iterable and positionally relative.

If we wanted to think of netwar as a dispositif of power, we would do well to remember what Foucault said back in 1977, stressing that the intentionality of power relations are not hidden away deep below but inscribed on the surface. As such, we can read the following as a blueprint that has largely been pursued by constituted power since the turn of the millennium. RAND points to the key lessons to be learned from the Zapatista: foreground the notion of a 'civil society' and promote a 'global civil society' with the help of friendly NGOs⁶⁰; recognize that information and 'information operations' are key strategic weapons: "capture media attention, and use all manner of information and communication
technologies”; and, understand that decentralized, transversal, nonhierarchical rhizomatic formations diffuse mass force in a most efficacious manner—such ‘swarming’ is how change can be implemented without ‘taking control’ and this is "a natural outcome of information-age, network-centric conflict" (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001).

I want to briefly conclude this section by noting that there were other compositions of bodies which found great affinity with the Zapatista movement and equally realized the importance of ‘information operations’ especially given that it was the refusal to rely on corporate media in the first place that facilitated the networked formations. In 1999, there was a highly networked node with a surfeit of high tech capacity and knowledge generation. Seattle was not only the site where a new and far more ambitious juridical device was being constructed, it is also where the first IndyMedia began. It was always already part of a broader movement, of new social movements and new forms of political organization. Like the rhizomatic bamboo garden that Scott Uzelman evocatively invokes in his overview of autonomous media, IndyMedia quickly spread across the globe to networked nodes both expected (Vancouver, Toronto, New York City, London, Paris, Rome, etc) and unexpected (Burma, Armenia, Ecuador, Belarus, etc.) (Uzelman, 2005). What is critical is that this is a movement without a centre, composed by diffused and fluid communities which are resisting different forms of domination and control, articulated both locally and globally. What unites them is a common desire to construct ‘imagined communities’ and new ways of seeing the world around them. There is no attempt to ‘reform’ commercial media and no
assumption of legitimacy of the narratives produced therein. Instead, autonomous media activists "take up the tools of communication in order to tell their own stories" (p. 13).

I will later look at a few examples of such autonomous media practices. For now, this contextualization of the new and diverse prominence of networks can be concluded with a recollection that dispositifs, as presented by Deleuze, are comprised of 'curves of visibility' and 'regimes of enunciation'—by that which we enables us to see and speak. What is even more important is that a 'regime of light' is also a heterogeneous ensemble; that is, it is comprised of multiple lines that do not share a single or general source. There is an implication of critical importance here. If we use the concept of the dispositif form to understand media, then objects are not in any way 'represented'—that implies a preexisting form that is illuminated, like a flashlight smuggled into Plato's cave. Thinking in terms of dispositifs, the 'objects' that we see are dependent upon the regime of light, on its multiple and heterogeneous lines. In short, that which we see—and in turn can speak of—does not preexist the dispositif which expresses it. This makes the diffused project of autonomous media practices both difficult and full of potential. Such networked forms are replete with a capacity for 'productivity'—albeit without any progressive teleological guarantees.

**Foucault, power and networks**

In previous chapters I have talked about power, like war, in terms of a grid of intelligibility. But, in fact, war was a grid for understanding sovereign power. for revealing the dried blood on its juridical and neutral codes. As the previous
section demonstrates, war does have a place in networks, as the name netwar
attests. Networked ICTs become a site for tactics and strategies of struggle, both
from above and below, for purposes of domination and becoming. Yet,
antagonisms are dispersed in complex network relations; clashes between
homogeneous blocs are far less likely that dispersed and iterable flows. As well,
within network architecture, affinity is a much more powerful dynamic in their
cohesion than antagonism. After all, for networks to form, links need to be made
between discrete nodes. Recognition of the efficacy of affinity over antagonism is
arguably a primary means by which capitalist market relations continuously
outmaneuver radical politics. Yet, the importance of such affinities has long been
stressed by friends of the Italian Foucault—like Spinoza, who has been doing so
since the 17th century. This is why Spinoza places such importance on the role of
‘common notions’ in the facilitation of new compositions of bodies:

The common notion is the assemblage of two composable
relationships to create a new, more powerful relationship, a new
more powerful body—this assemblage, however, is not merely a
chance composition but an ontological constitution, because the
process envelops the cause within the new body itself (Hardt, 1993,
p. 99).

Affinity—or common notions—are the causa sui or cause of itself that
coheres such compositions of bodies. Again, there is no guarantee that this
causa sui will be in any way progressive. We can posit that common notions or
affinity are what facilitate linkages between nodes and adhere network
formations. However, even in Spinoza’s time, capital, market relations, and
money played a role therein. In writing about the importance of cooperation, of
extending our capacity to act and the preservation of our bodies, we by no means always turn to a progressive *causa sui*:

Now to achieve these things the powers of each man would hardly be sufficient if men did not help one another. But money has provided a convenient instrument for acquiring all these aids. That is why its image usually occupies the mind of the multitude more than anything else. For they can imagine hardly any species of joy without the accompanying idea of money as its cause (Spinoza, 1994. p. 159).

Let us leave such a recognition aside for the moment and return more specifically to Foucault and networks. We could say that the dispositif has greater conceptual affinity to networks than it does to structure. That Foucault long denied any structuralist connections has already been noted. Furthermore, the dispositif itself was a distancing from any structuralist hangover carried by the episteme. As one translator noted, structure differs from dispositif in that the former suggests "some universal frame in which all empirical configurations might be considered 'in principle' inscribed in terms of their ultimate analysis into a universal system of 'elementary' terms" (Deleuze, 1997, p. 196). By contrast, there is no 'organizing finality' nor a coordinate subjectivity within the dispositif. One of the basic lessons of the Italian Foucault is in regards to the dynamic of resistance, and as we have seen, the lines that comprise any dispositif can always be bent or broken.

There is an inherent dynamic, a flow, an expectation that the structural form of a network will change that also makes it more adequate to the dispositif than a synchronic structure. In the interview that appeared in the 1976 Italian collection *Microfisica del Potere*, Foucault spoke explicitly in terms of networks
and not structures. The dispositif is not merely the symbolic domain of signifying structures but a genealogy of relations of force; it is not like structuralism which seeks to evacuate the event from its synchronic analysis: “The problem is at once to distinguish among events, to differentiate the networks and levels to which they belong, and to reconstitute the lines along which they are connected and engender one another” (Foucault, 1980b, p. 114). Given that a dispositif is a heterogeneous ensemble, that there is no single source or determining factor, and that as factors cohere, they also diverge, there is a fundamental diachrony in its analytic capacity. Networks are a process of flows, of connections and disconnections between nodes. Yet, even within this more dynamic state, there is a tendency for asymmetric relations to persist. So if we think in terms of dispositifs, can we learn anything about the predominance of asymmetrical formations with recourse to network theory?

**Network theory**

One aspect of the dispositif that is potentially confusing its very heterogeneous composition and lack of a singular determining element. I am suggesting that regarding the dispositif as a network of relations will make it more amenable as a tool of analysis. Foucault writes, “the dispositif itself is the network of relations that can be established between these elements...[and] I would like to locate in the dispositif exactly the nature of the links which may exist between these heterogeneous elements.” He adds that between these elements which are discursive and nondiscursive, “there is something like a game where positions change, functions are modified, in ways that can be very different” (Foucault,
The difficulty comes in qualifying the nature of the connections, or the way in which a dispositif organizes into a network form. Without the mode of production as the determining factor, difficulty and confusion result.

The question is whether network theory can offer any insight regarding the 'rules of the game' of the dispositif. Network theory has only risen from obscurity in mathematics over the past decade or so. Given the proposal that the dispositif can be understood as a network we might be able to learn something about the seeming persistence of asymmetrical relations from structure of networks. Again, this is to not to exclusively put forward a dispositif of network power; rather, it is to understand its dynamic formation better through network theory. Given our historical moment which is dominated by ICT networks, this gambit seems a propos. Of course, there are myriad other factors—from capital to race and gender, to an array of cultural variable—which can augment or negate any principles or laws of network architecture. But even if that is the case, understanding just what might be facilitated or blocked can surely provide insight.

Albert-Lazslo Barabasi of the Notre Dame Centre for Complex Network Research has done much to pull network theory out of its relative obscurity through a field of mathematics called graph theory. His work has been made even more popular with the publication of his accessible book Linked. This, no doubt, is as much of an expression of our network society as is my interest in this mode of analysis. Networks were long thought to be random in their formation. In the late 1950s, two Hungarian mathematicians, Paul Eros and Alfred Reyna, put
forward an elegant solution to a complex problem: the laws of self-organization governing the formation of links between discrete nodes followed the simplest path—connections were made randomly. This notion held for a surprising number of years, perhaps bolstered in part by the way it fulfilled a liberal dream there was an egalitarian quality to the fact that each node has the same chance of being linked.

In the 1970s, there was sporadic interest in the social sciences after the now-famous Harvard experiment of ‘six degrees of separation’ posited small worlds as a general property of networks. That is, there was a recognition that networks were comprised of many highly connected clusters. Furthermore, these small world clusters were largely connected by ‘weak ties’; this is seen in phenomena as disparate as chemical molecular structure (weak hydrogen bond hold together large water molecules) and in social networks—for example, Facebook—where they keep clusters of close friends from being isolated. These weak ties seemed crucial for communication networks as they were thought to facilitate the flow of information from myriad sources between otherwise unconnected groups as well as being important relays that articulate the local to the global in various ways. In 1998 the Watts-Storgatz model demonstrated that weak links often covered vast distances: “these long-range links offer the crucial shortcut between distant nodes drastically shortening the average separation between all nodes” (Barabasi, 2002, p. 51).
Power laws, scale-free networks, and fitness

Barabasi seems to make some dubious assumptions. For example, he consecrates ‘80/20 rule’—or Pareto’s Law, named after the early 20th c. Italian economist—which stipulates that 80 percent of profits are produced by 20 percent of employees, 80 percent of customer service problems are created by 20 percent of employees, even that 80 percent of the peas in a garden are produced by 20 percent of the peapods. It would seem a pyrrhic victory to state that Pareto is wrong because X percent of the population has X percent of the wealth. Regardless, it is not the numeric breakdown that is of interest; rather, it is the persistence and predominance of asymmetrical relations. Enter the principle of ‘power laws.’

A power law is a mathematical expression that helps to explain the organizing principles on non-random, or scale-free networks. Indeed, the seeming ubiquity of power laws indicates that networks are rarely if ever random. Power laws also reveal glaring inadequacies in the Watts-Storgatz model and suggest a very different organizational form for most networks. But what is a power law? The simplest explanation is that power laws are the defining principle for self-organization in complex systems: “power laws appear each time order spontaneously emerged in complex systems” (p. 76). Is there something here, then, that can help us understand how the heterogeneous ensemble of the dispositif initially forms when it coheres in response to an urgent need? This is a moment when order appears out of non-order. Parallels can be made here to the physical world; when a gas becomes a solid, a solid liquid, etc., physicists call
this process *phase transition*. This radical shift in the order of things is relatively well-known in physics; in network theory, it is an emergent field of understanding. A consensus has developed around the fact of scale invariance; that is, power laws apply to networks of different sizes, and thus can be understood as a general principle in organization of complex or heterogeneous systems. In short, “when giving birth to order, complex systems divest themselves of their unique features and display a universal behaviour that has similar characteristics in a wide range of systems” (p. 78). Given that a dispositif also functions as a grid of intelligibility, can power laws help unpack the ‘phase transition’ wherein these systems of signification and subjectivities take hold?

Another way to understand a power law is, is to understand what it is not. We are all only too well aware of the “bell curve,” another mathematical expression that creeps into the collective unconscious of students and teachers as each semester draws to a close. Bell curves demonstrate, for phenomena within a given sample—be it height or grades—will fall within a predictable distribution pattern. The majority will be clustered somewhere in the middle with variations decreasing exponentially as you move either direction from that median point. Hence the high peak with rapidly decaying tails in either direction—the bell curve.

Through a perspective from above, via a lens of normalizing relations of force, the bell curve provides a perfectly expected vista. Such a distribution curve is what we have come to expect from most phenomena. But that is not what Barabasi and his colleagues found in their examination of the internet; nor,
subsequently, was it found to be an adequate model for just about any complex network. The bell curve explains why, when we walk down the street we see tall and short people but that the variation we encounter is rarely radically divergent from the norm; this is because examples exponentially decline each step away from the median. This is inconsistent with what was observed in the network structure of the internet. The bell curve would demand that the internet be comprised of discrete sites that all had relatively the same number of links to it, with only limited variation. Even a casual consideration of the massive difference between the number of links to Google, or MySpace, or Yahoo and my course blogs shows that this is definitely not the case. Rather than the karsts-like form of the bell curve, power laws are more like a waterfall. That is, on an axis of the number of nodes with x-links and the number of links, there is an initial high point (many nodes with just a few links) and a rapid decline but one that stretches out almost indefinitely like the river that flows away from the falls. That is because there is no exponential decline, or normalizing factor that limits difference as exhibited in a bell curve. So on the one hand, power laws indicate that within a scale-free network there is always a significant degree of variation; the longer the tail of the power law curve insures that because it is, by definition, the most intense site of difference. On the other hand, this difference can be quite inconsequential, relative to the peak; that is, its low level of connectivity to other nodes can render it an isolated, local phenomenon. The peak is where we find the superlinked hubs and connectors, like Google, et. al. In short, power laws allow for greater variation from the norm—my course blogs with perhaps a score
of links, coexist next to the billions of links to Google. Yet one is a super unknown, relatively speaking to the other. In a different analogy, if our physical characteristics were subject to power laws, "among the six billion inhabitants there would be at least one over 8,000 feet tall. So the distinguishing feature of a power law is not only that there are many small events but that the numerous events coexist with a few very large ones" (pp. 67-8).

The bell curve expresses strict limitations in variation by its very form. By contrast, the possibility of radical variation is something that fuelled both Foucault and the autonomists; that is, the possibility that asymmetrical relations could be radically transformed and rearticulated. So let us turn briefly to another conceptual ‘friend’ of the Italian Foucault, and underline further qualitative differences between the power law and bell curve and some implications.

Variation as the expression of natural history

Stephen Jay Gould was an iconoclastic scientist, famous not only for his silken prose but for helping to overturn a paradigm of evolutionary biology. He helped establish the theory of punctuated equilibrium—that evolutionary change happens in intense temporal bursts of radical change followed by long periods of relative stasis, as opposed to a steady gradual process. His affinity for such a revolutionary model no doubt was informed to some degree by his uncommon status as a Western scientist who was also an avowed radical. Gould can be seen as a friend of the Italian Foucault’s in a number of ways. First, he was profoundly anti-Platonic, arguing that an ontology of the natural world is expressed in variation, not an ideal form: “Read monkeys for preexistence, and
read variation as the primary expression of natural reality" (Gould, 1996, p. 42).

This is connected to another line of affinity. By considering natural history through the 'full house' of variation, we are left with a very different grid of intelligibility than that provided by *homo sapiens* as an essence or teleological indicator. This demonstrates what has long been part of his oeuvre: a radical decentering of 'man'—in this case, in terms of supposed evolutionary 'progress'.

Gould stresses that if we are to draw a lesson from the history of our complex biological network, it is that humans are neither emblematic nor do they comprise a pinnacle. His counterintuitive point is that in terms of evolutionary success, the prize goes to those that came first: single-celled prokaryotes; more specifically, bacteria. In terms of organizational form, this is the simplest form of life, "cells without organelles—no nuclei, no chromosomes, no mitochondria, no chloroplasts" (p. 170). Such cells have maintained their position as the most prolific form of life for more than 3.5 billion years. If we remember Gould's point that variation is the fundamental mode of existence, then we can understand our infinitely more complex biological form not as a march of progress but as—in mathematical terms of probability—as a 'drunkard's walk' that can only ever go in one direction. That is, organisms cannot shift to a simpler form than prokaryotes as that comprises a 'left-wall of minimal complexity'. This allows Gould to construct a graph of the frequency distribution of life's complexity which bears great resemblance to the power laws invoked by Barabasi et. al. One again we see a waterfall with a long river sloping ever-so-slightly lower in the far distance.
The bacterial mode comprises much of the falls; we are an infinitesimally shallow stream at the extreme right wall.

Increasing structural complexity of organisms, then, is a consequence of simplicity of the starting point; that increased complexity has a right-skewed distribution is an effect of that left wall of minimal complexity—what Gould calls "an epiphenomenal tail" (p. 174). As for the particularities of that complexity, that too is the result of an open-ended process as opposed to a preordained teleological one: "If we could replay the game of life again and again, always starting at the left wall and expanding thereafter in diversity, we would get a right tail almost every time, but the inhabitants of this region of greatest complexity would be wildly and unpredictable different in each rendition" (p. 175).

We can read, then, at least a homologous relationship between the development of organizational structures in natural history and in network formation. Because if we return to the organizational form of networks, power laws allow for more complex relations but they too do not impart any inevitable form. But before doing so, two more points can be drawn out.

So far, throughout this chapter, I have considered the phenomena of networks—in their economic, social, biological, and technological formations—in their actual existing forms in all their complexities, trying to glean some insight from the laws and principles of their organizational form. This parallels Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza, from which I have gathered much via Hardt in a consideration of an ontology of power. Specifically, Deleuze reads Spinoza first on a speculative plane; that is, beginning with his system of philosophy, with the
principles that animate the system. This is followed by the practical reading, the
consideration of how bodies are composed in practice (in fact, this reading
proceeds more in tandem as opposed to a strict temporal flow). This seems an
opportune moment to make a practical observation about both power laws and
the right-skewed distribution of complexity in natural history. In both cases we
begin with a simple organizational form.

There is an inherent difficulty in seeking to discern general laws for
complex phenomena. In 'Letter 32' Spinoza acknowledges such difficulties in a
manner applicable to understanding networked relations. “As to knowing the
actual manner of this coherence and the agreement of each part with the whole. I
made it clear in my previous letter that this is beyond my knowledge. To know
this it would be necessary to know the whole of Nature and all its parts” (Spinoza.
1992, p. 280). That is why Spinoza is forced into a more practical perspective
even when he is trying to understand the dynamics and laws governing the
composition of bodies into networked relations. Before considering what, from
the outside, seems like the simplest networked relation—a single link between
two nodes or bodies—the composition of any single given body must be first
considered. Can this be read as a kind of radical historicizing on the speculative
plane; that difference in the capacity to act, to be affected, is also inscribed on a
microphysical scale that measures only the composition of any given body? As
Hardt concisely states, “A body is not a fixed unit with a stable or static internal
structure. On the contrary, a body is a dynamic relationship whose internal
structure and external limits are subject to change” (Hardt, 1993, p. 92). Thus,
even a single body or node is already subject to a complex internal dynamic of relations, making it more or less subject to any given link, to the possibility of the simplest network between two bodies.

Foucault also emphasized a microphysical orientation, and its network formation: “'Power is exercised, circulates and forms networks,'” he proclaimed at the College de France in 1976. And in order to better grasp its asymmetrical relations, one does not begin at the centre or some singular point of emanation. Instead, “begin with its infinitesimal mechanisms, which have their own history, their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics” (Foucault, 2003, p. 30). Thus he never tired of his invocation to not start with the ‘terminal form’ of power—e.g. in sovereignty, or in capital—but on a finer-grained interactional level, in the countless networked relations:

[in] the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the domain in which they are exercised, operate, and which constitute their organization; the game through which the ceaseless struggles and confrontations are transformed, strengthened, or reversed; the supports which these relations of force find in one another, the manner of forming a chain or system, or, on the contrary, gaps or contradictions which isolate them from one another (Foucault, 1994a, p. 122, Trans. mine).

Relations of force are like links between microphysical nodes, forming networks which cohere and diverge, grow and break apart. We can see its terminal forms and they have been studied extensively and continue to be so. What about the dynamic principles of their formation, of their tendency to asymmetrical forms?
**Power laws, variation and radical change**

One of the great advantages of network theory—and another way in which it has affinity to the dispositif—is that it is a dynamic model. One of the problems with the Erdos-Renyi model, besides the fact that it is incorrect, is that it is a classic static model. That is, it only offers a diachronic analysis, making it akin to a structuralist analysis of networks. This model "sought simply to arrange a fixed number of nodes and links such that the final web conforms to the [random] network being modeled" (Barabasi, 1992, p. 90). It now seems clear that networks are formed under the principles of growth, preferential attachment, and fitness. The first factor is straightforward: the process of network growth proceeds by adding one link after another. The second factor is what negates the bell curve. Preferential attachment means that "given a choice between two nodes, one with twice as many links as the other, it is twice as likely that the new node will connect to the more connected node" (p. 86). This means network growth does not follow a straightforward temporal dynamic—i.e. the oldest node is the most connected. The seniority of a node can be negated by preferential attachment. Thus the likelihood of one node connecting to another is a partial expression of relative connectedness; a new node will more likely connect to a node that is itself well-connected. Any given node will attract new links proportional to the number of links it has. Thus a well-connected node will be more 'fit' than an isolated one. This puts a different spin on the notion of affinity, if we can apply it to network theory. Thus the third factor is fitness with the growth of a network being guided by preferential attachment which in turn operates on a
modality of fitness. The concept of fitness, in network terms, is largely a measure of connectivity. The rate at which a node gains new links is proportional to its fitness; and the fitness level of a node increases with each new link.

In real world networks, there is an advantage for existing nodes, provided they are well connected. In real networks, this would seem to ascribe an advantage to that which is already constituted; in turn, it seems to set up a challenge for a politics of becoming or self-valorization. Does this mean that network theory suggests structural difficulties for an ontology of power that is productive? Or is the notion of a multitude, with multiplicitous connections an effective wildcard? Regarding a dispositif, elements that comprise the heterogeneous ensemble are not necessarily new; merely not previously constituted in that form. This brings us to a difficulty, both within network theory and in real world networks. Fitness is both imprecise and difficult to quantify. Network theory describes fitness as an ‘intrinsic quality’—which can only be expressed in medias res, within a given network. The degree of connectivity is an important measure but ultimately it is a matter of connected to what?

Thus, from the beginning, network theory can only help us so much in terms of the principles of self-organization. Those ‘intrinsic qualities’ are often political, economic, or broadly cultural. Critical analysis can extend network theory necessarily. There remains much possibility to consider those qualities of fitness via affinity. No doubt networks break down constantly on the basis of antagonism. But, they must be able to cohere for there to be a network in the first place. So another way to think of networks is as being contested. There are
struggles among nodes themselves over connectivity. As Barabasi notes, "the fitness model allows us to describe networks as competitive systems in which nodes fight for links" (p. 106). Thus struggle remains within the process of network formation; networks, however, can gain cohesion only on the basis of affinity or fitness of connectivity.

**Actor-network theory**

I want to conclude this chapter with one more way of considering networks. It has been noted how networks are a defining feature of global capitalism, how networked communication and media facilitate new forms of resistance and the circulation of struggles, and how the emerging field of network theory can extend the conceptual efficacy of the dispositif. Throughout network thinking has been a means of imagining new compositions of bodies. Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory helps us take the imaginary one step further because it situates networks as an interface between humans and technology; and the growing omnipresence of ICTs makes this a pressing task. What is being enabled in the interface between humans and ICTs are new kinds of collectivities, but not ones which are necessarily undermining the expansion of capital—quite the contrary.

With Latour, what is 'collective' is a new interface between humans, machines, and other non-humans. This takes us into the often-misunderstood and unproductively maligned realm of cybernetics. The term itself sounds a bit antiquated—like, say, telematics—but its object of study has only grown in significance. From the beginning, cybernetics was the study of that interface—
between humans and machines—and how communication and control function in those systems. When cybernetics pioneer Norbert Wiener first coined the term, he took it from the Greek *kubernetes*, or 'steersman' because his focus was on means of controlling the relationship between humans and machines.

Latour’s view of the relationship between humans and non-humans (machines) is of a radically different perspective than Marx, which focuses on its impact on the mode of production. For Latour, it does two different things. First, it avoids various traps that are set by the modernity/postmodernity divide when it comes to thinking about the non/human relationship. Schematically, the difficulties begin with modernism which posits two incommensurable poles. The first is nature which is 'all natural' and 'all facts'; this is the realm of science and it comprises the very substance of our societies. The second is society which is 'all power' and 'all strategy'; this is the space of socialization, and of the political and economic. So we have, on the one hand, the natural world; and on the other, the space of social construction. Within modernity, these two realms must remain strictly separated and this is made possible by the function of language. As long a language remains a stable point of reference, then we can safely represent nature and retain a cogent semiotic interface with nature.

But there are two problems. First, a defining characteristic of postmodernity is the destabilization of language; it can no longer act as the link, the middle ground between nature and society, the nonhuman and human. The other problem is that we have never done anything but mix up nature and society. We have interfaced with machines and interfered with nature since the
time of paleolithic stone tools and before. Nonetheless, we have insisted on
ascribing separate ontologies to humans and nature. So Latour tries to unravel
these difficulties with a deceptively simple question: what if we simply say “we
have never been modern?” If we stop insisting on this separation, then we can
forego the mutual ontological purification. And most importantly for our purposes,
we can recognize the fundamental role of hybridity (between the human and
nonhuman) and the network can take centre stage.

We have only ever mixed nature and society and thus we have only ever
existed in networked relations. And as science and technology become an even
more powerful force, we need to expand our understanding of networks if we are
to retain any critical capacity. Latour asks, “[i]s it our fault if networks are
simultaneously real, like nature, narrated, like discourse, and collective, like
society?” (Latour, 1993, p. 6). This positional statement serves as a useful
springboard to a more detailed consideration of the particulars of actor-network
theory and their application to the analysis of power and discourse in
contemporary societies.
CHAPTER 6: THE SOFT REVOLUTION? AN EMERGENT DISPOSITIF OF NETWORKED CULTURAL PRACTICES

Consider two bodies that agree entirely, two bodies, that is to say, all of whose relations can be combined: they are like parts of a whole, the whole exercising a general function in relation to these parts, and the parts having a common property as belonging to the whole. Thus the two bodies that agree entirely have an identical structure. Because all their relations may be combined, they have an analogy, similarity or community of composition. Now consider bodies agreeing less and less, or bodies opposed to one another: their constitutive relations can no longer be directly combined, but present such differences that any resemblance between bodies appears to be excluded. There is still however a similarity or community of composition, but this from a more and more general viewpoint which, in the limit, brings Nature as a whole into play. One must in fact take account of the ‘whole’ formed by two bodies, not with one another directly, but together with all the intermediary terms that allow us to pass from one to the other. As all relations are combined in Nature as a whole, Nature presents a similarity of composition that may be seen in all bodies from the most general viewpoint. One may pass from one body to another, however different, simply by changing the relation between its ultimate parts. For it is only relations that change in the universe as a whole, whose parts remain the same. (Deleuze, 1990, p. 275)

Bodies are always in networked relations, albeit in an ever-changing composition. So much of our network society is precisely comprised of ‘communities of composition’ from a ‘more general viewpoint’; but that viewpoint is not so much nature but increasingly capital. This is in the spirit of Jameson’s observation that “[i]t seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism…” (Jameson, 1994, p. vii). In short, that most typically, capitalism as assumed the holistic perspective of ‘Nature as a whole.’ What Deleuze was
referencing above was the Spinozist concept of 'common notions'—or that which facilitates the cohesion of bodies in composition. A constitutive element of common notions is affinity. When we foreground the harsh reality of structural antagonism inscribed in the social relations of capital, we can become blind to the concomitant affinity that allows for so many 'communities of capitalism' that spread in ever diversifying networked relations.

This brings us to one of the difficulties of thinking in terms of heterogeneous ensembles—with their discrete yet intersecting lines of composition—is that there are always a number of elephants in the room. Capital is one that often goes nameless but takes up a lot of space all the same—especially as that which would be a determining mode of production in other schemas. One of the most urgent needs this dissertation sought to address was a productive relationship between Foucault and certain variations of marxism. This chapter will offer some final suggestions for our theoretical tool box that will facilitate just that, and in a way adequate to our historical moment. I have already posited that in our network society we might benefit from thinking of dispositifs in terms of network formations. Here we can introduce some specific examples that would be rich objects of future studies that recast the ontology of power in a practical network of relations between subjectivity, new media practices, capital and resistance. In short, my goal is to bring the dispositif into the more traditional terrain of critical communication studies. To do so, I want to revisit an old but valuable paradigm—that of Dallas Smythe’s “audience commodity” thesis. The ‘producibility’ of the subjects therein will be contrasted with the concept of
‘immaterial labour’ and its ‘productivity’ in what are called ‘social networks,’ specifically MySpace—which is one of the most popular website on the internet. Finally, I will present the Soft Revolution—a new set of cultural practices—as a contemporary dispositif of creative resistance and becoming, albeit in a manner that might seem ambivalent to eyes fixed on the perspective of crisis circa late 1970s.

Marx and ‘The intricate networks of power’

At the State University of Rio de Janeiro in October 1974, Foucault for the first time used the term biopolitical power at a conference on social medicine; he identified biopolitical power as “a strategy” and social medicine as “a network” (Foucault, 2001n, p. 209, Trans. mine). In his subsequent overview of the history of medicalization, he distinguishes the individualistic character of medieval medicine from its increasingly collective practice under capitalism. His hypothesis is that with the development of capitalism, from the late 18th and early 19th century, the networked practices of collective medicine takes the forefront. Here he rehearses what would become a central concern: the collective body as a productive force, and a force of labour: “For capitalist society, it is the biopolitical which is important before all, the biological, somatic, and corporeal” (210). It would be four years before Foucault would again speak at length on this concept and not until his 1979 College de France lectures ‘The Birth of Biopolitics’ where he would fully flesh out biopolitical power.

There are two things of most interest here. One is that Foucault speaks to the elephant in the room by considering the development of capital in relation to
this dispositif of power. The second related point is indicative of the conceptual relationship between Foucault and marxisms—affinity is expressed but in a line that follows a diverging and differentiating trajectory. First the affinity: "[i]t is certain that the human body was politically and socially recognized as a labour force." Then the differentiation: "the development of social medicine [an early biopolitical practice]...did not concern itself at the start with the human body as labour force. Medicine was not interested in the proletarian's body, the human body as an instrument of labour."

This is an example of how the heterogeneous ensemble is just that in its lack of singular causal relations or cause of network cohesion. That the logic of capital can find service in the composition of heterogeneous elements does not mean it is a singular cause of cohesion. He grounds the heterogeneous elements of this example in different historical contexts. Paraphrasing Marx, he notes that there was a state concern with social medicine in mid-18th century Germany; an urban interest in late 18th century France; and an economic interest in 'labour' medicine in mid-19th century England. By the 20th century, especially its last quarter, these lines had cohered into our more familiar, and polyvalent, biopolitical power.

There is a final point that expresses affinity with our reading: that the dispositif of biopower highlights the importance of the body for productive power as opposed to a repressive power of ideology: "[t]he control of society over individuals is not effected solely by consciousness or ideology but also in the body and with the body" (210). From this single reference grew Foucault's
conceptualization of a new dispositif of power—one that can be cast in terms of a
network. There is no limit to the complexity of any given network. Indeed, the
greater the complexity, the finer the mesh of the relations which comprise the
network.

Throughout this dissertation I have argued that Foucault views power as a
set of multiple and finely-meshed relations. ‘Les mailles du pouvoir’ is a lesser-
known article by Foucault which could be translated literally as ‘The Meshes of
Power’; more elegantly, one could posit ‘The Intricate Networks of Power.’ This
article comes from yet another conference Foucault attended in Brazil, this time
at the faculty of philosophy in the University of Bahia in 1976. Unfortunately it has
never been translated into English and did not appear in French until 1981. Yet, it
is very important for several reasons. First, it is an article where Foucault
addresses his conceptual relationship to Marx in an atypically candid manner.
For example, in his extended critique of the persistent perception of power as
something which only represses or dominates, he cites Marx as an important
figure in the recasting of power in its more positive form. In particular, helocates
‘The Process of the Circulation of Capital’ in Capital, Volume II as a source of
“elements which for me will service an analysis of power as positive
mechanisms” (LMP, 1005). Indeed, he situates Marx’s conception of power firmly
in line with his own:

First, [for Marx], there exists not one power but several powers.
Powers, in other words, are forms of domination, forms of
subjection, which function locally, for example, in the factory, in the
army, as a property of a slave owner, or of servile relation. These
are all local, regional forms of power, which have their own
functioning modality, their practices and techniques. All these forms
of power are heterogeneous. So we cannot speak of a power...if we want to make an analysis of power then we must speak of powers and try to localize it in its historical and geographic specificity (LMP, 1005-6).

Foucault's Marx, then, posits power as a heterogeneous ensemble, situated in specific space-time trajectories, articulating local and global relations (although surely Marx would insist on the coherence of these elements in the mode of production).

Foucault's comments about Marx and power are highly amenable to thinking in terms of networks. He restates what I have already covered at length: that there is no central source of power, such as sovereignty, and that Marx implicitly refuses such a schema. Instead, Marx also begins with the recognition of myriad local forms of power which, in turn, are bit by bit captured by a larger state apparatus. Furthermore, these local forms of power are not that which in their primary form say 'you must not.' Instead, one basic function is to bring about productive efficiencies and aptitudes. Here Foucault emphasizes that which is often overlooked in disciplinary power: it does not merely 'normalize' in a repressive fashion but also has a profoundly productive capacity. Be it in the army or factory, such power might say no, but only so that its dressage will "obtain the best performance, the best production, and the best productivity..." (1007). Another key point is that such new mechanisms of power had their own specific trajectory which by no means all start with capital. Foucault offers the example of the army, where technological advancements in artillery necessitated a rearticulation of organizational form. These mechanisms, which facilitated a more sophisticated divisions which were largely interchangeable, could then
easily be transferred to the factory where there were similar but different needs for a division of labour.

Hence we can cite one more line of affinity which Foucault traces between himself and Marx: "we can easily find, in between the lines of *Capital Volume II*, an analysis, or at least the draft of an analysis, which would be a history of the technology of power, such as it would be exercised in the workshops and factories" (1008). It is in this shared spirit of the technologies of power that Foucault undertook his analysis of sexuality as an exemplary form of biopolitical power.

**A triptych of power**

The divergence of Foucault’s lines of affinity with Marx are summarized in the remainder of the article, where he restates the dispositifs of power for which he is best known. It will be helpful to summarize them here. While the article offers a rare glimpse of periodization by Foucault, again it should be stressed that we remain in a composition of all three, albeit in more dominant, residual, and emergent forms. *Sovereign power* was pre-eminent pre-18th century. It is enacted in fixed relations between individuals and the social body; and, power is exercised as an exception—the power of death against those who transgress these fixed relations. The term individuals, however, is misleading for its initial instantiation because subjects are fixed on an unchanging grid by ‘the Great Chain of Being.’ Later, this grid was rearticulated into a juridical form wherein individuals were fixed through a social contract. Theories of sovereign power remain the dominant paradigm of political theory. There is also another aspect of
this onerous power: it acts by deduction, through tax collection, operating by economic subtraction not stimulation. As Deleuze puts it, sovereign power operates by “taking a cut instead of organizing it, condemning to death instead of ordering life” (Deleuze, 1992b, p. 177).

Disciplinary power was ascendant from the mid-18th through the mid-20th century. It fixes relations between individuals and various institutions: power is exercised over those individual bodies in order to attain capacities and aptitudes more adequate to the different and changing needs of the social body. Discipline is comprised by ‘techniques of the individualization of power.’ As Foucault stated in Brazil, it is “how we surveil someone, control his conduct, his behavior, his aptitudes, intensify his performance, multiply his capacities, put him in his place where he will be most useful” (1010). There is a greater flow in comparison to the rigidity of sovereign power. But it remains discontinuous. In the memorable characterization by Deleuze, “Individuals are always going from one closed site to another, each with its own laws: first of all the family, then school (‘you’re not at home, you know’), then the barracks (‘you’re not at school, you know’), then the factory, hospital from time to time, maybe prison, the model site of confinement” (Deleuze, 1992b, p. 177). In other words, disciplinary societies was a matter of spatially and temporally ordering things in a discrete manner that composed bodies in a way that made them greater than the sum of its parts.

But, these existing dispositifs of power were inadequate to an ever-increasingly mobile and interconnected society: “[t]he mesh of the net is too large, almost an infinite number of things, elements, conducts, and processes
would escape the control of such power." Hence the need for the more continuous networked relations of biopolitical power, which is less onerous and more flexible, and "is exercised in the direction of economic processes" (LMP. 1009).

Yet, Foucault does not want to bring back the idea of a determining economic base. Indeed, he warns against falling into this "habit of once again, in the spirit of a somewhat primitive marxism" (1010). This wards off the mode of production as totalizing causality lest the terminal form of the cohesive composition blind us to the heterogeneous trajectories of its elements. In this way, it is not that there is a disassociation between capital and the dispositif of biopolitical power. Rather, it is that there are myriad ‘minor’ elements with their own temporal-historical trajectory whose particularities get effaced by such a perspective. One real implication of this is that the target of radical social change is no longer exclusively the terminal form (i.e. the state and capital) as opposed to the dynamic elements which make any dispositif function in the first place.

Yet ample room remains for critical inquiry into the relationship to capital. Perhaps a more amenable method for doing so is to think of capital as a logic which increasingly flows through more and more otherwise discrete social relations, and finds passage in different political and social techniques and practices. Certainly there is no doubt that an emergent capital had the urgent need for a new dispositif of power. On the one hand, there remains sovereign power, a relationship between the sovereign and his/her subjects, and disciplinary power which begins a process of increasing individual flexibility vis-à-
vis specific and discrete institutions. On the other hand, capitalism needed something else: not just individual, atomized subjects, but a population of living beings, arrayed in myriad flows of compositions of differing capacities. Foucault situates this beginning in the second half of the 18th century, a generation after the long-lost genealogical dreams of Boulainvilliers, and a generation before the ascendency of the first properly capitalist class the bourgeoisie.

Biopolitical power, then, is that which “uses this population like a machine for production, for the production of wealth, goods and other individuals” (1012). Regulating the flow of bodies in specific compositions would supercede the containment of disciplined juridical subjects in institutional spaces. “From the 18th century, life becomes an object of power” (1013). This marks the end of neither sovereign nor disciplinary power; juridical and normative practices continue to flourish. But, there is a new materiality of power expressed through networked relations in populations. This is how Foucault situates his study of sexuality: “a point of articulation between the discipline of individuals and bodies, and the regulation of populations...of primary importance for making society a machine of production” (1013).

Biopolitical power then, marks a shift away from both the juridical body of sovereign power and the individual body of disciplinary power. It is the social body in its entirety, or the population, which becomes an object of regulation. of power relations. It is because of the emphasis on the composition of bodies in a given population that the network is all the more appropriate for biopower. In summary, sovereignty exercised the power of death over life; discipline is a
corrective power over individual bodies to make them more adequate to institutionally-grounded socio-economic demands; biopolitics is a power that coheres and flows through compositions of bodies to maximize particular capacities to live. This capacity to live is manifested most directly in subjectivities; to better understand the asymmetrical dimensions of power relations is to consider which subjectivities are valorized over others.

From the audience commodity to immaterial labour

Earlier I noted in passing Foucault's repeated references to *Capital Volume 2*. Also known as *Book II The Process of Circulation of Capital* this is sometimes called the 'forgotten' volume of Capital. While Foucault positions it as a text that demonstrates how for Marx power was polyvalent, he was largely mute on detailed references (leaving someone with the task of a formidable excursus another time). Regardless, this remains particularly fitting for this chapter because it presents the labour process in unexpectedly broad terms. Specifically, Marx emphasizes the increasingly social nature of the labour process. As one commentator notes, “[t]he progress of the division of labour and labour productivity, as well as the growth of transport and communications, have steadily increased the range and depth of human interdependence…The labour process has thereby become to an increasing extent objectively socialized” (Marx, 1993a, p. 15). Of course, our main concern is the subjective socialization of labour; regardless, Marx more broadly situates the role of workers to include the social labour of consumption. The increasingly important role of such social labour in the circulation of capital is of central concern to critical communication
inquiry. Here we can greet an unexpected and a posteriori friend of the Italian Foucault, and an obvious rival, Dallas Smythe.

This brief conceptual genealogy and foray into the political economy of communication is to help better understand how human beings interact with popular culture, media, and information technology in their everyday lives, and how that interaction relates to the reproduction of capitalist market relations. More specifically, on social (re)production under contemporary post-Fordist capitalism, the conditions and parameters of which have changed considerably in the quarter century since Smythe first conceptualized the ‘audience commodity.’ One task is to radically rearticulate Smythe to make it more adequate to our network society. I will do so by pointing to conceptual developments that resulted from the dispositif of biopolitical power. My main argument is that the notion of immaterial labour, considered most extensively by a ‘second-generation’ Italian autonomist theorist and close friend of Foucault’s Maurizio Lazzarato is rich in possibilities for helping us better understand how the economy, media, culture, language, information, knowledge, and subjectivity are becoming increasingly inseparable in the reproduction of our contemporary social order. In other words, Lazzarato’s insights can help us understand how communication and subjectivity—including the realm long considered mere ‘consumption’ (pace Marx of Capital Volume 2)—have become an active articulation of capitalist production. In short, to go from the audience as discrete, measurable quanta in the chain of production, circulation, consumption, to a dynamic, productive composition of
bodies networked in ICTs. To do so, first I must briefly present Smythe’s audience commodity thesis.

Dallas Smythe was a trailblazing peripatetic communication scholar who went from a boyhood in Saskatchewan to graduate studies in economics at Berkeley during the Depression. Smythe worked in several government departments, including the US Federal Communications Commission where he played a key role in the development of U.S. government policy in communications. He later went on to teach at the University of Illinois. Smythe was appalled by U.S. federal government policies during the depression and he was inspired by anti-fascist struggles in the Spanish civil war. During his time at Illinois he became increasingly politicized and he began to feel scandalized and victimized by the anti-communist hysteria of McCarthyism. He returned to Canada to teach, flirted with Maoism, and played a key role in developing pioneering communication programs at the University of Saskatchewan and at Simon Fraser University.

What seems curious today is the newness of the concept of the audience commodity when it was first proposed amidst the famous communication blindspot debates of the late 1970s—a contretemps at the time seemingly distant but now much closer to Foucault’s roars of battle circa 1977. As Smythe wrote in his book, *Dependency Road*, “presently we know very little about this strange commodity, the audience”. The basic thesis of the audience commodity is straightforward: “readers and audience members of advertising-supported mass media are a commodity produced and sold to advertisers because they perform a
valuable service for the advertisers" (Smythe, 1981). In short, the audience is not a category like class, gender or race; rather, it is an aggregation of people linked to a particular market, be it for a cultural commodity (such as a TV program) or the commodities advertised therein. There is already a conceptual alert to biopolitical power here: the audience is a population that must be managed if capital is to attain desired aptitudes and capacities. In more marxist terms, the audience is always already a market. It is because of this intrinsic functional position in the circuit of production and consumption that Smythe—ever the political economist—considered the audience commodity as a key entry point in the analysis of capitalist reproduction.

It is important to remember that Smythe, in part, was responding to the Frankfurt School’s critique, which considered ‘ideology’ as the main commodity produced by the culture industry. He writes “[f]or a variety of methodological and substantive reasons I do not find them particularly helpful… I mistrust such analysis because it seems static—ahistorical and tending to ignore the movement of the principal contradiction: people vs. capital.” This latter comment is especially important to my genealogy as it demonstrates an affinity to the Italian Foucault. Smythe considered it “no novelty to discover that dominant class formations used…the mass media to supplement the use of force in domination”. By Smythe’s reading, the Frankfurt School focused excessively on power as domination, which meant they overlooked the productive role audiences played in the reproduction of surplus value and the general extension and intensification of capitalist markets into everyday life. As well, Smythe’s concept sufficiently
problematizes the base-superstructure model as to render it redundant: "[t]he clear dichotomy between base and superstructure was no longer possible under monopoly capitalism, with the Consciousness Industry buying audiences comprising virtually the whole population to aid it in managing demand for its commodity output. For the audiences are engaged in production which is as essential to the capitalist system as was production at the job front in the early nineteenth century." So despite some of the elements of the concept which are antiquated and problematic, one has to admire Smythe's insight. He made the modest claim that "[i]ndeed, so complex and unanalyzed are the issues I shall be discussing that it may be as much as can be done on this occasion to try to pose the 'right' questions" (p. 22).

Nick Dyer-Witheford briefly noted this linkage between Smythe and autonomist marxism, the theoretical crucible in which the concept of 'immaterial labour' was developed. In CyberMarx, Dyer-Witheford mentions Smythe amidst his analysis of the circulation of capital. In a footnote about the key role of audience 'labour' he reveals "[i]n a personal conversation shortly before his death Smythe agreed that his perspective converged with the autonomist...analysis" (Dyer-Witheford, 2000, p. 271). We must be careful not to remake Smythe into an autonomist—his 'audience' is rather static and preformed, as they are passively bought and sold with no participation other than the movement of their eyeballs. Yet there remain strong parallels. Smythe writes "[f]or, in inventing the mass media and the mass audience as its principal protagonist, monopoly capitalism has created its chief potential antagonist in the capitalist core area"
The affinity with the Italian Foucault in general, and autonomist theory in particular is manifest here. As Smythe never tires of repeating, the principal contradiction of capital is 'people vs. capital'; likewise for autonomists, the true dynamic of capitalism (and one of their key conceptual interventions) is the antagonistic relationship between labour and capital, with the former driving the latter. So onto immaterial labour.

To better situate immaterial labour, a brief return to Marx is necessary. The theoretical foundation of immaterial labour is found in what was, until recently, an obscure reference in *Grundrisse*. Having witnessed the rapid expansion of industrialization, Marx anticipated the moment when the productive force of abstract knowledge—or collective general intelligence—would exceed that of mere physical exertion. Marx imagined that this collective social knowledge—what he called 'general intellect'—would accrete primarily in fixed capital, or machinery. For Marx, what was of interest was how 'general intellect,' which is 'made iron' in machinery, would undermine the so-called law of value, and hence capitalism itself. This entails a working relationship between humans and machines. Specifically, capital seeks to transform general social powers into its own power; furthermore, it seeks to transform that labour into an automated system of machinery. Hence, the general intellect is deployed to make workers 'conscious linkages' in machinery. This will increase the gap between labour time and the productive capacities put to work.

This is what Marx meant when he writes that capital "calls to life all powers of science and of nature, as of social combination and social intercourse, in order
to make the creation of wealth (relatively) independent of the labour time employed on it" (Marx, 1993b, p. 706). Where Marx seemed to miscalculate was in positing that this general intellect would accrete in fixed capital or machinery. By contrast the autonomists developed a more subjective perspective with twofold implications. The first is that 'productive subjectivities' would flourish throughout our everyday lives. Hence the focus is on the "social factory" rather than on the more limited shopfloor or assembly line. Second, increased subjective productive capacity means greater possibilities for different compositions of relations outside of capital. Paolo Virno, another second-generation autonomous profoundly influenced by Foucault, was central to this radical reinterpretation of Marx's original insight. He writes, "Science, information, linguistic communication, and knowledge in general—rather than labour time—are now the central pillars on which production and wealth rest" (Virno, 1996, p. 267). The accretion of the general intellect, then, is in the variable capacities it builds in new networked compositions of contemporary subjectivities. As Dyer-Witheford states, it is "the human 'know-how'—the technical, cultural, linguistic, and ethical—that supports operations of the high-tech economy, especially evident in the informational, communicational and aesthetic aspect of contemporary high-tech commodity production." It is precisely this thoroughly subjective aspect of the general intellect that facilitates immaterial labour.

As may be self-evident, the term immaterial labour attempts to conceptually capture the major shifts that have occurred in labouring practices amidst post-Fordist globalization. It also comes, in part, from Lazzarato's reading
of biopolitical power. We will draw out that reading in the following section on the Soft Revolution. For now, what I am going to attempt, is to employ a slightly different articulation of this concept by using it to look at not the ‘production’ of culture, but its ‘consumption’—keeping in mind that Smythe’s audience commodity was a corrective response to what he considered an excessive focus on ‘consumption’ via ideology. As we will see, however, such discrete categorizations are increasingly untenable. This perspective is not wholly unprecedented. Lazzarato, for instance, notes that with the economy of immaterial labour, ‘leisure time’ and ‘working time’ are becoming increasingly fused. As he writes, “In a sense, life becomes inseparable from work” (Lazzarato, 1997). This is a key aspect of what Marx called ‘real subsumption’—the absorption of capitalist logic and the dictates of surplus value through more and more of everyday life. What remains to be done, however, is to explicitly consider the characteristics of immaterial labour in terms of what Smythe, referencing a bygone era, called ‘audience’ work.

But first I’d like to clarify what immaterial labour is not. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have come under fire for suggesting that immaterial labour encapsulates the central characteristics of production under Empire. Skeptics wonder about the vast foundation of body-breaking material labour upon which our ‘advanced’ economy rests. Three things should be immediately stated. First, immaterial labour refers more to what is produced (i.e. an ‘immaterial’ good such as a service, a cultural product, or a social relationship) than to the labour process itself. Second, immaterial labour does not preclude a ‘material’
component of the process; indeed, it is generally mixed with material labouring forms (consider the courier, delivering ‘material’ packages in a ‘material’ vehicle yet utilizing both a POS and a GPS tracking system which are dependent upon an ‘immaterial’ communication and information network). This is part of a general trend toward what Hardt has called the ‘informationalization of production’—we can see it in information and communication network-dependent ‘just-in-time’ production; we can see it in agriculture in genetically modified organisms; and we can see it in myriad forms of cultural production, internet-based practices only being the most obvious. Finally, with the third point of clarification, as Hardt and Negri have pointed out repeatedly, immaterial labour is a dominant form only in qualitative terms with regards to value; it is not dominant in quantitative terms. If we remember the onset of industrialization, it is clear that agriculture did not disappear, nor did it immediately cease to be dominant in quantitative terms; nonetheless, there was a tendency toward industrialization. Similarly with immaterial labour. As Hardt writes, “This is the role of the dominant sector in each phase of economic history: to transform all the other sectors in line with its own characteristic.”

So what can we consider as immaterial labour proper? Lazzarato and Hardt both offer similar typologies, breaking it down into two broad categories. First, there is networked ‘informational’ labour, which is often cybernetic or computer-based revolving around symbolic or analytical tasks. Generally-stated, the products here are ideas. The second is ‘affective’ labour. For Hardt, this includes anything from a flight attendant to a healthcare professional. What is
produced are affects, like well-being, satisfaction, excitement or passion. This work is often lumped in the ‘service’ industry but the emphasis here is on the relationships produced therein. Surely one of Smythe’s own blindspots was to not see the importance of the production of affect, one of the most important modalities of ‘audience labour.’ Lazzarato’s second category is an extension of this affective labour. He calls it cultural labour, which involves “a series of activities that are not normally recognized as ‘work’—in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more importantly, public opinion” (Lazzarato, 1997). Thus we reach the meeting place of ‘audience’ work and immaterial labour.

As should be becoming evident, the term ‘audience’ is less and less adequate for immaterial labour. Even if we modify it with the term ‘active,’ it still fails to capture the shift in the process of capitalist valorization—or how surplus value is produced. This is one of Lazzarato’s underlying reasons for conceptualizing immaterial labour in the first place. Part of the process of ‘real subsumption’ is capital seeking an unmediated form of command, not just over labour in the factory but in everyday life. That is why, for post-Fordist capital, Lazzarato coins the slogan ‘become subjects’—hence the subjective reading of capital. But this is not an uncritical celebration of the proliferating subjectivities of postmodernity. When looking at actual labouring practice, the subjects that humans become must be compatible with the needs of contemporary capitalist reproduction. That is one reason why linguistic and communicative elements are
so integral, as they facilitate an expanded capacity for social cooperation—absolutely essential for more flexible production practices.

But, we cannot make a straight line to immaterial labouring practices in popular culture here. This is neither a resetting of the ‘trap’ Foucault sought to escape nor a reinscription of the domination thesis of the Frankfurt School in which the myriad subjectivities engendered through cultural practices merely produce dullards pliant to capitalist command (even though at times that is precisely what they seem to do). Here we must remember the autonomist view of labour, which like Foucauldian resistance, always comes first. Think of the storied cultural practices of peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing, and what happened to its progenitor Napster. It is techniques of immaterial labour that allowed for the proliferation of such decentralized practices of virtual social cooperation, in the process radically altering potential kinds of interface with popular culture. Yet, this is not to make an argument for some kind of emerging consumer sovereignty. Because what is important from the perspective of immaterial labour is the higher level and intensity of antagonism that is created along the way. Lazzarato notes this fundamental contradiction in the workplace. Capital “is obliged ([in] a life-and-death necessity for the capitalist) not to ‘redistribute’ the power that the new quality of labor and organization imply” (Lazzarato, 1997).

We can see this playing out in the dynamic decentralized architecture of the internet—the distributed network in which computers with a shared protocol can communicate directly without a hierarchical intermediary. This is not only a
radically different media terrain than television, it is one animated primarily by
immaterial labour.

In short, we have shifted from the static world of the couch potato to the
dynamic one of the websurfer or blogger. Capital has paid attention to this and
there is a shift in what is being valorized. With television, the audience commodity was an isolated and sedentary beast, an aggregation of individuals linked only through the show they watched each week. Its organizational form was also more static: a centralized network with the audience in a cluster of dead-end lines. With the internet it is about the dynamic immaterial labour that traverses and constructs the decentralized networks. In short, it is the links, the networks that people construct and participate in that comprise this new audience commodity.

Commercial media has always had an insatiable appetite for as much information as can be possibly gathered about audiences. After all, such information is what fuels techniques and practices for managing these discrete populations. This is why RSS—a content distribution and delivery mechanism, or 'push technology' which reads the updated content of any site you link to (and that content can be text, audio, video, PDF, pretty much anything digitized) and automatically displays it on your browser—is such an important new technology when mobilized in networked applications animated by immaterial labour. It is the network of relations—the ways in which it can be compartmentalized into discrete components (each with myriad marketing possibilities) which makes capital, in the case of Google, for example, so excited.
It has been reported that Google has indexed 3 billion pages that it ‘maps’ out in a number of ways: the content through keywords, and the links between sites. With RSS, feed reading behaviour can be added to search behaviour to provide even more sophisticated and dynamic profiles. With Gmail, email message content can be added to that indexible content to provide an even more sophisticated data shadow. Google’s Ad Sense (those little text ads you see increasingly on search results, blogs, and websites) is busily refining its techniques of delivering ‘contextual advertising’ all powered by your immaterial labour. Thus, Google proclaims on their site: “Ad Sense can deliver relevant ads because Google understands the meaning of a web page.”

To conclude these sketches of affinity between the Italian Foucault and Dallas Smythe, let me restate the reconceptualizations of the subjectivities found in the middle of the relations between capitalist reproduction and information-communication technology/popular culture. We have gone from the Frankfurt School, for whom subjectivity was ‘pseudo-individuality’ stamped out in total domination by the culture industry, to Smythe where the subjectivity of the audience was a mere commodity bought and sold by commercial media and advertisers, to the autonomists for whom the communicational and affective qualities of mass media, communication, and information technologies have been subjectively internalized, thereby augmenting and proliferating their productive capacities.

The Frankfurt School’s subject was cast in neo-Freudian terms -- the pleasure seeking blissful worker who found solace in the culture industry in
response to a social life world of reification and alienating work. Following Marx, the worker was viewed as both an object of production, in the form of abstract labour power, sold as a commodity, and as a subject of production. The worker’s subjectivity, however, was said to be expressed increasingly through the consumption of culture industry commodities, which offered “happiness but not liberation.” Following Lukacs, the political trajectory of criticism in the Frankfurt School was directed at awakening a form of consciousness that could look beyond the reified social life world and false promises of the culture industry.

By contrast Smythe believed that this emphasis on subjectivity and consciousness was a manifestation of the trap of a lingering philosophical idealism. He was interested in the way that subjectivity, and desires for pleasure and for meaning, were key elements in the production of audiences as reproducible commodities in western capitalism. Workers were suckered in by the ‘free lunch’ of commercially-sponsored media and voluntarily “worked” themselves into stable audience blocks to sell to advertisers. However, Smythe’s idea was to reorient critical analysis away from a focus on consciousness itself to a focus on the capitalist labour process in the realm of communications. In the world of mass media, however, the production of value was anchored in forms of immaterial labour.

This is not the place to debate the merits of Smythe’s overall analysis. Rather, my point is simply to note the way Smythe tried to integrate a focus on immaterial labour into his analysis of the labour process in communications. Were Smythe alive today, in the age of the internet he would no doubt seek to
extend his analysis of immaterial labour in new ways: for example, in the content people provide (e.g., emailing or blogging), in the content they read (actual websites or blogs you visit), and in the way they negotiate that virtual terrain (via googling, clicking on links, or otherwise tangentially linking one site to another). In short, Smythe would clearly be interested in the dynamic relations of the networked composition.

As always, much more remains to be done. Lazzarato (1997) makes a provocative call:

The process by which the 'social' (and what is even more social, that is, language, communication, and so forth) becomes 'economic' has not yet been sufficiently studied. In effect, on the one hand, we are sufficiently familiar with an analysis of the production of subjectivity defined as the constitutive 'process' specific to a 'relation to the self' with respect to the forms of production particular to knowledge and power (as in a certain vein of poststructuralist French philosophy), but this analysis never intersects sufficiently with the forms of capitalist valorization.

This call goes to the heart of this dissertation. As it does to the future work it implies and amidst the roars of the distant battles now near.

The soft revolution?

Much of the work of the Italian Foucault is grounded in the 1970s. However, my emphasis on this time has not been for nostalgia, or to suggest reproducing some of the defining strategies of that age. Indeed, there is a claim here to have learned something from the debacle of 1977 and the profoundly diminished possibilities that closed out the decade. As such, antagonism need not be unnecessarily valorized as the sole element of struggle. Antagonism
remains a constitutive element of capitalist relations and its structural manifestations are as harsh as ever. But, it would be a grievous error to assume that antagonism has ever achieved hegemony, even within capitalist market relations. Affinity was always already at play in the expansion of the rule of capitalism from the beginning. But the possibility of antagonism trumping affinity revives the spectre of the trap of power as domination.

Deleuze aggressively reread Foucault in the wake of his death in order to emphasize the possibility of resistance. Countless times, Deleuze referred to Foucault in the mid-1970s as ‘trapped in something he hated’ unable to escape from conceptualizing power as domination, as a normative force of discipline, as a potentially deadly hand of sovereignty. Yet even with Deleuze there remains a curious understanding of the dispositif and its relationship to power as domination. He notes the polyvalent functions within a dispositif which inscribes both lines of domination and resistance. He refers to the former as ‘lines of stratification or sedimentation’ and the latter as lines of creativity. These lines of creativity are always situated in the present tense, as a process of becoming; in turn, stratification or sedimentation are lines of history, of the archive, which express normative relations of containment. As such, Deleuze writes, “[w]e weren’t looking for origins, even lost or deleted ones, but setting out to catch things where they were at work, in the middle: breaking things open, breaking words open” (Deleuze, 1988a, p. 86). This is a way out of the ‘trap’; the point of breakage is a possibility always already inscribed on any dispositif. This is why a dispositif is never a totality, never truly sedimented in a way that allows for
thinking in terms of anything a priori. Dispositifs always leak and the processes of
subjectification is often the materialization of that which could not be contained
by that heterogeneous ensemble. Better still, if a heterogeneous ensemble is a
network of relations, new subjectivities, new ways of seeing and speaking result
from the rearticulation of the lines which comprise a dispositif. It is a different
composition; new links between different nodes. The divergence, or breakage, of
some lines here, the connection of other lines there cohering a new set of
relations. But this is an open process.

Surely if we are to take struggle seriously, then its ontology, as it were, is
precisely a lack of certainty, of guarantees. Yet despite that, there remains much
to anger those who are invested with dreams of practices of revolution; likewise
there remains much to make nearly unbearable those who are structurally
positioned under the crushing weight of asymmetrical relations of force. Given
this, for many the dispositif might be seen as a network of disappointment, as
that which entices more sad passions. For there is nothing about such networked
relations that in any way tend toward a more aleatory formation. A Deleuzian
maxim here is that there is 'no general formula' for processes of subjectification
which traverse lines of a dispositif. Indeed, if we can paraphrase Spinoza,
'nobody knows what a line of subjectification can do but the dispositif never
ceases to be amazed at the creativity expressed therein.' This is even identified
as work left undone: '[t]he study of the variations in the process of subjectification
seems to be one of the fundamental tasks which Foucault left to those who would
follow him" (p. 162). What follows are the modest first steps toward such a study in the Soft Revolution.

How can we see and speak of a Soft Revolution and become therein—a radical social transformation that issues forth from within and is predicated on proliferating networks of relations animated by joy, respect and love?

We can only speak of a Soft Revolution if we take seriously that autonomist insight which is surely its most important conceptual contribution: that is, we must first consider the dynamic force of labour before we can understand its capture and domination by capital. As we have noted throughout, this reversal of marxist orthodoxy was in profound affinity with Foucault's equally important reconceptualization of power: that is, resistance comes first, that there is always already the possibility of resistance wherever there are relations of power. To speak of the Soft Revolution as a dispositif, then, is to speak about cultural expression, about subjectivity, about power-knowledge relations in a language foreign to that of the Frankfurt School and their 'domination thesis.' This requires following a line that diverges from Foucault's original conceptualization of biopolitical power. Maurizio Lazzarato reclaims the political as a productive constituent practice. He thereby distinguishes a biopolitical becoming (a dispositif of creative resistance, refusal, and exodus) from a constituted biopower (a dispositif of command, management, and domination).

So what is the Soft Revolution? It is a networked composition that is in the process of coming together and breaking apart. It was not the Die Neue
Rheinische Zeitung (New Rhenish Gazette) of Marx's day but the Süddeutsche Zeitung (South German Gazette) of recent times which wrote the following:

Records are springing up all over from politicised collectives: freak relics like Godspeed You Black Emperor and Silver Mt. Zion who have been hanging out in tumbledown houses in a Canadian middle of nowhere are now getting reinforcement - and it's even charts compatible. An Arcade Fire concert is a joyous experience, [where] the fireworks are lit collectively, lit by more or less anonymous participants in the general revelry, who take turns entering the stage and leaving it again in ever changing constellations, so that after two songs the audience has lost track of what's going on and the notoriously name-obsessed New Musical Express can only identify 'the guy with the motorbike helmet' in their yearly list of the coolest people on the planet (Brukmaier, 2006).

The Soft Revolution articulates new organizational forms of local cultural expression in both established and emerging flows of global circulation. As the New York Times Magazine writes:

[To call Broken Social Scene a] 'band' is to simplify matters drastically. It's more like a network...Most of the members of BSS are also members of other bands that are released by Arts & Crafts...The musicians play on one another's CD's (BSS can have between 9 and 17 musicians on a given track depending on who shows up or what's needed for a particular song), a level of cooperation and organization unusual in any popular-music scene, even one that might be summed up by the slogan above the bar code on BSS's most recent CD: "break all codes (Quart, 2006).

One of the first heterogeneous lines that comes together in the Soft Revolution is a musical one. This is but one way in which we can see not only myriad forms of creative resistance across different social fields—from music to new social movements to the blogosphere—but as a key site in which capital is seeking to overcome its own limitations. So I am not presenting the Soft Revolution as a dispositif teleologically inscribed with revolutionary subjectivities.
Rather, it is a field of contestation, a site of struggle. What is at stake, then, in the Soft Revolution are all the new possibilities for the unprecedented proliferation of networks of relations of affinity—the spaces in which we see, speak, and transform and take up our subjectivities. And the strategies in play in the Soft Revolution are respect, love, and joy.

In more sober terms, there is considerable methodological potential for interdisciplinary study here. That is, the Soft Revolution can be parsed through a grid of ‘network thinking’. The potential here is to bring politics, economic, culture, and subjectivity into a relational grid of intelligibility by foregrounding networked communication and information. That is, by seeing social relations enmeshed in a different kind of ICT: informational, communicational, and technological assemblages. In other words, we can position information and communication as the transversal relays which interconnect the political, the economic, the cultural in complex networked relations—the technological and the semantic/social. This is not as a totalizing methodology; rather, it is an application of the theoretical toolkit constructed herein.

The Soft Revolution first entered my imaginary when I heard the song of the same name on Stars most recent album Set Yourself on Fire. Soon thereafter, I discovered that one of the singers of Stars, Torquil Campbell, had been using the term for a number of years. Later in discussion with a colleague, we agreed that this Soft Revolution suddenly seemed to be everywhere, responding, as Foucault insists every dispositif does, to some urgent need. As Stars Campbell said:
There isn’t [a Soft Revolution] office somewhere where people have telephones and are taking calls. We are not stockpiling flowers somewhere to throw over the barricades. It’s what was happening to me and my friends...I think The Arcade Fire, The Dears, Broken Social Scene, all these bands are trying to reflect the sound of young people right now who feel they want some music to change things to. They don’t want to shuffle around and be ironic—that is totally uninteresting and it got us to where we are, so we gotta figure something else out. Even at the risk of being foolish or looking naive, something has to be done (Qtd. In Siddiqui, 2004).

But the response to this need—ever more so urgent since 9/11, since the US-led military invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, since the reassertion of the Bush-regime’s rule, since the increasingly calamitous state and juridical indifference to our spiraling environmental crisis—is not that of traditional political music. Rather, it has taken a hybrid form in networks of social, economic, and technological relations.

So to speak of the Soft Revolution in music requires us to see the celebration of the creative ferment in contemporary Canadian ‘indie’ music. These are bands burning intensely in a new firmament outside of the mainstream spotlight on Celine Dion, Avril Lavigne, Nickleback, etc. Bands of the Soft Revolution are generally signed to tiny independent labels, are typically promoted in small media outlets, and are more likely to have their albums sold at independent stores over the big chains, or even more likely for them to circulate online as MP3s.

Like a dispositif, we can identify a heterogeneous ensemble of lines that come together in the musical Soft Revolution. First, there is the lyrical content which expresses a joyful critique. Yet this is by no means a return to 60s-style
protest songs. Their narratives are much more oblique: for example, Stars sing out a warning to sad militants everywhere—"and after changing everything, they couldn't tell, we couldn't sing, and that changes everything". As a member of the Broken Social Scene stated, “[Our music] doesn't have to be so lyrically obvious that we’re trying to escalate hope in people. Hope is a word that is used in so many rock and roll references, but I don’t think hope can ever be an overused word. Especially now when everything is going backwards. That’s why we called our album You Forgot It in People, because people have to remember it in themselves, that it’s up to them” (Cited in Cote, 2006).

The political content tends to be less in what those bands say and more in what they do. These lines of action run through the rise of decentralized production, distribution, and consumption technologies that are circumventing the hegemonic circuits of the music industry. For starters, technological advancements have resulted in a proliferation of independent home recording studios, like Hotel 2 Tango studios in Montréal, Little Bullhorn in Ottawa, Stars and Sun in Toronto, House of Miracles in London, not to mention the innumerable bedroom studios across the country. And there are also more indie labels than ever as opposed to the doom in the air nearly a decade ago when Montréal’s Cargo Records went under. Virtually all the bands that could be seen as followers of the Soft Revolution are on indie labels, like Mint Records in Vancouver (home of The New Pornographers and The Organ) or Toronto-based Three Gut Records (Constantines and Royal City) and finally the epicentre of Arts & Crafts which houses Broken Social Scene, Stars, Feist. Then there are
more traditionally 'political' labels like Winnipeg's collectively-owned and operated G7 Welcoming Committee (Che: Chapter 127 and The Weakerthans) or Toronto's Underground Operations, a socialist label, or Carnobear Records in Halifax, a hip-hop label that came together to 'join the hip hop and activist communities' in response to the aftermath of 911. Finally, there are labels like Zunior.com, run by a former member of the Inbreds, which is not concerned with traditional politics; instead, it emphasizes artist autonomy and affinity. Zunior sells all its recordings as MP3s over the internet, with 85% of revenues going to the musicians. Founder Dave Ullrich states "I'm primarily doing this to prove it can be done and demonstrate a new type of music model that can stand outside the structure of the music business" (Ulrich, 2006).

I have put forth this brief overview of the Soft Revolution as a descriptive term to help see a new kind of musical-political expression already in formation. But, we need to speak to the Soft Revolution as a concept, as a dispositif. What we can see in this dispositif is that there is no non-discursive base from which the discursive emanates. Nor is there a transcendent originary subject which provides a normative matrix to coordinate those effects. As such, it is not filled by \textit{a priori} subjects and objects each with a distinct ontological status—rather, that this results from their networked-relational composition. Less abstractly: we can think of those elements in their networked relations instead of alone in their distinct registers: from the materiality of institutions, to the regulation of juridical processes, to the discursive production of and struggle over meaning. In short, this is a network that is functional, that signifies, that enables the agency of
subjects and their identity formation, and that allows us to see and speak of that within that networked composition and understand ourselves in relation to it.

Dispositifs are always proliferating although with varying efficacy and scope, and in this way, the effects of the Soft Revolution are still very much in play. And my gambit is that its musical form is but one manifestation of this Soft Revolution.

What else can be seen through the dispositif of the Soft Revolution. The informational, communicational, and technological is integral to a broader ensemble. So too are the collective, decentralized, and distributed network formation and the affinity that coheres those networks. We can point to a host of different political expressions: in Chiapas, the streets of Seattle (IndyMedia), Quebec City and Genoa, and Kiev. On a more cultural level, there are myriad popularizations ranging from Indy Media and No Logo.

What is at stake is a radical rearticulation of our relationship not just with music but with media and culture in general. Thus, the importance of those Informational-Communicational-Technological networks whose architecture is that of distributed networks, of open source, of many-to-many, of Wikis, of social software. At the risk of overstatement, you might say there is a bit of the Soft Revolution happening each time you download music from an MP3 blog, look something up on Wikipedia, blog, post baby pictures on Flickr, or what your kids do on My Space. The fundamental lines comprising the Soft Revolution are immaterial communicative processes.

Dispositifs are generally understood as a lens for understanding power; Deleuze asserted that Foucault’s work became a ‘philosophy of the social
dispositifs.' What I am suggesting is that the Soft Revolution can be seen as a
discrete subsection: a communication dispositif, comprised largely by immaterial
communicative processes and relations—as expressive combinatory machines
which make words, things, subjectivities, and cultures intelligible. The
aforementioned triptych of sovereign-disciplinary-and biopower are only
prominent examples. I’ve already mentioned Lazzarato’s important differentiation
of a biopolitical dispositif and followed its spirit: “do not start with a theory of
obedience and its legitimating forms…but with the freedom and capacity for
transformation that every exercise of power implies” (Lazzarato, 2002). Yet.
because I want to emphasize the communicative quality of the Soft Revolution.
I’d like to keep in mind the Deleuzian variant of ‘control society.’ While doing so.
I’d like to take up another exemplar of the Soft Revolution for the remainder of
this chapter, that what is coming to be known as the blogosphere.

Most are familiar with the sorry demise of Napster, that vital technological
insurgence from below that unleashed new networks of relations through affinity-
based Peer-to-Peer networking. Capital, via state and juridical forms, effectively
captured and tamed Napster. But affinity-based file sharing of music is a many
headed hydra. MP3 blogs are perhaps the most virulent new form. How MP3
blogs differ from Napster is that the music is not stored on an anonymous hard
drive but openly on different people’s blogs. Another key difference is that
Napster and other P2Ps worked primarily for getting music you already knew
because it functioned on search parameters you set. MP3 blogs, on the other
hand, is all about a musical becoming. People regularly post a handful of new
files of music they like and write a little something about them. Hence you go to MP3 blogs precisely because you don’t know what you are looking for and the excitement is in discovering new musical affinities you didn’t even know you had. Thus, MP3 blogs are another exemplar of the Soft Revolution. So what is at stake is a radical rearticulation of our relationship not only in music but with media and culture in general. What is being contested is whether that will simply comprise more effective relations with capital and the commodity form or finally something new.

Deleuze stated that “control societies function with a third generation of machines, with information technology and computers, where the passive danger is noise, and the active piracy and viral contamination.” (1988a, p. 180) It is a danger in what one might call, only half-jokingly, the Microsoft Revolution, where the goal is complete control through Digital Rights Management. In the Soft Revolution, however, that ‘danger’ becomes a virtue. This recognition of the vital role of information and communication was emphasized further in a discussion between Deleuze and perhaps the most famous (but by no means representative) Italian autonomist Toni Negri. It is Negri who notes that what is primarily being ‘controlled’ in control society is communication. And Negri, whose particular utopian inflection is to see things through a lens of revolutionary becoming, wonders whether our communication society is finally the time of fruition of the communist utopia of the Grundrisse in “precisely the form of a transversal organization built on a technology that makes it possible” (Deleuze and Negri, 1990). While I fully agree that those transversal relations are here
now, I do not share the unbridled optimism, at least in that I do not see there an inherent tendency within the communication society (or Soft Revolution for that matter) toward radical social change. Instead, for me it is vitally important that we see the Soft Revolution as ambivalent. That is, it is a contested space, as open to the strategies of capital as it is to creative use and resistance.

The very architecture of the blogosphere is the internet which has become fundamental to the global expansion of capitalist markets. And blogs are composed generally on platforms provided by corporate entities. Regardless, what blogs offer are not only virtual space for proliferating subjectivities but for the development of previously unfathomable relations of affinity. And just as in the musical expression of the Soft Revolution, what flows most intensely through these lines is affect and it is powered by immaterial labour. Thus the blogosphere is a quintessential space for Lazzarato's slogan: “become subjects.” Yet these processes are also blurred: it is not an authoritarian discourse commanding that “one has to express oneself; one has to speak, communicate, cooperate and so forth.” Blogs are not the same as 'quality circles' in post-Fordist assembly plants. That expression, speaking, communicating, and cooperating is the affective space of processes of subjectification. These are relations-still-becoming wherein processes of valorization are under contestation, by the Soft Revolution and by capital. Bloggers are not yet “simple relayers of codification and decodification, whose transmitted messages must be 'clear and free of ambiguity,' within a communications context that has been completely normalized by management.” What remains very pertinent from Lazzarato's 'Immaterial Labour' article is that
"capitalism seeks to involve even the worker's personality and subjectivity within the production of value." So capital and command are still looking to subjectivity and the communication process. And if capital has its way, then blogging will become the vanguard of the expansion of its own relations, a most diffuse and intense site of production in the social factory.

This gives us a sense of the Janus-faced nature of affinity. So what about affinity? I am interested in the Soft Revolution, in the dispositif, in thinking in terms of networks and information because I am looking to that which is counter to, in flight from, and in struggle with neoliberal globalization. We have already noted the importance of affinity in the formation of networks. Now we must acknowledge yet another elephant in the room. Affinity is not only a key dynamic of the Soft Revolution; it also animates neoliberal globalization.

Indeed, there is a polyvalence to affinity. To reductively schematize, lines of affinity are what link nodes—be they social formations of race, gender, ethnicity or culture. Affinity also articulates economic relations via consumption, especially those expressed in social formations and mediated by ICTs. So what we get are different compositions—all articulated on those lines of affinity. In some cases, as with neoliberal globalization, it is networks of asymmetrical (or uneven) relations that get reproduced. In other instances, affinity leads to new and more equitable networks of relations. What certainly has not changed is that we remain in medias res of general contestation and struggle—even in regards to affinity.
I want to conclude this chapter with two quotes that perhaps summarize what is at stake in the Soft Revolution. The first is from Foucault:

I dream of a new age of curiosity. We have the technical means for it; the desire is there; the things to be known are infinite; the people who can employ themselves at this task exist. What are we suffering from? From too little: from channels that are too narrow, skimpy, quasi-monopolistic, insufficient. There is no point in adopting a protectionist attitude, to prevent "bad" information from invading and suffocating the "good". Rather we must multiply the paths and the possibility of comings and goings... Which doesn't mean, as is often feared, the homogenization and leveling from below. But on the contrary, the differentiation and simultaneity of different networks (1996d, p. 305).

The final is from P. Diddy, formerly rapper Puff Daddy turned media mogul, and now, it would seem, communication scholar who is already looking beyond blogs to mobile technology:

I have tens of millions of subscribers, who spent billions of dollars every year on music, on fast foods, on cosmetics, on soda, and yes, on consumer electronics and wireless communications technology. I know where they live, what they like, what they eat and what they drink, I know what they wear, and more importantly for you, I know how to communicate to them, I know how to talk to them...The country which has embraced the new communications first becomes the dominant culture...[the internet, blogs] and now picture and video phones. Youth culture has driven the mobile culture to a multi-billion dollar industry. But to move from here, mobile phones need to evolve. My company and other can take advantage of the power of the latest 3G technologies that allow customers to easily use and virally spread the content.....I give them want they want, I show them the way. I am the Mobile Virtual Network Operator (Cited in Cote, 2005).

The Soft Revolution is arguably underway; where it goes depends upon those who animate it, and the affect that progressive and radical politics can muster. For communication scholars and social theorists there are myriads possibilities. One that holds great interest for me is, not surprisingly, an open
methodology of the dispositif thought of in terms of networks. This opens up a rather formidable question: how do these networks come together, and what is the role therein of communication? Specifically, are there any structural principles—in addition to broader power/knowledge relations—that can allow for a better understanding of the persistence of asymmetrical networks? In other words, is there something new we can learn from structural elements or persistent architectural forms like nodes, links, hubs, connectors, weak links, long-distance links, and the like? Given that many critical scholars are trying to understand and theorize change, perhaps there is something to be gained from a better understanding of 'network architecture encoding.' There is a dynamic that deserves further thought: what is it about the 'edges' of networks relations—where lines of flight, and creative resistance flow most easily?
CONCLUSION

The theoretical trajectory of this dissertation began with what could be called a crisis in practice. In my own studies, I encountered significantly diverging receptions of Foucault, particularly in relation to Marx. On the one hand, there was a strong critique of Foucault from a Marxist perspective; on the other, there was a complete refusal to even consider any affinities with marxisms from a Foucauldian perspective. At times, it seemed like I was facing an either/or binary Foucault/Marx. But, of course, in crisis there is opportunity. So without quite realizing it at the time, I began my long pursuit of lines of affinity between Foucault and marxisms. Given the interdisciplinarity of Communication Studies, my gambit was that this would provide new kinds of inquiry and fresh perspectives, in addition to original scholarship. In particular, I wanted to gauge the possible fit and extension of materialism and ideology critique with Foucault’s radical reconceptualization of power. The unexpected result of this ensemble of events was the dispositif.

There can be no doubt that the preceding pages are, to paraphrase Marx, haunted by the spectre of general crisis—on multiple fronts. My temporal focus—the mid to late 1970s—were largely a time of crisis, both for Foucault and Italian autonomist marxists. The kind of radical politics in which both were engaged were practices which increasingly encountered seemingly insurmountable walls as the decade waned. I reread these crises in the hopes of discovering new
transversal relays—not just between Foucault and marxisms—but in order to better address many of the growing asymmetries which have persisted since that time.

Boulainvilliers was a counterintuitive relay between Marx and Foucault. There were three elements which linked the two. First, Boulainvilliers’s positing of war as a grid of intelligibility sharply exposed the limits of sovereign power and the constitutive struggles it negates; second, genealogy as the historical knowledge of struggle was the conceptual source for class struggle; and third, this historico-political discourse was polyvalent, and thus eventually as open to use by the working class as it was for Boulainvilliers’s nobility. But it also normalized and sedimented further the binary schema (be it Gaul vs. Frank: nobility vs. bourgeoisie; labour vs. capital), a structural expression of modernity that Foucault steadily moved away from.

The particular Italian marxist inflection herein was, in small part, the result of a summer in Bologna. There I experienced a robust and richly diverse left beyond what I’d ever seen elsewhere. Italy not only retains myriad orthodoxies but an even more broad array of radical alternatives, across political, cultural, and social relations. The long-term electoral success of the PCI established a very different baseline for left politics; in turn, this created large margins on which the more creative wings of radical alternatives could flourish, dissent, and struggle not just against the state and capital but against those very hegemonic formations on the left. It is in this multiply oppositional left that I first imagined real affinities with the famously contrarian Foucault.
The diversely manifested autonomist tendency was the Italian site of most resonance with Foucault. Both were in the thrall of reconceptualised power. Foucault was sharpening his politicization outside of representational and party forms, as his autonomist counterparts had done for some time at a local level; and, the Italians were under an increasing influence of Foucault, to expand their theoretical concerns with knowledge production, signification, and subjectivity. This confluence helped produce the Italian Foucault, not because it signaled a belatedly discovered a “true” Foucault. Instead, it was a conceptual persona and resultant methodology that was produced out of crisis—both elements seemed to be reaching the apogee of their radical theory and practice at about the same time. This was partially manifested in the respective September 1977 meetings— for Foucault the Deuxième Gauche in Paris, and the autonomists’ debacle in Bologna. A key modality, then, is of protracted crisis as opposed to increasing certitude.

For the autonomists, Tronti identified a key crisis of Marxism, although it is a problem that remains to this day. First, he turned orthodox Marxism on its head by recognizing working class power and the key dynamic in the relationship between labour and capital. This ushered in a defining autonomist pursuit: the rearticulation of the working class as a class against capital into a class in and for itself. In other words, how could working class power be transformed into its own, as opposed to remaining a dynamic stoking capital? Marking the many vicissitudes of this collective effort has been the difficult question of autonomous action versus political organization.
For Foucault, there were both shared and different crises. A major commonality was the crisis of the “trap” of power as domination. By the mid-1970s, Foucault was able to confidently state “resistance comes first”. It is cold comfort for many to state that structurally there always already the possibility of resistance in relations of domination. Others question the longer term efficacy of such resistance, as its remnants are so often rearticulated in a manner which seemingly reinforces the very hegemonic formations against which it actively struggles.

The dispositif, however, is born out of uncertainty, and thus could be called a methodology of crisis. In this way, it is radically different form the scientific precision—or, at least, aspirations—of structuralism, wherein a hermetic synchronic frame enabled an ordered enumeration of the fixed relations which provided its functionality. The shift toward the more fluid networked relations of the dispositif was a eureka moment for Foucault encountered in his early attempts to overturn the “repressive hypothesis”—of sexuality as a normative force of domination which said “no”. The realization was that “sex” is not a pre-given thing upon which discursive and non-discursive formations are overlayed. Instead, it is that “sex” itself was produced by a dispositif, a heterogeneous ensemble of the material and symbolic. The dispositif, then, is also a method in response to crisis: to that of the subject, which now need not be foundational or a priori; and to that of determinism, as there is no singular, organizing, or final causality to the ensemble of relations which comprise the dispositif.
There is one other important effect of the dispositif, which both assuages and engenders crisis depending upon where one stands. Truth—of sexuality, for example—is not something which the dispositif uncovers. Instead, it is the very cohesion of the elements of that heterogeneous ensemble which fabricate the truth. In other words, it is the very functioning of a dispositif which provides its own verity. If ideology critique is in crisis, then the dispositif is a balm. It does not concern itself with the verisimilitude of appearances and hence—in relation to truth—is never about falsity, only about its fabrication. The dispositif expresses the coherence of its component parts which enable us to see and speak intelligibly. Thus the dispositif is an ontological machine, expressive not representative—born of, but remaining in crisis.

Yet if crisis also presents opportunity, then it too can be seen as productive. One of the most enduring innovations, in both theory and practice, to emerge from the Italians and Foucault is the profoundly productive aspects of power. This comprises one of the most felicitous, and arguably compelling lines of affinity between Foucault and the autonomist marxists. Indeed, via the nimble assistance of Hardt, a much more sophisticated relationship between Foucault and marxisms is made manifest. The productive ontology of power directly suggests ways in which a Foucauldian conception of power relates to class. For example, for both one can posit that power is nothing but a network of relations. And (class) subjectivity is not based on any transcendental essence of being. Rather, being—and in turn, subjectivity—is expressed though an historicized ontology (fabricated by dispositifs), and is grounded in the power to act. There
are always specific relations through which our being can be expressed. On the one hand, it is here we are tempted to assert that this ontology is best expressed by a binary schema: domination, or the imposition of order through which we are produced versus resistance, or the (political) art of organization through which we can produce anew. We can equally recast a famous dictum of Marx here: we make history (organize bodies) but not under conditions of our making (imposed order). Yet this brings us back to the crisis of the binary schema. It is really straightforward antagonism, or are there more complex relations which increase and diminish our subjectivities and collective ability to act?

One opportunity provided by the productive ontology of power is that it demonstrates the real limits of antagonism. There can be no doubt as to the very real antagonisms structured into the capitalist mode of production and the relationship between capital and labour. Yet if that is the endpoint, then the insight of Tronti is lost: as such subjectivity remains forever trapped in crisis, against that which it struggles, and never composing new relations, in and of itself.

Spinoza, for many a forgotten forebearer of Marx, offers myriad opportunities here. While he saw no space outside of a strategic interplay of forces—often through antagonistic relations—he also saw no way forward other than through the constitutive dynamic of joyful practice, and the extension of bodies under relations of affinity. That is, we must pursue the affirmation of organization (what autonomists called "self valorization")—as we can never be free of an antagonistic imposition of order. We become active by seeking
collective encounters; we become more adequate by forging common notions on the basis of affinity; and we become joyful, as a resultant effect of an increased capacity to act. In short, political action can only move forward through relations of affinity—an insight often lost on many radicals as the crises of the 1970s intensified.

Binary schemas, then, can be increasingly relegated to ash heaps in favour of complex networked relations of force—which are animated by a dynamic, polyvalent continuum ranging from antagonism to affinity. What are the opportunities and crises of affinity as a constitutive element in the productive ontology of power? How might the network be a better model for the dispositif in general, and as a prominent dispositif for our current historical moment?

Again, it should be emphasized that the dispositif is not a structure; it is neither synchronic nor hermetically sealed. Instead, it is diachronic in so far as it is comprised of dynamic relations. It is processual in that it functions in terms of the expressive flow enabled by those relations, always subject to breaking apart and cohering again in a new composition of relations.

Castells has already demonstrated how neoliberal globalization has been imposed through the order of the network society. Equally, there have been wholly new and unexpected political organizations—from the Zapatistas to new social movements—through new networks, the very same forms of networked ICTs and new media upon which transnational capital depends. In making the Italian Foucault more adequate to this historical moment, new friends are needed for this conceptual persona, ranging from Latour’s Actor-Network theory to new
research on the dynamic structure of networks. The possible opportunity is that a broadly-cast network theory could sharpen the dispositif as an analytic tool.

The ultimate antagonism of war was not only put forward by Boulainvilliers as a grid for understanding power, it continues to be deployed for measuring the potential of network power. But, in lockstep with Foucault and the autonomists, opportunities were first explored from below with the Zapatistas, and only later rearticulated more ominously from above in the Pentagon-initiated study and subsequent practice of netwar. Contestation and struggle, then, have become diffused across the space of flows of networks, the new “non-space” of netwar.

It is affinity, however, that remains the source of cohesion among the nodes which comprise any network. Without the linkage of such discrete nodes, there would be no network formation. Affinity—what Spinoza calls common notions—are the primary dynamic in the cohesion of networks. But asymmetrical formations persist, in a manner which exacerbates antagonisms. Can the combination of network theory to the dispositif help us better understand why and change those structures?

There is, of course, no necessary answer, immediate or otherwise. It must be noted that the turn to affinity is not a recasting of an of 60s placard—Love not War. Clearly, we have and will continue to live amidst love and war. As such, there are crises, and thus myriad opportunities. As such, the preceding pages are, for me, a set of important steps down a path with no end.
ENDNOTES


2 There have been recent closures of various independent media in our new post-911 security/terror state regime. For example, see the following:

3 Radio Alice on air just before 11pm, March 12th 1977.

Mauro (Radio Alice DJ): (answering phone) Alice...

Valerio (Radio Alice DJ): The telephone rings continuously, really a continuous stream... here’s some Beethoven if you like, if not, whatever...

Mauro: No, Calimero has left...

In the background: Goddamn, I knew it, I knew it.

Mauro (to the telephone): No listen, I’m alone, the police are here and banging on the door

(Music)

Valerio: Here’s a little bit of background music.

(The music continues)

Mauro: I don’t know, listen, I don’t even know if I’m going to sleep tonight. What a pain in the ass...

Antonio: Tell the cops we are waiting for our lawyers

(The noise of loud banging)

Valerio: Well, the police have started banging on the door again, screaming open up

Mauro: (to the police): They’re [lawyers] coming, they’re coming!

Valerio: (to Mauro): Watch out! Stay down!

Police: Fuck, open up, open up!

(a loud racket is audible)
Mauro (to the police): The lawyers are arriving, wait five minutes, the lawyers are on the street

Police: We're coming in now!

Mauro: Let the listeners hear the banging

Valerio: Their [cops] only words are: Fuck, open up and things like that.

(Telephone rings) Alice!

Police: Put your hands up high, hands up high

Valerio speaks into the phone as the police enter: I don't know Alberto, no it's not Matteo, listen there are cops at the door...

(Lots of noise)

Antonio: They've come inside, they're here!!!

Valerio: They're coming in!!! they're coming in!

Our hands are raised, they're here, our hands are raised!

(Loud racket, noise of equipment moving)

Valerio: This is it, they're ripping out the microphone

Police: Hey, hands up high!

Valerio: We have our hands up high. They're ripping out the microphone

(noise)...they said...(noise)...warrant to come in this place...

SILENCE

For concise overviews of Autonomia, see Lotringer and Marazzi, 1980a; and, for the 'Movement of 77' see 'Anatomy of Autonomy' by Berardi 1980, both in Italy: Autonomia, Post-Political Politics.

Throughout this dissertation, I intentionally employ two different spellings: Marxism and marxisms. The reason is to emphasize the polyvalent manifestations—in both theory and practice—which flow from the work of Karl Marx. The former is used in reference to a more orthodox interpretation, typically in a centralized and hierarchical party form (e.g. the Italian Communist Party); the latter entails a more open and fluid interpretation, often mixing with other theoretical paradigms (e.g. the Italian autonomists).

Such a binary typology is undoubtedly reductive; furthermore, it would be difficult if not impossible to delineate a clear division between the two. Nonetheless, one of the key gambits of the dissertation is to not only stress the ongoing contestation over the legacy/legacies of Marx, but to flag an alliance with the latter, more open and flexible interpretations.
As is the case with much of the 'foundational' work for autonomia, Mario Tronti was among the first to look outside the walls of the factory: "At the highest level of social development, the social relation becomes a moment of the relation of production, the whole of society becomes an articulation of production; in other words, the whole of society exists as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination over the whole of society." (Operai e Capitale. Torino: Einaudi, 1971, quoted in Wright 2002. Yet despite Tronti's perspicacity, his insistence on a strictly functional relationship between the mode of production and its more microphysical and diffused expressions will lead to further splits with the more 'creative wing.' Indeed, the Italian Foucault is fabricated precisely to explore such lines of affinity and divergence.

A more philological reading would insist that soon after signing the appeal, Foucault parted ways with both Deleuze and his marxist flirtations. Some would even insist he took a 'liberal' turn toward governmentality. The merits of such a highly contestable reading require an entirely new project.

This interview, which was published the same month, took place between Foucault and a number of psychoanalysts from the experimental Université de Vincennes. Cf. 'Le jeu de Michel Foucault,' Ornicar? Bulletin périodique du champ freudien, n.10, Juillet 1977, pp. 62-93; also in Dits et Ecrit II, pp.298-329; and translated as 'The Confessions of the Flesh' in Power/Knowledge.

This was outlined by Gilles Deleuze in his essay 'Postscript on the Control Society.' In a 1990 interview with Deleuze, Antonio Negri noted that this division is based on "sovereign power, disciplinary power, and above all the control of 'communication' that's on its way to becoming hegemonic." C.F. 'Deleuze, 1997, p. 174.

For an overview in English of Italian microbroadcasters, see Matteo Pasquinelli's 'Manifesto of Urban Television' at http://www.urbantv.it/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=22

Italics added. The English translation appeared as "tactics and their unfolding." The original, 'Des Supplice aux cellules' reads as "...dispositifs"

C.F. Roger-Pol Droit, The Philosophy of Everyday Life.

For a more comprehensive discussion of the role of the intellectual—ranging from Gramsci's 'organic intellectual' to Foucault and Deleuze's 'specific intellectual' to what we conceptualize as 'academicus affinitatus' see 'Academicus Affinitatus' in Utopian Pedagogy, Cote, Mark, Richard Day, Greig DePeuter eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Prres, 2007)


Such a study is undertaken in part by Jason Read's important contribution The Micropolitics of Capital: Marx and the Prehistory of the Present (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003)

dispositif: 1) Ensemble de piece constituant un mécanisme, un appareil quelconque; ce mécanisme, cet appareil. Un dispositif d’alarme, de sécurité. 2a) Ensemble des mesures prises, des moyen mis en oeuvre dans un but determiné. Un important dispositif policier. b) Agencement des moyen qu’adopte une formation militaire pour exécuter une mission. c) Dispositif scénique" aménagement spatial de l’aire de jure au theatre. 3) DR. Partie d’un jugement dans laquelle est
The sociologist Neil Brenner claims a 'functionalism' in Foucault's dispositif in 'Foucault's new functionalism', *Theory and Society* 23: 679-709, 1994. His assertion that the 'functionalism' inherent in the dispositif limits the concept's value for understanding resistance, however, is problematical by my reading.

19 Fontana, Alessandro, and Pasquale Pasquino (eds.) *Microfisica del potere: interventi politici*. Torino: Einaudi, 1977. This title, which translates as 'Microphysics of power: political interventions' comprised the bulk of what was translated and republished as *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. The myriad differences between the two works, which appeared in quick succession, is deserving of its own in-depth study. For now, suffice it to say that the more abstract and 'depoliticized' presentation of the latter did little but reinforce antagonisms between English-speaking Marxists and Foucault.

20 For an overview of the French left in electoral politics in that period, albeit from a party perspective, see George Ross and Jane Jenson, 'The Tragedy of the French Left' *New Left Review*. n. 171. Sept-Oct 1988, pp. 5-44

21 E.P. Thompson continued this debate with his incendiary attack on Althusserian structural marxism in *The Poverty of Theory*. London: Merlin Press, 1978. That, in addition to Milliband's rejoinders effectively undermined the structuralist position outside the continent. Shards of the tradition, however, were reassembled by the likes of Stuart Hall and Ernesto Laclau and Chantall Mouffe.

22 Hall's summary originally appeared in the *New Left Review* and was subsequently published as the introduction to *State, Power, and Socialism*. The occasion was the 'defenestration' of Poulantzas—he jumped through the window of his office, holding reams of his recent writing in his arms. Intellectual historian François Dosse notes the pall of death and tragedy that subsumed the Althusserians in the early 1980s. First, Althusser succumbed to his own demons and strangled his wife; the next year Poulantzas committed suicide; the following year the Althusserian linguist Michel Pecheux killed himself. Whether this was due to the growing anti-Marxism of the time, the theoretical impasse of the Althusserian turn, continued political disappointments, or other external factors remains unclear. Nonetheless, an interesting project on the suicides of 'master thinkers' remains to be undertaken. (Dosse, 1997b, pp. 387-8)

23 Both Poulantzas and Foucault were students of Althusser. Foucault, however, had no affiliation with Althusser at the time of this debate. Foucault writes, "I followed Louis Althusser, who worked militantly in the P.C.F [French Communist Party]. It was also somewhat under his influence that I had decided to join. And when I left the Party [late 1952], he pronounced no anathemas, nor was it on that account that he decided to break off relations with me." (Foucault, 1991, p. 55)

24 Fernand Braudel was also a serious interlocutor of Foucault's and an exception among French historians in that he took his work seriously. Foucault did likewise. stating, "What Bloch, Febvre, and Braudel have shown for history, we can show, I believe, for the history of ideas."
The main source for Marx on formal and real subsumption of labour under capital can be found in the ‘Results of the Immediate Process of Production’ which is in the ‘Appendix’ to Capital, Volume 1, (pp. 1019-1038). Marx also looked at those processes from the perspective of ‘social capital’ in ‘The Chapter on Capital’ found in Grundrisse (pp. 584-589). These writings were taken up avidly by many autonomists, most notably Antonio Negri in Marx Beyond Marx (pp. 120-125).

Braudel is best known for his epic three-part Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century. The historians with which he is often associated are of the Annales school.

Because I have foregrounded the importance of affinity throughout, let us bid a more fond adieu to Poulantzas, not thinking of the reams of papers he clutched to as he plummeted to his death. Crisis produces tragedies to be sure; but it is also a terrain of opportunity. So instead, let’s simply note a final point that are very much in line with the Italian Foucault. That power is relational is surely a key contribution that Poulantzas made to Western marxism, and something very resonant with Foucault. Struggle, specifically class struggle for Poulantzas, played out in relation to the capacity of capital and its various manifestations. The key point: “the field of power is therefore strictly relational. The power of a particular class (the dominant class, for instance) does not refer to a substance which it holds in its hand: contrary to the old zero-sum conception, power is not a measurable quantity that the various classes share or exchange among one another.” (147) Farewell, then, to Poulantzas, friend and rival of the Italian Foucault.

Gilles Deleuze identified this important line of affinity between Tronti and Foucault in his small masterpiece Foucault. In the main text, Deleuze writes, “the final word on power is that resistance comes first.” (89). In the footnote to that statement, Deleuze writes “In Foucault, there is an echo of Mario Tronti’s interpretation of Marxism as a ‘workers’ resistance existing prior to the strategies of capital.” (144).

This quote is from the opening lines of an article initially titled “A New Style of Political Experiment’ which appeared in Tronti’s opus Operai e Capitale. The article was translated into English in the early 1970s, and the title was inexplicably changed to ‘Lenin in England’. It was later published in Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis, ed. Red Notes (London: Red Notes,1979). The version here was accessed online at http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/i/tronti.htm

There is also Italy: Autonomia—Post-Political Politics which has the great benefit of being written in 1980, at a time when those radical politics had been recently shattered. It features essays by many participants, ranging from Mario Tronti to Antonio Negri to Sergio Bologna to Franco Berardi (Bifo), as well as ‘friends’ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.

Southern Italians, in general, and Calabrians in particular, are known by the epithet ‘testa dura’ (hard head). Considering their constitutive role in autonomous labour struggles given ‘testa dura’ a much more political shine.

Operai e Capitale as quoted in Wright, 2003, p. 39. The more complete quote reads as “the working class must discover itself materially as a part of capital if it wants to counterpose all of capital to itself; it must recognise itself as a particular aspect
of capital, if it wants to be the latter's general antagonist."

Poulantzas, knowingly or otherwise, wrote very similar words more than a decade later in State, Power, Socialism (27): "There are no social classes prior to their opposition in struggle: they are not posed 'in themselves' in the relations of production only to enter into struggle (become classes 'for themselves') afterwards and elsewhere. To situate the State with reference to the relations of production is to chart the original contours of its presence in the class struggle."

33 It is, of course, a fabrication to suggest Bologna was closely aligned with Foucault; my claim is purely conceptual and there is evidence to support this. In a 1996 interview, Bologna looked back on that period, and noted that while Foucault may have been in the air, he personally was not steeped in his work: "Certainly the "77 Movement and several intellectuals linked to Autonomia had read Foucault especially, and with great passion. They identified more with Foucault, sometimes, than with Marx or Lenin, and this is obviously very important. So a discussion was opened." Bologna's great insight did not, however, take him down a Foucauldian path. By the end of the '70s, his focus returned to 'workers' centrality', through the analysis of the large factories, and with transportation workers.

34 It should be noted that Ginsborg is considered as having been close to the PCI. This can be seen throughout his two-part epic A History of Contemporary Italy, in which the entire autonomia movement receives only a few paragraphs. For example, the rest of this quote reads as follows: "The conference itself was a damp squib, marked by opportunist interventions by the French 'nouveaux philosophes', and by squalid hand-to-hand fighting for control of the microphone at the mass meeting in the Palasport. The demonstration that marked the end of the three days passed off, mercifully without incident. From then on the movement fizzled out." Certainly he is not wrong in characterising the conference as an opportunity lost, but one wonders how Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari could be identified as 'nouveaux philosophes, let alone 'opportunists'.

35 Maurizio Torealta is now a documentary producer. His recent work includes Fallujah La strage nascosta, [Fallujah, The Concealed Massacre] which was broadcast on RAI News 24, 8 Nov 2005. This comes in fearful symmetry with comments in the Introduction regarding the US dropping 'phosphorous bombs' on Fallujah. Torealta's documentary claims to demonstrate 'irrefutably' that the US military not only used 'white phosphorous' bombs in Fallujah but also MK77, a new form of napalm. Accessed online at http://www.rainews24.it/Notizia.asp?NewsID=57784

36 "Indeed, no alternative was possible since heroin was everywhere, all revolutionary and youth vanguards had been destroyed, hundreds of activists were crowding penitentiaries and many others fled abroad avoiding prison by the skin of their teeth. What is more, a pax romana had been imposed in the factories, where the bosses were free to speed up downsizing and massive dismissals. Capital surpassed fordism by brutal force. In 1980 the defeat of the FIAT metalworkers in Turin and the bomb massacre at the Bologna railway station were the most appropriate epilogue to a decade of tragedy" (Blissett, 1999).

37 The serendipity in this reference vis-à-vis genealogy and the polyvalent discourse of struggle can be found in the multiple contemporary mobilizations of Joseph
Weydemeyer. I will cite just two examples. On the one hand he is excoriated on a website Fire Eater, a revisionist history site which is dedicated to "the Southern movement". One could call it a kind of counter-history—in this case lamenting the loss of the South in the US Civil War. Therein, Weydemeyer is sourly remembered for praising the tactics of the Northern general Sherman to even facilitating the supply of cannons from Engels to US president Lincoln: "In a letter from Engels to Weydemeyer he stated, 'You may have any number of Prussian howitzers, as they have all been withdrawn now and replaced by rifled 6-pounders and 4-pounders.'" The reference to the letter regarding the cannons is from 'Manchester. 10 March 1865' and can be found at

On the other hand, he is praised by the Socialist Organizer, whose motto is 'The emancipation of the working class is the task of the workers themselves.' Therein Weydemeyer is praised for founding the New York-based German-language newspaper Die Revolution and helping to organize the American Worker's League, in addition to his considerable correspondence with Marx and Engels.

38 The 'Introduction' to the 1869 Second Edition begins as follows: "My friend Joseph Weydemeyer, whose death was so untimely, intended to publish a political weekly in New York starting from January 1, 1852. He invited me to provide this weekly with a history of the coup d'état. Down to the middle of February, I accordingly wrote him weekly articles under the title The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. Meanwhile, Weydemeyer's original plan had fallen through. Instead, in the spring of 1852 he began to publish a monthly, Die Revolution, whose first number consists of my Eighteenth Brumaire. A few hundred copies of this found their way into Germany at that time, without, however, getting into the actual book market. A German bookseller of extremely radical pretensions to whom I offered the sale of my book was most virtuously horrified at a "presumption" so "contrary to the times."

The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Moscow: Progress Press, 1937

39 'The war of all against all'

40 Originally in Renée Simon. Henry de Boulainvillier, historien, politque, philosophe et d'un auteur (Paris, 1941).


Both Christopher Hill and Raymond Williams write about the shifting etymology of the word revolution—namely as something negative. Rachum demonstrates that Hill, the Marxist historian of the English Revolution, may have underestimated the importance of the Italian example: "while implying the influence of the Italian works, [Hill] seemed to by-pass the question, maintaining that by then the sense of 'revolutions' as popular revolts was common. Actually, this was not so. The works which appeared in Italy in the 1640s with 'rivoluzioni' in their titles really renewed, in a rather sensational manner, the long neglected political meaning of the word, first evidenced in the histories of the Villani.
brothers in the fourteenth century and encouraged other Italian authors, as Masolino Bisaccioni, Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato, Girolamo Brusoni to employ it."

p. 198

43 Even Ernest Mandel, orthodox Marxist and longtime leader of the Fourth International cites the importance of the 'Soissons vase' in the establishment of the state, and thus sovereign power. For a curious connection to a kind of marxism to which the Italian Foucault would find little affinity, see 'The Origin and Development of the State in Modern Societies', (http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/article.php3?id_article=187#nh4)

The pertinent reference reads as follows:
"This is an important function. Engels said that the state is, in the final analysis, nothing other than a body of armed men. In the primitive collectivity, all male members of the group (and sometimes even all adults, male and female) are armed. In such a society the concept that the bearing of arms is the particular prerogative of some special institution called army, police, or constabulary, does not exist. Every adult male has the right to bear arms. (In certain primitive societies, the ceremony of initiation, which marks coming of age, confers the right to bear arms.)

It is exactly the same in societies that are still primitive but already close to the stage of division into classes. For example, this holds true for the Germanic peoples at about the time they attacked the Roman Empire: all free men had the right to bear arms and they could use them to defend their person and their rights. The equality of rights among free men that we see in primitive Germanic societies is in fact equality among soldiers - which the anecdote of the Soissons vase illustrates so well."


45 The original Italian version is as follows:
Cacciari eventually became a politician and was has intermittently been mayor of Venice since 1993.

46 Cacciari tried to paint Foucault as a member of the 'nouveaux philosophes' who were young philosophers/media stars in 1977. Most of them were former Maoists who abandoned peasant/proletarian struggles for a depoliticized libertarian critique. Clare O'Farrell concisely summarizes their relationship with Foucault.

"In 1977, France and the world suddenly became aware of the 'new philosophers'. Time magazine gave them front-page coverage with the slogan 'Marx is dead', and in Russia the literary journal *Litteraturnaia Gazeta* condemned this 'lost generation of 1968'. Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan were the 'maîtres penser' or the 'gurus' of this new movement. Maurice Clavel, dubbed the 'uncle of the new philosophers', in prophetic tones heralded Foucault as the 'new Kant', and based his somewhat apocalyptic Christian philosophy on Foucault's formulation on the 'death of man'. Clavel's books (especially *Ce que je crois*) were immensely popular and introduced Foucault to an audience who might not otherwise have become familiar with his
ideas. In these books Clavel displayed a seemingly endless capacity for repetition and self-quotation as well as 'prophetic' exaggeration. When he died in 1979, Foucault, a friend with whom he had engaged in many militant activities since the 1960s, wrote an obituary in Le Nouvel Observateur. The younger 'new philosophers', the ex-Maoists Andre Glucksman and Bernard-Henri Levy, adapted Foucault's theories on power to fit their pessimistic conceptions of a modern all-powerful repressive Gulag-State. Although initially Foucault supported the efforts of Andre Glucksman, he did not pursue this line as it became increasingly apparent that the intellectual quality and the political implications of the works of the so-called 'new philosophers' left much to be desired."


47 This section, along with 'Notebook VII' are key texts for the Italian autonomist movement. The latter contains the now-famous 'Fragments on Machines from which the concepts of the general intellect and immaterial labour are derived.

48 This quote comes not from Marx but from Ernest Mandel in his introduction to the 'lost sixth chapter' of Capital which contains the 'Fragments on Machines'. It is perhaps fitting that in a dissertation which focuses on the 'subjectivist' reading of autonomist marxists—that is, their emphasis on the antagonistic relation of labour which provides the dynamism of capital—that a quote on the 'logic' of capital would come from one of the most renowned 'objectivists' (who are critiqued by autonomists as relying on the contradictions internal to the logic of capital—i.e. the 'falling rate of profit'—in order to bring about radical social transformation).

49 A brief clarification may be helpful here. 'Necessary labour' is the time of labour that produces the amount of commodities equivalent to what the worker gets paid. 'Surplus labour' is the time in which the worker is simply producing for the capitalist. Beyond merely extending the working day, capital also seeks to divide the same value of labour produced in a manner it finds more favourable. This requires the reduction of necessary labour time, thereby lowering the value of labour. Thus the continual turn to technology to increase productivity, thereby lowering necessary labour time. This is the strategy of real subsumption—always increase relative surplus value.

50 An inexact and incomplete version of this interview appeared in *Power/Knowledge* as 'Truth and Power'.

51 Maurizio Lazzarato, one of the most important 'second-generation' thinkers, offers a concise comparison-contrast of biopower with Marx:

"Biopolitics, understood as a government-population-political economy relationship, refers to a dynamic of forces that establishes a new relationship between ontology and politics. The political economy that Foucault talks about is neither the political economy of capital and work of classical economists, nor the Marxist economic critique of 'living labor.' It is a political economy of forces that is very close yet very distant from either of these points of view. It is very close to Marx's viewpoint because the problem of how to coordinate and command the relationships between men, insofar as they are living beings, and those of men with "things," keeping the aim of extracting a "surplus of power" in mind, is not simply an economic problem but an ontological one. It is very distant because Foucault faulted Marx and political economy with reducing the relations between
forces to relations between capital and labor, with making these binary and symmetric relations the source of all social dynamics and every power relation. The political economy that Foucault talks about, on the contrary, governs "the whole of a complex material field where not only are natural resources, the products of labor, their circulation and the scope of commerce engaged, but where the management of towns and routes, the conditions of life (habitat, diet, etc.), the number of inhabitants, their life span, their ability and fitness for work also come into play" (Lazzarato, 2002)

52 Quote originally from Mario Tronti. Operaio e capitale, Torino: Einaudi, 1966, p. 260

53 This lecture is another example of Foucault's extended turn toward 'governmentality', as was also evidenced in the other article he provided for Aut Aut.

54 Hardt situates a Deleuzian agencement, or assemblage, as the seeming ontological opposite of the dispositif: "Deleuzian agencements, or assemblages constitute the mechanisms of social organization from below, from the immanent social plane" (121). In short, he is positing the assemblage as the concept of political practice. However, this opposition is limited to a single reference in the concluding remarks of Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy. Given his very different usage of the concept dispositif elsewhere, perhaps it need not be considered so seriously. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that much could be learned by an extensive critical comparison of the Foucaultian dispositif with the Deleuzian assemblage. It is, however, beyond the scope of this project.

55 For insight into this term, see Deleuze, 1998b, pp. 92-3. Also see Negri, 1991b where, on a number of occasions he references natura naturans/natura naturata (c.f. pp. 25, 57, 74, 129, 237). Negri's book was translated by Hardt.

56 Indeed, given these quotations comes from a chapter of Hardt's dissertation, it would be foolhardy of me to address it in anything less than a generous spirit.

57 It is important to emphasize that this is predicated on an immanent and transversal relationship between mind and body. The quote proper, reads as follows. "For indeed, no one has yet determined what the body can do, that is, experience has not yet taught anyone what the body can do from the laws of nature alone, insofar as Nature is only considered to be corporeal, and what the body can do only if it is determined by the mind. For no one has yet come to know the structure of the body so accurately that he could explain all its functions—not to mention that many things are observed in the lower animals which far surpass human ingenuity, and that sleepwalkers do a great many things in their sleep which they would not dare to awake. This shows well enough that the body itself, simply from the laws of its own nature, can do many things which its mind wonders at." (Spinoza, 1994, p. 71—III P2s—within Spinozist scholarship, this is the accepted way of categorizing passages from Ethics. This indicates Part 3, Postulate 2, Scholia)

58 This point has been made by numerous observers. A small selection would include Revelli, 1996, and Wright, 2002.

There is another connection here. The 1973 Chilean coup and assassination were central to the PCI's justification of its historic compromise. The austerity program that it supported, as a result, helped lay the groundwork for neoliberalism. Chile, of course, has long been considered the 'laboratory' of
neoliberalism, complete with a raft of Milton Friedman acolyte economists who literally experimented on that country's economy with the full support of the Pinochet regime. See Valdes, 1995.

59 For example, in Cleaver's most famous book, *Reading Capital Politically*, concisely situates autonomist thought in both its Preface and Introduction. There are many more lines of affinity between Cleaver and autonomists. He has housed the Texas Archives of Autonomous Marxism for decades now. (www.eco.utexas.edu/~hmcleave/txarchintro.html)

Finally, his writings on the Zapatista began in a 'post-autonomist' journal. As he notes in the first footnote to 'The Zapatistas and the Electronic Fabric of Struggle':

“This paper elaborates a theme first laid out in a February 1994 article written for the Italian journal *Riff-Raff*. This elaboration is based on continuing research and participation in the electronic networks of cyberspace being used to circulate the struggles of the Zapatistas and the pro-democracy movement in Mexico to others around the world. The article appeared as "L'insurrezione nel Chiapas e le prospettive della lotta di classe nel nuovo ordine mondiale," *Riff-Raff. Attraverso la produzione sociale* (Padova), March 1994, pp. 133-145.”

60 Within days of writing that sentence, I came across an article entitled 'Bush Meets Beleaguered NGOs Before Putin Talks' which reads:

"Bush flew from Germany to St Petersburg for the annual summit of the Group of Eight rich nations, which will focus on world energy supplies and other global problems. He will also hold talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday. But even before meeting the Kremlin leader, Bush underscored Western concerns over Putin's record on democracy by going straight into roundtable discussions with 15 activists from non-governmental organizations...

Several of the groups have been under pressure from Russian authorities as part of what human rights activists see as an erosion of civil liberties in Russia under Putin and proof that it is not fit to be a G8 member." Bush later emerged to say he had spent a lot of time "listening to their concerns" and had assured them that "we believe in universal values embedded in democracy, we believe in the rule of law, we believe in human rights".


61 Some of the more cited papers include: Milgram, 1967; and Watts, 1999.

62 There were two papers independently published the same year which both 'discovered' this previously unknown network topology of the World Wide Web. They are as Albert, R., Jeong, H., and Barabasi, A., (1999), and Kumar, R., Raghavan, P., Rajalopagan, S., and Tompkins, A. (1999).

63 Gould was not only on the advisory board of the Brecht Forum which sponsored the New York Marxist School, he was also a long-standing member of *Rethinking Marxism*’s editorial board. Soon after Gould’s untimely death in 2002, the journal

64 While I am not directly referencing it here, it should be noted that Hardt and Negri examine at length the way that 'life itself becomes an object of power', in particular see Ch. 1.2 'Biopolitical Production' in *Empire*. 
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