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## ARTICLE

### **The Groupe d'information sur les prisons: The voice of prisoners? Or Foucault's?**

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In 1971 Michel Foucault founded the 'Groupe d'information sur les prisons' (GIP), which planned to gather and publicise testimonies about prison conditions in France. The GIP had no reformist agenda, but rather aimed to enable prisoners themselves to speak out on prison issues and decide for themselves what should be done about them. The GIP membership thus theoretically included prisoners, ex-prisoners and prisoners' families alongside the intellectuals and professionals who founded it. They collected information from prisoners via questionnaires, inmates' letters and personal narratives, and endeavoured to alert public opinion to the insalubrious nature of prisons, and to the unjust and inhumane treatment endured by countless inmates. The GIP organised demonstrations, distributed tracts, gave press conferences and published a variety of documents, in the form of articles in the press and through a series of pamphlets. The GIP's campaign was successful on a number of fronts, winning the right for prisoners to read the daily press, for instance, and leading to a series of actions initiated by prisoners, from a wave of rooftop protests to the creation of the Comité d'action des prisonniers (Prisoners' Action Committee), pursuing the fight for prisoners' rights through the 1970s.

The work of the GIP has thus far mostly been discussed in hagiographical mode, most extensively in Foucault's biographies, and in a handful of articles and unpublished French dissertations. Scholarly commentary on the work of the GIP has hitherto chiefly focused on the relationship between the public pronouncements of the GIP and Foucault's ideas on power and the role of intellectuals.<sup>1</sup> For the most part, however, these analyses are limited to emphasising the originality of the GIP's approach on the basis of the statements published by the GIP, which they take at face

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance: Michelle Perrot, *Les Ombres de l'histoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001); François Boullant, *Michel Foucault et les prisons* (Paris: PUF, 2003); Gérard Mauger, 'Un nouveau militantisme', *Sociétés et Représentations* 3 (1996): 51-77; Keith Gandal, 'Michel Foucault: Intellectual Work and Politics', *Telos* 67 (1986): 121-134.

value. The announcement that the GIP wanted to give prisoners the opportunity to speak out without intermediary<sup>2</sup>, for instance, has thus been repeatedly commended as testimony to Foucault's ethics, endlessly echoing Gilles Deleuze's claim that Foucault was 'the first [...] to teach us something absolutely fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others'<sup>3</sup>. Macey comments that: 'The goal of Foucault's political activity was the empowering of others by giving, for instance, prisoners the voice they were denied.'<sup>4</sup> Halperin similarly argues that Foucault 'consistently refused to speak for others, working instead to create conditions in which others could speak for themselves'<sup>5</sup>. The GIP's work is thus generally acknowledged as 'the advent of a new form of activism, allowing someone's speech to be heard directly, rather than speaking *on behalf of*'<sup>6</sup>.

No critical assessment of the GIP's work has as yet investigated the extent to which the GIP's methods accorded with their pronouncements, and how the dynamics of their communication with prisoners affected the information which they were able to collect. This article proposes to address precisely these issues.

While the GIP's procedures were no doubt often original, and went some way towards letting prisoners speak for themselves, I would like to argue that the intellectuals' role within it was a rather more complex one than critics have so far maintained. Although their goal was to give prisoners the practical means to express themselves, I will show that the methods it used, and the responses it elucidated, suggest that the prisoners' discourse was not simply 'set free', as Artières contends<sup>7</sup>, but was also subtly constrained by the GIP's agenda.

I argue that the GIP's discourse cannot be reduced to the publication of prisoners' testimonies, but can rather be understood as the product of a dialogical process involving the intellectuals' investigative methods and editorial decisions on the one hand, and the prisoners' responses and contributions on the other.

Sylvain Dambrine suggests that the GIP was a movement which made prisoners access the status of discursive subjects<sup>8</sup>. He does not, however, substantiate this claim. I propose to investigate this assertion by analysing the statements and methodology of the GIP in order to assess how prisoners were constructed in the discourse of the GIP, and what types of statements [*énoncés*] they were expected to

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits* [hereafter DE] (Paris: Gallimard, "Quarto", 2001 [1994]), vol.1, p. 1072.

<sup>3</sup> Gilles Deleuze, 'Intellectuals and Power', in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. D. F. Bouchard (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 209.

<sup>4</sup> David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (London: Hutchinson Random House, 1993), p. 257.

<sup>5</sup> David Halperin, *Saint Foucault* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 53.

<sup>6</sup> Philippe Artières, 'Les Écrits de la révolte. La prise de parole des détenus (1970-72)', *Drôle d'époque* 8 (2001): 47, original emphasis, my translation.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37, my translation.

<sup>8</sup> Sylvain Dambrine, 'Passages du mur: des subjectivations de prisonniers' in *Vacarme* 29 (2004): 146.

formulate. I will thus construct a fuller picture of the 'discursive subjects' which prisoners became through the work of the GIP.

## RATIONALE

The impetus for the creation of the GIP in January 1971 lay in the attention drawn to the penitential regime by a group of political prisoners on hunger strike during the winter 1970-71. In the aftermath of May 68, a number of drastically repressive measures were brought in by the government in order to regain control in the face of continuing social unrest. Among these, a bill known as the *loi anti-casseurs* ('anti-wreckers' law<sup>9</sup>) was passed in June 1970, which made the organisers of demonstrations liable for any disturbances, and thus led to the incarceration of increasing numbers of political protesters. Concurrently, the government ordered the dissolution of the Maoist organisation Gauche prolétarienne (GP), founded in 1968; several hundreds of members of the clandestine ex-GP would subsequently be arrested. The political prisoners' movement caught the attention of a few intellectuals, including Michel Foucault and Daniel Defert, who decided to form the 'Groupe d'information sur les prisons', with the support of historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet, and of Jean-Marie Domenach, then editor of the Catholic monthly *Esprit*. The GIP proposed to gather information inside French prisons, building a case for a de facto trial of the prison service.

The GIP's original rationale can be glimpsed in a number of its statements, such as an article published on 15 March 1971 in *J'accuse*, indicating a carefully thought out strategy on its part:

We want to break the double isolation in which prisoners are trapped: through our investigation, we want them to be able to talk to each other, to share what they know, and to communicate from prison to prison and from cell to cell. We want inmates to address the population, and for the population to speak to them. These individual experiences, these isolated rebellions must be transformed into a shared body of knowledge, and into coordinated action. [...] Our investigation is not designed to amass facts, but to increase our intolerance, and transform it into active intolerance.<sup>10</sup>

The GIP's aim, it is suggested here, was primarily to start a debate: amongst prisoners, and between prisoners and the rest of the population. This simple dialogue, however, was practically hampered by prison regulations, which forbade communication with unauthorised persons (i.e. everyone but close family members), while the daily press was not allowed inside and radio broadcasts were regularly censored. The GIP's investigation was thus not an end in itself, for the sake of gathering information, but rather a means to an end: a way to set up a vast

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<sup>9</sup> Macey's translation, op.cit., p. 258.

<sup>10</sup> DE, vol. 1, p. 1044, my translation.

communication network, between and around prisoners, so as to allow for discussion and coordinated action to take place.

The GIP's project appears to rest on an implicit model of the outbreak of revolts, whereby individual experience can be processed in such a way as to become a trigger for uprising. The simultaneous articulation of similar experiences is expected to amplify their impact and legitimate dissatisfaction hitherto dismissed as merely personal and psychological, rather than collective and political.

Indications of an expected course of events in the article cited above and elsewhere suggest that the GIP was virtually engineering a rebellion unbeknown to those who were to be its actors – the prisoners themselves. The repetition of 'we want' constantly reinstates the GIP as the principal orchestrator and decision-maker of the manoeuvres to be made, regardless of the prisoners' wishes. The movement seems to have partly acted as a real life testing ground for Foucault's hypotheses; interestingly, the editors of *Dits et écrits* note that Foucault delayed publication of *Discipline and Punish* for two years, so as to evade the charge of having been motivated solely by theoretical interest.

It is on 8 February 1971, at the press conference that marked the end of the political prisoners' second hunger strike, that the public announcement of the creation of the GIP was made. The statement, signed by Foucault, Vidal-Naquet and Domenach and published in several newspapers, explains that 'together with a number of *magistrats*, lawyers, journalists, doctors and psychologists, we have founded a *Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons*'<sup>11</sup>. Prisoners are thus not included amongst the investigators at this stage, nor are they explicitly addressed with any more precision than as among 'those who have some experience of prison or some connection with it, in whatever capacity'<sup>12</sup>, even though the statement would be published in *Esprit*, which was available in prisons.

The proposed role of those who would have relevant experience or information is 'to contact us and pass on what they know. We have compiled a questionnaire, which is available on request. As soon as we have received enough responses, we will publish them.'<sup>13</sup> Prisoners are thus seemingly addressed solely as sources of information, while the processing and use of the information remains the investigators' monopoly. This first official GIP statement thus casts prisoners rather as passive objects of the GIP's investigation, leaving the leading roles to the intellectuals and professionals.

The GIP's request for prisoners to send in personal narratives of prison life and answers to a pre-established questionnaire can be argued to cast them simultaneously as subjects and objects of the GIP's investigation. The relatively passive role which they are given supposes that they are, to an extent, approached as

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<sup>11</sup> Translation in Macey, op.cit., p.258.

<sup>12</sup> DE, vol.1, p. 1043, my translation.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., my translation.

objects to be interrogated, in such a way as to extract data from them to be used by the researchers as they see fit. By having made key decisions about the investigative procedures and the role to be played by prisoners within them, the GIP can be seen to have created a certain position for inmates to occupy, thereby subjecting them to its own vision of what subjectivity they should take on. The ambiguities of this subjectivation process are explored further in the following sections, where I discuss some of the methodological problems pertaining to the GIP's investigation.

## METHODOLOGY

Though the GIP's avowed aim was to hand the floor over to prisoners, the methods by which it did so can be shown to have simultaneously imposed significant constraints upon prisoners' voices. These constraints operated in a number of ways at different stages of the investigation, beginning with the imposition of the written medium to impart information to the GIP, the restrictive questionnaire format and the limitation of testimonial genres to questionnaire answers and factual personal accounts, through to the remarkably biased selection put forward for publication. I shall look at each of these constraints in turn, considering the way in which they limited prisoners' discourse, and assessing the extent to which they recalled typically institutional practices. I will show that by thus imposing a degree of constraint on prisoners' participation, and specifically on the discursive subject positions available to them, the GIP effectively delimited a subjectivity which inmates were expected to take up.

First of all, the GIP's investigative methods failed to ensure the participation of a representative sample of informants. From the first invitation from the hunger strikers' 'comrades' to send information to Foucault, to the GIP's reliance on written questionnaires, the written medium is privileged. For the significant proportion of prisoners who have difficulty reading and writing, or for whom French was not their native language, writing will have been alienating at the very least, if not absolutely unmanageable.

The fact that the questionnaire's dissemination was illegal inside prisons means that questionnaires were, however, often covertly read out to prisoners by visiting family members or fellow prisoners who had managed to smuggle in a copy, and the answers were collected orally. The formulation of some of the answers published in the GIP's brochure *Enquête dans vingt prisons* indicates that they were given orally, and compiled by a third party: 'According to the questions I have asked prisoners...' <sup>14</sup>. Among those is this revealing answer to the question 'Have you been the victim of censorship?': 'People don't write much in prison, because of spelling; they are ashamed of their spelling before the censors.' <sup>15</sup> The GIP's privileging of the

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<sup>14</sup> *Le G.I.P.: Enquête dans vingt prisons* (Paris: Champ Libre, 1971), p. 27 – my translation.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29 – my translation.

written medium will thus probably have led to under-representation of illiterate prisoners and non-French-speakers, though perhaps more so in the letters sent in than in questionnaires, on account of their ad hoc dissemination in prisons.

The Administration pénitentiaire's annual report indicates that French prisons housed 29,026 prisoners on 1 January 1970.<sup>16</sup> The number of questionnaires sent out by the GIP, by contrast, approximated one thousand, but the number of answers received was around 50.<sup>17</sup> Letters, prison narratives and diaries were also sent to the GIP by 20 or so inmates and ex-cons. The total of the GIP's informants thus represented only a tiny fraction of the prison population, favouring French-speaking, literate and relatively politicised and articulate respondents, which may not be deemed representative of the whole of the prison population. However, given the drastic restrictions on all forms of communication with prisoners, the GIP's aim of enabling inmates directly to express their grievances to the 'outside' was difficult to achieve without recourse to the written medium, even though this will have prevented many from taking part in the investigation.

## QUESTIONNAIRES

One of the GIP's key investigative tools, announced in their founding declaration, was the dissemination of a questionnaire destined to collect information on prison conditions from prisoners themselves. Interestingly, the authorship of the questionnaire seems to constitute a moot point. The first announcement of the availability of the questionnaire appeared in the GIP's manifesto, which did not mention any involvement of prisoners or ex-prisoners in the GIP at that stage. In an article published in *La Cause du peuple-J'accuse* (25 May 1971), Daniel Defert (founding member of the GIP) states that it is prisoners themselves who drew up the questionnaire. Defert seems anxious to minimize the intellectuals' involvement and maximize the prisoners', so that the role of ex-inmates in the drafting of the initial version of the questionnaire may be suspected to have been rather less than Defert claims.

By contrast, the historians who retraced the early meetings of the GIP altogether discount ex-prisoners' involvement at that stage, maintaining that the questionnaire was written by a small group of young philosophers and sociologists (including Jacques Donzelot, Daniel Defert, Danielle Rancière, Christine Martineau) around Michel Foucault<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> In *Le Monde*, 2/09/1970.

<sup>17</sup> Elie Kagan and Alain Jaubert, *Une Journée particulière* (Lyon: Ædelsa Éditions, 2004), p. 40.

<sup>18</sup> Philippe Artières, Laurent Quéro and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel (eds), *Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons. Archives d'une lutte 1970-1972* (Paris: Editions de l'IMEC, 2003), p.30.

The GIP's claim that 'This is not a sociological investigation'<sup>19</sup> arguably referred not so much to the professional training of its investigators as to the purposes of the investigation. A covering letter to the questionnaire insists that the GIP's investigation is to be understood as an act of resistance<sup>20</sup>, foregrounding the significance of the investigation's motives over its format. Thus it is not a sociologists' investigation because it does not share the aims that sociological investigations usually have. The meaning of the enquiry is a function of the socio-political stance which the enquirers adopt, perhaps in the sense in which Pêcheux argues that 'Words, expressions, propositions, etc [...] change their meaning according to the positions held by those who use them, which signifies that they find their meaning by reference to these positions'<sup>21</sup>.

However, it could also be argued that the choice of the questionnaire format was actually crucial to the GIP's goals, not least in that it positioned its authors as social scientists. The questions could thus be described as 'énoncés' in the sense that Foucault proposed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: 'To describe a formulation *qua* statement [énoncé] does not consist in analysing the relations between the author and what he says (or wanted to say, or said without wanting to); but in determining what position can and must be occupied by any individual if he is to be the subject of it.'<sup>22</sup> Thus, the questionnaire format positions its authors as social scientists, regardless of how they wish to present themselves; the genre is that of the scientific institution, automatically casting its subjects as institutional researchers: 'The positions of the subject are [...] defined by the situation that it is possible for him to occupy in relation to the various domains or groups of objects: he is subject questioning according to a certain grid of explicit or implicit interrogations, and listening according to a certain programme of information'<sup>23</sup>.

The institutional stamp carried by the questionnaire format in turn grants scientific authority to the investigative procedure. Questionnaires have been sanctioned by the social scientific establishment as a valid means of generating standardised knowledge. Their formal rigour is arguably instrumental in allowing the constitution of a 'shared body of knowledge' ['savoir commun'], which the GIP foregrounded as one of the chief aims of the investigation. The involvement of sociologists in the GIP's investigative methods, whether acknowledged or not, thus seems wholly cogent with the GIP's rationale, of helping prisoners produce knowledge about their situation.

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<sup>19</sup> Ce n'est pas une enquête de sociologues', in Artières et al, op.cit., p.52.

<sup>20</sup> 'ce n'est pas une enquête sociologique, une enquête-curiosité, c'est une *enquête-intolérance*', ibid., p.53.

<sup>21</sup> Michel Pêcheux, *Language, Semantics and Ideology*, trans. H. Nagpal, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982), p.111.

<sup>22</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, (London & New York: Routledge, 2003 [1972]), p.107.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. pp.57-58, translation adapted.

However, the GIP's reliance on questionnaires can be considered problematical on a number of grounds. Firstly, the use of a strict question-answer format has been shown to generate power asymmetry in the relationship between those asking the questions and those answering them.<sup>24</sup> The GIP's recourse to questionnaires may therefore be thought to have imposed an unequal interaction pattern on prisoners.

The GIP questionnaire set the topics, signalled by the sub-headings 'visits', 'letters', 'your rights', 'cells' etc., which remained unchanged even as some of the questions were added or amended following initial feedback. A considerable part of the GIP's discourse indeed consisted in politicising the daily life and material conditions of prisoners. In a 1973 interview Foucault explains how his rationale in asking prisoners to testify to their living conditions is inscribed in the redefinition of the political initiated by the late Sixties liberation movements. As Artières notes, since 1968 prisons had remained the only place not to be reached by the collective 'speaking out' undertaken by sections of the population hitherto denied access to the political platform, from women and gays to workers and students<sup>25</sup>. In a 1972 article, Jacques Donzelot, who was involved in the GIP, clarifies the GIP's position in relation to movements largely influenced by psychoanalytic notions of liberation through speech, contending that the GIP aimed to move beyond merely freeing the voices of the oppressed, to formulate a potent political discourse. The GIP, he states, did not encourage prisoners to speak out for self-expression's sake, but saw that their testimonies should have a very specific content, revolving around their living conditions<sup>26</sup>.

The GIP's strategy was thus very clearly defined in relation to the protest movements of the preceding years. One of its key premises built on the idea that the personal is political, and it therefore insisted that prisoners designate their daily living conditions as their primary concern. While it also drew on the contemporary power of the silenced voice finally speaking up for itself, the GIP nonetheless distanced itself from the clinical associations of confession, to rather channel testimonies in the direction of pre-defined claims grounded in verifiable information on material conditions.

The range of issues deemed relevant was thus pre-selected by the GIP, and can be suspected to have stopped other problems coming to the fore: as Drew and Heritage found, in question-answer settings, 'professionals may prevent particular issues becoming topics in their own right'<sup>27</sup>. Incidentally, Gudjonsson remarks that

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<sup>24</sup> See for instance: Roger Fowler et al, *Language and Control* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2001 [1989]).

<sup>25</sup> Artières, op.cit, p.37.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Donzelot, 'Travail social et lutte politique', *Esprit* 413 (1972): 654-73.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Drew and John Heritage (eds), *Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.49.



the police are aware of this effect and 'ask specific questions in order to [...] allow the police officer to have greater control over the interview'<sup>28</sup>.

Further, the validity of both closed and open survey questions has been challenged: Foddy contends that the 'suggestion that open questions do not suggest answers to respondents [in contrast to closed ones] is not necessarily valid'<sup>29</sup>. Open questions have been observed to yield markedly different answers from closed versions of the same questions. Though this has been attributed to the inadequacy of the closed response options, Foddy remarks that 'such an outcome can just as easily be the result of respondents having to guess what kinds of answers the researcher wants in response to open questions. The central issue is not which format produces the most valid responses but whether or not respondents know what kinds of answers they should give.'<sup>30</sup> Respondents are thus thought not to answer absolutely freely, but rather to attempt to conform to what they assume the researcher's expectations to be. This problem will certainly have applied to the GIP questionnaire: prisoners will have responded according to what they thought the GIP required. Leading forensic linguist Roger W. Shuy further warns that: 'The *way* a question is asked can influence or even determine the answer given. [...] Lawyers have long recognized the dangers of "leading questions," for example, and the courts try to prevent this from happening.'<sup>31</sup>

These problematic aspects of the questionnaire format point to a rather more complex relationship between the GIP and the prisoners than the former simply offering a platform to the latter. The prisoners' involvement in the GIP was thus restricted, at this early stage in the movement, to answering questions concerning material conditions of imprisonment. The GIP also suggested, however, that prisoners sent in 'detailed narratives of imprisonment.'<sup>32</sup>

## PRISON NARRATIVES

What 'detailed narratives of imprisonment' ('des récits détaillés de détention') might involve is perhaps open to interpretation. They may arguably refer to second-hand reports of events, but it is likely that they would be taken as autobiographical accounts of prison life. Whatever their exact contents, however, the suggested format

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<sup>28</sup> Gisli Gudjonsson, *The Psychology of Interrogations, Confessions and Testimony* (Chichester: Wiley, 1992), p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> William Foddy, *Constructing Questions for Interviews and Questionnaires: Theory and Practice in Social Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 129.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p.152.

<sup>31</sup> Roger W. Shuy, *Languages Crimes: The Use and Abuse of Language Evidence in the Courtroom* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1993), p.174, original emphasis.

<sup>32</sup> In Philippe Artières, Laurent Quérou and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel (eds), *Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons. Archives d'une lutte 1970-1972* (Paris: Editions de l'IMEC, 2003), p. 42, my translation.

is unambiguously that of narrative: 'récit'. The suggestion of a narrative genre by the GIP is particularly interesting in light of Foucault's comments on prisoners' autobiographies in the preface to Serge Livrozet's book, *De la Prison à la révolte* (1973). Foucault condemned the prevalence of the autobiographical genre as ensuring that 'the convict cannot have thoughts, as s/he may only have recollections. His/her memory alone is accepted, not his/her ideas'<sup>33</sup>. Whether wholly autobiographical or not, the GIP's 'récits de détention' likewise arguably preclude analytical critique, political manifesto, or any other non-narrative genres prisoners might have wished to adopt.

Foucault's analysis of the significance of the prisoners' testimonies lays particular emphasis on first-person enunciation and communication, rather than on contents. In a 1972 interview Foucault thus stated that 'in our pamphlets, it was the inmates themselves who spoke out and revealed the facts. Since these facts were only known in restricted circles, it was important for the public to hear the voice of prisoners, and for prisoners to know that they themselves were speaking out'<sup>34</sup>. This observation clearly stresses the importance of viva voce dialogue between prisoners and 'public opinion', or 'contact' in Debray's words<sup>35</sup>, rather than the terms of the discourse they held.

In requesting personal narratives the GIP can be said to have aligned itself with what Scannell shows to be the dominant distribution of discourse in the media, where 'public persons [such as intellectuals] are entitled to opinions, private persons to experiences'<sup>36</sup>:

To have an opinion is to be entitled to comment on events, to have views about them, to assess their significance. To have an experience is to be entitled to describe an event that happened to oneself and to say how one felt about it. [...] Public persons [...] speak as representatives of institutions, as agents not as persons, and their views have generalised weight and authority. They are accredited spokespersons, whose views are legitimated and legitimating. Private individuals appear in news, become newsworthy, accidentally and usually disastrously. They are often the victims or witnesses of catastrophes and are interviewed for what they saw or for how it affected them [...]<sup>37</sup>

The GIP reproduced this pattern by inviting prisoners to contribute experiences, while analysis and commentary was provided by the GIP intellectuals. They thus conformed to a generic convention reflecting the fact that 'the powerless are not seen

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<sup>33</sup> 'le condamné ne peut pas avoir de pensée puisqu'il ne doit avoir que des souvenirs. Sa mémoire seule est admise, non ses idées', in Serge Livrozet, *De la Prison à la révolte* (Paris: l'Esprit Frappeur, 1999 [1973]), p. 6, my translation.

<sup>34</sup> DE, vol.1, p. 1297, my translation.

<sup>35</sup> Régis Debray, *L'État séducteur. Les Révolutions médiologiques du pouvoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), p. 127.

<sup>36</sup> Paddy Scannell, 'Public Service Broadcasting and Modern Public Life', in *Culture and Power*, ed. Paddy Scannell et al (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage, 1992), p. 344.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

as credible sources of knowledge and explanation and tend as a result to be marginalised'<sup>38</sup>.

By the same token, however, for the GIP to combine prisoners' experience with intellectuals' public pronouncements may be considered an efficient strategy in that it will have met discursive expectations, and hence have been more easily accepted and understood. In a 1975 interview first published in 2004, Foucault clarified his view on the role of the intellectual in relation to the discourse of powerless groups:

To me, the intellectual has no right to privilege his/her own discourse over that of others. Rather, s/he tries to make room for the discourse of others. This does not mean that s/he should keep silent, for this would be verging on masochism... His/her role is to open up possibilities in discourse, and to blend his/her discourse with others', to intertwine it with that of others, like a support.<sup>39</sup>

This position is quite different from the GIP statements that insisted that it only put forward prisoners' voices without intervening in any way. Contrary to previous claims that the GIP intellectuals aimed to remain silent, Foucault now suggests that such a position would be masochistic. He rather argues that the intellectual's role is to open up recognised discursive channels for others, and to intertwine his/her discourse with theirs so as to lend them its institutional support. This view more accurately reflects the way that the GIP operated, in that the intellectuals, and Foucault in particular, indubitably intermingled their own discourse with the prisoners', and thereby enabled the latter to find its way into the media.

In the same interview, Foucault repeats that the GIP intellectuals did not intend to remain silent and let prisoners alone speak – contrary to earlier GIP pronouncements:

What we tried to do with the prison issue was [...] to weave together discourses which were on an equal footing. We did not keep quiet if an inmate was speaking, we did not acknowledge that he had the right to shut us up, but nor did we assume the right to speak in his place. It seemed to us that the fact of being on the outside was neither qualifying nor disqualifying for us. It was one position in relation to prison – a position allowing us to speak about prison without speaking on behalf on inmates.<sup>40</sup>

Foucault's claim that neither the prisoners' discourse nor the intellectuals' was given more prominence breaks with both the GIP's insistence that the inmates' voices take precedence, and with Foucault's consistent theoretical view that the discourses of intellectuals occupy a privileged place in the order of discourse, and that this is precisely why, as in the previous quote, they can provide support for others' voices.

Foucault's defence, that the fact of speaking from outside prisons does not invalidate a discourse about it, is probably made in response to ex-inmate Serge

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<sup>38</sup> Romy Clark and Roz Ivanič, *The Politics of Writing*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 33.

<sup>39</sup> In *Le Monde* 19-20/09/04, my translation.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Livrozet, who led the Melun protests in 1972 and founded the Comité d'Action des Prisonniers on his release in 1973. Following Foucault's anonymous publication of an article on illegalism and delinquency in the daily left-wing newspaper *Libération*, Livrozet railed against the intellectual's analysis in an interview with the same newspaper: 'These specialists in analysis are a pain. I don't need anyone to speak for me and proclaim what I am.'<sup>41</sup> Mills remarks that Livrozet 'clearly felt that Foucault's position was not simply that of facilitator'<sup>42</sup>. It may be in light of such a challenge that Foucault saw fit to justify intellectuals' right to comment on subjects on which their research can shed a different and complementary light.

As if anticipating potential criticism that, by mixing the GIP's discourse with the prisoners', the GIP might be said to have unduly interfered with it by giving it a more authoritative shape, Foucault continues:

You're going to tell me: it is the intellectuals who are moulding this discourse... Big deal! The intellectual, in a given society, is precisely the 'discourse officer'. Whatever happens in the order of discourse is inevitably going to be his/her business. S/he might be for or against it, but no operation can take place within the order of discourse without the intellectual's intervention.<sup>43</sup>

Here Foucault effectively admits that the prisoners' voices could not have become a discourse, that is, have had the potential to wield any power, had they not been framed by intellectuals – as only they have access to the order of discourse and can alter the configuration of discourses in a society.

## PUBLICATIONS

As soon as information had been gathered, it was crucial to the GIP's strategy that it be rapidly spread and shared, to enable the emergence of a collective voice, and of a 'shared body of knowledge' ('savoir commun')<sup>44</sup>. To this end the GIP published a number of articles, particularly in the Maoist press and in the Catholic monthly *Esprit*. They also published five brochures, four of which appeared under the especially created series title "Intolérable".

Defert contends that: 'we did not hold any specific discourse of our own; the heterogeneity of the GIP's publications bears witness to this'<sup>45</sup>. While the GIP's output undoubtedly covers a wide range of issues, and treats them in a variety of ways, from polemical essays on George Jackson's death to word for word reproduction of questionnaire answers, I would like to suggest that the GIP's

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<sup>41</sup> 'Les spécialistes de l'analyse nous emmerdent, je n'ai besoin de personne pour prendre la parole et expliquer ce que je suis.' (*Libération* 19-02-1974), trans. Betsy Wing, in Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1991 [1989]), p. 234.

<sup>42</sup> Sara Mills, *Michel Foucault* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 77.

<sup>43</sup> In *Le Monde* 19-20/09/04, my translation.

<sup>44</sup> GIP, *Le G.I.P.: Enquête dans vingt prisons* (Paris: Champ Libre, 1971), p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> Daniel Defert in Artières et al, op.cit, p. 324, my translation.

publications did not always impartially reflect prisoners' contributions. The editorial power exercised by the GIP in its publication of prisoners' testimonies, together with the ideological standpoints discernible in their presentation of the issues they addressed, can rather be said to express, if not a unified 'discourse', at least a significant voice in the dialogical end products.

The first brochure to be published by the GIP, entitled *Enquête dans vingt prisons*, appeared in June 1971. The booklet, consisting of a selection of the questionnaire answers gathered by then, is prefaced with a three-page introduction attributed to Michel Foucault. The tone set by his opening paragraph is far from neutral:

Expressed through courts, prisons, hospitals, psychiatric hospitals, occupational medicine, universities, the press, and informational organs – through all these institutions, under different disguises, exists a form of oppression that is deeply rooted in the political.<sup>46</sup>

Foucault thus introduces the prisoners' answers to the GIP's questionnaire with a very powerful framework within which to interpret them: courts and prisons are to be understood not as providing an impartial service, for instance, but as a form of oppression which is above all political. Foucault places the judiciary on a par with other institutions considered neutral and democratic, and whose avowed mission is indeed to care for and benefit all citizens: an independent justice system is widely hailed as a hallmark of democracy, while prisons allegedly serve the common good by simultaneously protecting those on the outside, and seeing to the rehabilitation of those on the inside. Yet Foucault challenges this idyllic picture of democratic institutions in no uncertain terms: far from neutrally serving the population, they ensure its oppression. Prisoners, specifically, are thereby cast primarily as victims of the oppression exercised by the judiciary.

The political dimensions of this oppression become clearer in the next paragraph:

This oppression has always been recognized by the exploited class, which has constantly resisted it, but has been thoroughly subjected to it. Now this oppression has become intolerable to other social strata – intellectuals, technicians, lawyers, doctors, journalists, etc. It still purports to be exercised through these professionals, with their help and complicity, but it is now failing to take account of their interests, and above all their ideology. Those in charge of distributing justice, health, knowledge, and information, are becoming aware of the oppressive force of a political power at the heart of their own practices. Their growing resistance is now joining forces with the proletariat in its long struggle.<sup>47</sup>

Here Foucault presents 'political oppression' in terms of his own evolving understanding of power relations. While partly relying on Marxist class terminology ('the exploited class', 'the proletariat'), he distances himself from the idea that the

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<sup>46</sup> *Le G.I.P.: Enquête dans vingt prisons*, p. 3, trans. Betsy Wing, in Eribon, op.cit., p. 228.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, translation adapted.

exploited are blinded by ideology: rather he argues that they are fully aware of the injustices committed against them, and are constantly engaged in resistance, but have not hitherto been able to defeat oppressive forces.

Foucault presents oppression as not simply exercised by economic forces at the service of the bourgeoisie, but as operating through a heterogeneous network comprising a range of fields, including science, medicine, justice, and information. In his later lectures on power, Foucault would emphasise that he was not concerned with the operation of power within central institutions such as State apparatuses, where it is expected and regulated by laws, but rather with the continued impact of it beyond those institutions: 'power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, [...] those points where it becomes capillary, that is, [...] its more regional forms and institutions'<sup>48</sup>. His claim that increasing numbers of professionals have come to feel the exercise of power within their own practices is cogent with his focus on the impact of disciplinary practices brought to bear upon individual bodies by specific professional practices.

Foucault thus presents the GIP's work in relation to his own understanding of the workings of power: he offers a theoretical framework within which the prisoners' responses can be read as combating power at its very points of application: 'attacking [power] where it is exercised under another name: that of justice, technique, knowledge, objectivity'<sup>49</sup>. This discourse thus casts prisoners as not simply protesting prison conditions, but as taking on power itself in one of the many forms in which it is exercised in modern Western society. Prisoners are thus presented as occupying a key position in the modern power configuration.

The prisoners' responses are clearly not published simply on their own terms, as both the GIP and critics have sustained<sup>50</sup>, but they are rather encased within a very strongly-worded interpretive framework: they are an integral part of an '*enquête-intolérance*', which is essentially '*a political act [...] the first episode in a struggle [...] a front, an offensive front [...] the struggle which will prevent oppression being exercised*'<sup>51</sup>. The GIP thus presents the questionnaire responses through a distinctive discourse of anti-oppressive struggle, of which only partial echoes can be found in the prisoners' input. It therefore appears as primarily the GIP's own discourse, rather than the prisoners', and frames the latter as agents of a political struggle against oppression. Though Boullant argues that Foucault kept in the background, and unilaterally listened to prisoners<sup>52</sup>, this preface bears the unmistakable stamp of Foucault's thought, and foregrounded his own ideas rather than faithfully reporting prisoners' responses.

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<sup>48</sup> Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980), p. 96.

<sup>49</sup> *Le G.I.P.: Enquête dans vingt prisons*, p. 3, my translation.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Boullant, *op.cit.*, pp. 14-15; Artières *op.cit.*, pp. 44-46.

<sup>51</sup> *Enquête*, pp. 3-4, emphasis original, translated in Macey, *op.cit.*, pp. 268-69.

<sup>52</sup> In *L'Humanité* 19/06/04.

Following this introductory contextualisation of the GIP's investigation, the brochure's contents are summed up as follows:

In order to disseminate the information as rapidly as possible, we have written this pamphlet on the basis of the first questionnaires:

1. By way of illustration, two of the completed questionnaires are reproduced in full.
2. We also include two narratives which follow the order of the questions.
3. Finally, the most characteristic answers are brought together under the main questionnaire headings.<sup>53</sup>

These points indicate several ways in which the GIP operated a selection of texts for publication out of all the material that they initially received. Two filled out questionnaires were deemed worthy of publishing in their entirety; two continuous narratives were included in the midst of the dominant question-answer format; and finally, a number of answers were selected as 'characteristic'. The GIP thus undoubtedly brought its own judgement to bear upon what material should be widely publicised, and what could be omitted. As Macey notes, 'the absence of any statistical breakdown of the responses makes the very notion of "characteristic" rather dubious'<sup>54</sup>. While the necessity of such a selection was probably dictated by practical concerns regarding the length of the pamphlet, the order in which the texts appear within the brochure suggest that it was also used to foreground radical views in line with the GIP's activist agenda.

The first document in the brochure is a completed questionnaire seemingly published in its entirety, simply headed with the name of the Parisian men's prison from which it emanated: 'La Santé'. The answers are remarkably articulate – much more so than might be expected from the average levels of literacy recorded in prisons. This prisoner can thus be suspected, from the outset, not to be representative of the prison population at large. As one reads on, it becomes apparent that he holds clear political sympathies, as he bemoans the lack of access to Marxist publications within the prison.

The questionnaire answers are thus fronted by a strongly politicised and articulate prisoner – whom later questions further reveal to have been one of the prisoners involved in the hunger strikes organised by the political prisoners of the ex-Gauche prolétarienne. None of the answers compiled in the remainder of the brochure express clear political views, suggesting that such a set of answers might have constituted the exception rather than the rule among the questionnaires collected. Yet the GIP chose to give it the most prominent place. The fact that it is largely coherent with Foucault's radical introduction would seem to suggest that this questionnaire was selected on account of subversive contents supporting Foucault's

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<sup>53</sup> *Enquête*, p. 4, my translation.

<sup>54</sup> Macey, *op.cit.*, p. 268.

activist aims, rather than Foucault's introduction having been based on overwhelmingly political responses from the prisoners.

The GIP's last brochure, *Cahiers de revendications sortis des prisons lors des récentes révoltes*, published in 1972, highlights the growing gap between some of the GIP's initial aims, and the struggles taken up by prisoners themselves. The GIP's introduction to the *Cahiers* echoes its manifesto and first declarations, repeating some of the GIP's initial statements almost word for word. The consistency displayed by the GIP's discourse in no way reflects the relatively independent course taken up by prisoners' collectives inside prisons. As against the innovative means of political struggle called for by intellectuals, the *Cahiers* rather betray the adoption by prisoners of traditional forms of political action. Prisoners indeed summed up their grievances as numbered bullet points spelling so many suggestions for timid reforms, such as the 'right to a transistor in each cell', 'longer visiting hours', or the 'right to buy paperback books'<sup>55</sup>.

The original political subjectivity which the GIP tried to outline was thus not taken up by prisoners, who rather opted for more traditional modes of political struggle, and aligned their discourses either to a reformist agenda (as above), or to Marxist-inspired revolutionary declarations.<sup>56</sup>

## COMMUNICATIVE HEGEMONY

The GIP intellectuals' alliance with prisoners can be seen not to have yielded the results which Foucault expected. Deleuze reports that Foucault felt the GIP had achieved nothing.<sup>57</sup> In this section I review the key strengths and weaknesses of the GIP's strategy, and I argue that the failure of the GIP can be attributed to its imposition of a hegemonic discourse on prisoners, defining subject positions for them which they neither wanted to nor could adopt.

The originality of the GIP's approach resided in its endeavour to contrive a new way of championing the cause of an oppressed group. Although the use of questionnaires to gather information is problematic on a number of counts, it did nonetheless provide a way of transforming prisoners' experience into ratified knowledge. In this the GIP can be argued to have contrived a means of interceding between the powerless and the spheres of power, while breaking away from the prevailing intellectual tradition of defending people's causes from a humanist, theoretical position, as representatives of universal truths.

Discussing the role of intellectuals in the aftermath of 1968, Foucault commented that: 'the intellectual discovered that the masses no longer need him to

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<sup>55</sup> In GIP, *Cahiers de revendications sortis des prisons lors des récentes révoltes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 15.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Livrozet, op.cit.

<sup>57</sup> In Eribon, op.cit., p.234.



gain knowledge: they *know* perfectly well, without illusion; they know far better than he and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves. But there exists a system of power which blocks, prohibits, and invalidates this discourse and this knowledge'<sup>58</sup>. The GIP can be said to have attempted to tackle this de facto censorship of the masses' discourse by channelling it through the approved mechanism of knowledge production which questionnaires constitute.

Foucault envisioned that: 'The intellectual's role is no longer to place himself "somewhat ahead and to the side" in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of "knowledge", "truth", "consciousness", and "discourse"'<sup>59</sup>. The GIP's work can be said to have put Foucault's and other intellectuals' privileged place in the order of discourse at the service of those who were excluded and oppressed by that very order. As objects and instruments of power, the GIP intellectuals lent their licence to manufacture truths to those who would challenge that very power, thereby subverting and short-circuiting the order of knowledge's allegiance to the repressive exercise of power.

Though as many have noted, the GIP's work thus exemplified Foucault's conception of the new role of intellectuals<sup>60</sup>, it can be argued that the success of its work nonetheless largely relied on the continuing prestige of intellectuals as bearers of universal truths. Halperin remarks that Foucault used 'his prestigious social location to create specific opportunities for the voices of the disempowered to be heard, recorded, published, and circulated'<sup>61</sup>. It is indeed doubtful that, had the movement been led by lesser-known individuals, it would have generated as much interest in the media – and thereby held as much sway with 'public opinion'.

Thus, though Foucault insisted that the movement aimed to remain 'anonymous'<sup>62</sup>, the vast majority of the press coverage of its actions foregrounded Foucault's name, and later Sartre's and Mauriac's as they joined in the various protests. The fact that these intellectuals stepped back from the struggle after the creation of the Comité d'Action des Prisonniers (CAP) can further be regarded as one of the main factors accounting for the decrease of media exposure of the prisoners' movement after 1972. In a 1976 article Defert and Donzelot thus express concern at the lack of coverage of the work of the CAP, wondering: 'They are going on with it, but what response are they getting?'<sup>63</sup>

The position of power occupied by the GIP intellectuals, while an asset in exerting influence in official spheres, may however have hindered communication

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<sup>58</sup> In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, p. 207.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 207-08.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Gandal, op.cit.; Mauger, op.cit.; Jean-Claude Monod, *Foucault: La police des conduites* (Paris: Michalon, 1997); Barry Smart, *Michel Foucault* (London and New York: Routledge, 1985).

<sup>61</sup> Halperin, op.cit., p. 52.

<sup>62</sup> DE, vol.1, p. 1172.

<sup>63</sup> 'Ils continuent, mais avec quel écho?' Trans. Betsy Wing, in Eribon, op.cit., p. 234.

with prisoners. The communication breakdown between the GIP and prisoners is evidenced first and foremost in the poor take-up among potential respondents. I suggest that this may be due to the fact that the GIP chose to communicate with prisoners through the dissemination of written questionnaires in French, in spite of the higher rate of literacy difficulties, and the proportional over-representation of non-French speakers, in the prison population.

Analysis of the only completed questionnaire that has been archived further reveals a stark contrast between the GIP's flawless grammar and elaborate wording, and the brevity, broken syntax, tentative spelling and use of dialect and slang which characterise the inmate's answers. I would like to argue that, whether or not the GIP's linguistic choices impeded comprehension, this prisoner's failure to fulfil expectations implicit in open questions by answering at length, for instance, may be read as unwillingness or inability on the respondent's part to submit to the conventions of a genre outside of his ordinary communicative repertoire.

Foucault himself would later remark on the class divide perpetuated by the judiciary: 'in the courts society as a whole does not judge one of its members, but [...] a social category with an interest in order judges another that is dedicated to disorder'<sup>64</sup>. Citing a striking passage from Rossi's 1829 *Traité de droit pénal*, he then goes on to comment on the resulting linguistic gap commonly found in the courtroom:

The language of the law, which is supposed to be universal, is, in this respect, inadequate; it must, if it is to be effective, be the discourse of one class to another, which has neither the same ideas as it nor even the same words: 'How are we, with our prudish, contemptuous languages, overloaded with formality, to make ourselves understood by those who have never heard anything but the crude, poor, irregular, but lively, frank, picturesque dialect of the market, the tavern and the fair... What language, what method should we use when drawing up laws that will act effectively on the uneducated minds of those less capable of resisting the temptations of crime?' (Rossi, I, 33) Law and justice do not hesitate to proclaim their necessary class dissymmetry.<sup>65</sup>

Foucault thus shows that legislators have long been aware of the social asymmetry between judges and defendants, and of the confusion that can arise from the resulting clash of sociolects in the courtroom. Stubbs notes that 'it is within such institutions that strangers, from different social classes and language backgrounds, are in interaction with each other. There are therefore likely to be misunderstandings in precisely those encounters which lead to important decisions in people's lives.'<sup>66</sup>

The GIP's questionnaire may have been read by prisoners as yet another cross-examination session, to be carried out in the language of the prosecutor rather than that of the accused. It is with mitigated success that the GIP thus attempted to lend the powerless the intellectual clout of its jargon, as the vast majority of prisoners

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<sup>64</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. A. Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 276.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Michael Stubbs, *Text and Corpus Analysis* (Oxford and Mass.: Blackwell, 1996), p. 103.

failed to take part. It is paradoxical that it should have shown some sensitivity in insisting on having the information gathered made public in the prisoners' 'own words', while expecting respondents to understand the GIP's language in the first place. In Briggs's formulation, the GIP can be said to have been guilty of "communicative hegemony" – where communicative hegemony 'refers to researchers' efforts to impose their own communicative strategies on their subjects or consultants regardless of the possibility that these techniques may be incompatible with those persons' own communicative repertoire'.<sup>67</sup>

The questionnaires thus constituted an ambiguous medium in the GIP's investigation, simultaneously granting everyday personal experience the status of positive knowledge, and constraining prisoners' input by a set of questions devised to suit a strategy planned by the GIP, with little (if any) input from prisoners or ex-prisoners themselves.

Theorists of discourse argue that: 'Discourse conventions carry with them prototypical identities: possible selves for real writers, "subject positions" that they inhabit when they participate in this discourse.'<sup>68</sup> Imposing certain discourse conventions on prisoners can therefore be thought to have created specific subject positions for them to take up. Dambrine suggests that the GIP gave inmates access to the status of 'discursive subject'<sup>69</sup>, but what sort of discursive subjectivity were prisoners able to take on?

The majority of commentators take at face value the GIP's claim that, thanks to their movement, prisoners were finally able to speak for themselves. However, in her seminal essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Spivak points up a number of problems with Foucault's descriptions of the role of GIP. First of all, she remarks that Foucault's pronouncement that 'the oppressed can know and speak for themselves [...] reintroduces the constitutive subject' which Foucault's theoretical work has repeatedly called into question.<sup>70</sup> The implication that prisoners are knowing subjects who can express their views without the corrupting mediation of discourse contributes to 'restor[ing] the category of the sovereign subject within the theory that seems most to question it'.<sup>71</sup> Foucault's depiction of prisoners as 'knowing and speaking for themselves' is indeed inconsistent with his suggestion, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972 [1969]), that it is discourses that shape subjects, rather than sovereign subjects consciously and deliberately articulating their own original thoughts.

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<sup>67</sup> Charles L. Briggs, *Learning How to Ask: A Sociolinguistic Appraisal of the Role of the Interview in Social Science Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 90.

<sup>68</sup> Clark and Ivanič, op. cit. p. 140.

<sup>69</sup> Dambrine, op. cit. p. 146.

<sup>70</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 279.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p. 278.

Spivak argues that the GIP's position is also problematic from a political point of view. She notes that, in claiming that they let prisoners speak for themselves, 'the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent'<sup>72</sup>: they deny their own influential role in bringing the movement to the media's attention and shaping its whole strategy. Spivak suggests that the self-denying posturing of the GIP intellectuals could be criticised as 'interested individualistic refusals of the institutional privileges of power bestowed on the subject [as opposed to the oppressed non-subjects]'<sup>73</sup>: in representing themselves as absent, the intellectuals fail to interrogate their own relationship with groups who have less access to the order of discourse, and the institutional responsibility which they can be thought to carry vis-à-vis less privileged sections of society. Thus, Howe concludes, radical political practice 'must attend to its own ruses of power if it is to avoid underwriting a delusionary politics of self-representing subalterns speaking for themselves'<sup>74</sup>. The long unpublished 1975 interview<sup>75</sup> which I have discussed above sees Foucault partly answering these criticisms when he describes his privileged position in the order of discourse as having been instrumental in helping to formulate the prisoners' demands as a discourse in its own right.

Gandal acknowledges that any formulation of discourse on the part of prisoners should, in Foucauldian terms, be understood as a form of subjectivation, and may therefore be at odds with his critique of subjection:

In the case of the prisons, what Foucault was attempting to struggle against were the forms of subjection that constituted the convict as other and that condemned him to brutal treatment in the prison and a marginalization that did not end when he got out. Of course, Foucault's political work around the prisons also involved forms of subjection: it contributed to the creation of new identities for prisoners as they articulated their experiences. But rather than dividing prisoners from the rest of society, these forms of subjection, these practices of speaking and of developing new knowledge about themselves, provided links between prisoners and people on the outside.<sup>76</sup>

Gandal thus notes that the GIP shaped new identities for prisoners by making them voice their experiences. These identities, he contends, are not objectionable in as much as they do not separate prisoners from the rest of the population, but rather enable them to communicate with the outside. The form of subjectivation exercised on prisoners by the GIP can therefore be viewed as positive identity constitution.

Halperin equally argues that the GIP's methods did not involve any questionable constraints on prisoners. He states that Foucault's purpose was

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p. 275.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p. 280.

<sup>74</sup> Adrian Howe, *Punish and Critique: Towards a Feminist Analysis of Penalty* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 211.

<sup>75</sup> *Le Monde* 19-20/09/04.

<sup>76</sup> Gandal, op.cit., p.129.

to authorize those who are normally the objects of expert discourses, who are spoken about while remaining silent themselves, to speak on their own behalf – not so that they might confess to the authorities the truth of their being, of course, but so that they could articulate their own needs, point out the conditions that were particularly odious to them, and advance their own political projects.<sup>77</sup>

Though the aims of the GIP were no doubt different from those of the authorities and repressive institutions which invite and rely on confession, the methods which they used do bear some disturbing resemblances.

Indeed, by requesting personal narratives, the GIP made prisoners voice their experiences of prison in a first-person genre not dissimilar to confession. In addition, the assessment of the impact of prison conditions on detainees partly relied on the objects of its inquiry – the prisoners – constituting themselves as self-monitoring subjects. In order to answer some of the GIP's questions, they had to turn inwards and watch their own thoughts and behaviour so as to isolate those conditions and factors which they found most intolerable, and hence most urgently wished to bring to public attention. It could therefore be argued that the GIP constituted prisoners as self-monitoring subjects through a process similar to that through which the Panopticon shapes its inmates' subjectivity. Answering the questionnaire also placed prisoners in the inferior position of those subjected to question-answer examinations in institutional settings, such as suspects in police interrogations and defendants in court, where this procedure contributes to marking individuals out as criminal subjects.

## CONCLUSION

I have tried to demonstrate that, contrary to the GIP's own claims, which have been uncritically echoed by the vast majority of commentators, the GIP did not simply give prisoners a platform, but inevitably contributed to channelling, moulding and mediating inmates' discourse.

The various public pronouncements of the GIP described prisoners as an oppressed and exploited class who would now rebel against their scapegoat status and lead the struggle against the insidiously repressive power of so-called democratic institutions. The GIP thereby constructed inmates as key political agents in an unprecedented rebellion against newly-identified sites of power.

Prisoners' subjectivity was not only shaped by the GIP by portraying them in this way in its declarations, but also by delineating subject positions for them to adopt within the GIP's investigation by expecting them to formulate certain types of statements (*énoncés*). Foucault suggested in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that *énoncés* define subject positions for those who utter them.<sup>78</sup> By positioning prisoners as

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<sup>77</sup> Halperin, op.cit., p. 55.

<sup>78</sup> Foucault, op.cit., p.107.

respondents to questionnaires designed by sociologists, and as authors of first-person narratives, the GIP made those of the inmates who answered them adopt the position of objects of an interaction closely resembling an interrogation or a psychological examination, where prisoners had little scope for influencing the dynamics of the dialogue and the topics dealt with. Even as they may be argued to have been subverted by their use within a specific political strategy, the historically loaded genres which the GIP thus called on inmates to adopt may still be seen to have delineated specific subjectivities for prisoners. The 'discursive subjects' constructed by the GIP can therefore be argued to have been shaped by constraints comparable with those which Foucault would later argue constitute criminal subjects in modern Western societies.

Though the GIP repeatedly claimed to be letting prisoners speak for themselves, I have shown that the methods it used to collect testimonials, and the way it framed prisoners in its various statements and publications in fact imposed a number of constraints on both the form and contents of prisoners' contributions – constraints which may be argued to have shaped specific subjectivities for prisoners.