Disappointed Utopia

eli rose

An ethnography of radical philosophy in France.
Set in the Paris banlieue, in the decades since 1968.
An abandoned book project.
July 2022

ABOUT THE PROJECT

What is a disappointed utopia?

A place where utopia is part of the culture and everyone is incredulous about it.

A place where people are committed to things they are also incredulous about.

A place where people share the heavy load of idealism among each other, where they let it ricochet back and forth, with a cacophonous division of labor.

A disappointed utopia is a place that grapples with the history of racial violence, colonization, patriarchy, queer struggle, women's inclusion, precarious labor, class hierarchy, and generalized alienation.

This is an unfinished book about one of those places.

About the author

Eli Rose (formerly Thorkelson) is a nonbinary ex-academic. They got an anthropology Ph.D. in 2014 from the always problematic University of Chicago. The first draft of this book was their doctoral dissertation, *Hostile Futures: Radical Philosophy and the French University Movement of 2009*. They left academia in 2019; this would have been their first academic book if they had stayed.

they/she/elle pronouns, please.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Contact

It is very possible that errors of fact or interpretation appear in the manuscript. I would be happy to correct them if you let me know about them.

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A NOTE ON THE PDF FORMAT

This project is mainly intended to be read on the web.

The preferred web version of the text can be found at disappointed-utopia.de-casia.org.

I do not currently have the resources to do careful PDF layout for the project.

The layout of images and their captions, the flow of text across page breaks, the typography — there are many things that could be improved in this format.

But it should all be readable, at least, for the time being.

— October 31, 2022

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PART I: HISTORICAL FAILURES

PREFACE

Utopias are impossible

This book is for the people I love in the world. I don't think I could list them now, but I'm grateful for what they have made possible.

If you feel that the academic world is a pretty decent place, this is not the book for you. This is a book for the alienated. Or at least for people who are in touch with their alienation. For people who find that utopias are desperately needed and yet all but impossible. I do not recommend this book to prospective graduate students.

"Can I not give protection to the dream?
Can I not feel the tenderness and the pain?
Why is the sound so harsh?
It is my laughter.
Forgive! Forgive! I am cruel"
— Bessie Head, "Mr Nobody"

"The whole of European thought developed in places that were increasingly arid and increasingly inaccessible… A permanent dialogue with itself, an increasingly obnoxious narcissism inevitably paved the way for a virtual delirium where intellectual thought turns into agony since the reality of man as a living, working, self-made being is replaced by words, an assemblage of words and the tensions generated by their meanings."
— Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*

"Dialectics has let us down."
— Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind*

In a dire world like this one, utopianism is necessary but utopias often seem impossible. Are all utopias destined for disappointment? And if so, then what? Disappointment is not the end of history. Can there be a utopianism that absorbs disappointment and endures without hope? If your dreams and thoughts take on a life of their own, does that leave you empty? Do we find ourselves broken into different parts?

This is a book about how people can keep in touch with utopianism without having to live there all the time. It explores the ways that people can live through their immense disappointments and losses without collapsing into permanent cynicism or despair. And it argues that this can only be a collective and institu-

tional process. There are no strictly subjective, intellectual, or individual solutions to sustaining utopian hope. Nor can optimism be unmitigated at this point in history. Instead we can find ourselves invested in a fundamentally *disappointed* utopianism: a utopianism attuned to its own failures, its own despair, its own implausibility. The book argues that we can sustain a disappointed utopianism by keeping our utopian desires at a certain *distance* from ourselves, embedding them in our cultures of struggle and in our ambivalent, compromised institutions.

Our historical unconscious is an archive of violence and political failure. It is also a hiding place for utopian desires. Thus, this book is divided into two parts.

Reflexivity by the throat

To be more concrete, this book is an ethnographic study of French radical philosophers in a postcolonial, postrevolutionary world. It is not a history of ideas or of Great Men. I will take for granted a basic familiarity with some of these figures, such as Michel Foucault or Gilles Deleuze, whose work has been widely read in English. We will talk a lot about how the shadows of Great Men can take up space. But the book shows that beyond the books and (mostly) male faces of "French Theory," there were concrete institutions where these theories were produced.[1] This is a book about one of those institutions, the Philosophy Depart-

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[1] In the Paris region, other sites of global theoretical production would notably include the Ecole Normale Supérieure-Ulm, where Louis Althusser and Jacques Derrida taught, and so many philosophers were trained; the Collège de France, where figures like Claude Lévi-Strauss and Michel Foucault spoke from their pedestals; and postwar Parisian institutions such as Paris X-

ment at the University of Paris 8. It is a place that is largely unknown, or else mythicized or vilified. In the Introduction, we will begin to examine the site.

But perhaps you have skeptical questions. What good is an ethnography of French radical philosophers? What could it do but glorify Parisian intellectuals who have long been overly glorified, or ratify philosophy's imperial dreams? Before we start the book, this Preface says a word about where it comes from and why it might matter.

As a critical and not merely descriptive ethnography, this project aims to create concepts adequate to its unconventional object: an object set almost outside the legitimate bounds of "ethnography." It seeks to make its object shake, to uncover its object's concealed roots, and to shake us out of our present impasse. You might then ask: Just what is the impasse that characterizes our present? What are the reflexive *needs* of our moment? Can an ethnographic study actually satisfy any of them?

Even these questions may presuppose too much. What if *we* are in flux ourselves? What if reflexive scrutiny leaves us shaken or even undone? My thought is that my French ethnographic site, itself already historically fractured, can in turn become a mirror for our shattering present. I used to be an ethnographer, back when I started writing this book. Now I'm more like an ex-ethnographer: I left the academy since I started writing this book; I don't do academia anymore. I won't publish the book now in the normal way, because I'm too unsettled, too estranged from the academic identity I used to have.

So this is a book about being shaken, about being unsettled subjects.

Nanterre, the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, or since the 1980s, the Collège International de Philosophie.

I learned about being shaken while I was in France. A few weeks before I went home, one of my interlocutors, a French philosopher, accosted me and shook me gently by the throat. "Hand over your backpack," he said. "You can't go back to Chicago with all our secrets!" He was just teasing, of course. I did go back to Chicago. My backpack stayed in place. He let my throat go. Time resumed, and for a long time I couldn't write about that moment. I was afraid to think about the kind of masculine sociability that uses playful violence to express love, self-consciousness, and anxious recognition. It was as if my throat had become a perversely reflexive organ. As if the throat, and only the throat, could truly be receptive to this man's fears of becoming an object. Or rather: his fears of giving away that which constituted him as a subject: the "secrets" of the site. In cases like this, to be a subject is to be vulnerable, to be ambivalent, to risk losing one's defining *thing*.

To come back to the context in which I'm writing: one of the first things one should say about vulnerability is that is extremely gendered.

Where feminism is not at home

In the second half of 2017, I was overwhelmed by the outpouring of #MeToo harassment stories from academic women around me. I read a lot, wrote a little, and felt shaken and volatile. Worse things had happened to women in my graduate program than I'd known, and more often. Politically "radical" circles were cast in doubt, as numerous famous men of social and critical theory had their abusive masculinism held up for critical examination. On my own, I dug into the histories

of famous male theorists. "No sooner did he encounter a woman than he began to flirt with her," someone had written about Theodor Adorno. Erving Goffman, I learned, had looked back on his life and called himself an "male chauvinist pig," and this only in the face of prolonged feminist criticism. I learned that prominent centers of Marxist theory, such as CUNY and UC Santa Cruz, had been hostile environments for women, and that a famous postcolonial theorist in my graduate school had made "repugnant" advances to students.[2] As discussions continued online, I saw a lot of women having partial moments of public solidarity or unguardedness, while a lot of men stayed silent.

It was not that I had never heard of sexual violence in academia before, never been exposed to feminist critiques of academia, or never grappled with my contradictory place in a patriarchal society. But #MeToo was a synthetic moment for me, as a series of masculinist incidents coalesced into a different sense of the world. It shifted my understanding of my place in the world, above all of the sexism that had been constitutive of my personal network in academia, a sexism which I had been in some cases complicit in. And it changed my sense of social analysis, moving gender issues to the center of my analytical attention. I taught a gender studies class; I wrote a bit of feminist anthropology; I rewrote much of this manuscript; I saw life differently. I had a pretty public gender transition around this time. And I realized that there can be a difference between distantly listening to feminism and actively thinking with it. I have found that for me, it has not only been essential to read feminist critiques of patriarchy, it has also been necessary to learn to be at home in their logic.

Finding a home may involve leaving another. This is a book about a place where feminism is not at home. It is a book about the tethers of what I have come to think of as left-wing patriarchy — a particularly frustrating subspecies of late

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[2] On Adorno, see Müller-Doohm (2005:60). On Goffman, see Deegan (2014:76). On my graduate school, see C. Christine Fair, "#HimToo: A Reckoning," https://www.buzzfeed.com/christinefair/himtoo-a-reckoning.

capitalist patriarchy in general, one which emerges in milieux that ought be able to listen more clearly to feminism. Left patriarchy and its historical echoes have long organized the world of critical theory, and continue to do so.

Men on pedestals

As #MeToo unfolded, I was teaching at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. In my class on global student protests since the 1960s, the students, especially Black activist women, were deeply invested in questions about intersectional politics. During #FeesMustFall, a student protest movement in South Africa that had erupted in 2015, activists had confronted questions about masculinism, class differences, and the political status of women and queer people.[3] At the University of Cape Town, not far from where I was teaching, these issues had emerged in the shadows of a statue of Cecil Rhodes, the British imperialist who had "donated" the land for the campus (although he had no right to the land in the first place). The Rhodes statue was removed after sustained protest — after being showered in feces — but a similar statue at my own campus stayed in place.[4] I felt unwelcome and inadequately masculine every time I walked by the statue of J. H. Marais, an Afrikaner diamond magnate who had endowed the campus and whose statue radiated a brutal masculine physicality. To add the obvious, as a white Northerner hired to teach in an African university, I too was a blatant symbol of academic neocolonialism. I probably should not have been hired at all (as some of my colleagues said); but in any case, once I was there, I wanted to be politically useful.

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[3] For an overview of #FeesMustFall, see Badat (2016) and Mpatlanyane (2018).
[4] The Rhodes statue politics have been analyzed particularly in Nyamnjoh (2015) and Marschall (2017).

I frequently asked myself what I represented to my South African students, and what would be the politics of my teaching.

In the first class I taught, I tried to historicize the categories of intersectional analysis that activist students lived by. We read about the Northern critiques of white male radicalism that had emerged in the wake of the 1960s. We focused at one point on the Combahee River Collective's theory of Black feminist identity politics (1978), and I tried to situate it historically in the context of 1970s political radicalism in Boston. The topic was relevant, I think, but I was not fully prepared to teach it, at least not in that context. One Black woman — who was facing criminal prosecution for her student activism — told me later that it had been painful to step back and intellectualize radical politics, given the violent backlash she faced herself from white supremacist students, law enforcement and reactionary university administrators. Another student observed — rightly — that we should have read African feminists instead of U.S. feminists. Meanwhile, conservative students openly resented my class: three white women walked out of the room when we read Steve Biko, an anti-apartheid student organizer and theorist of Black Consciousness who had been killed by the police in 1977. It was a tense environment. And the longer I worked in Stellenbosch, the more I began to hear haunting, traumatizing stories about how very unwelcome Black, queer and female academics and students were in the historically white, masculinist, Afrikaans-speaking institution.

I'm describing my erstwhile workplace partly so that you can see where I was coming from as I wrote this. I sense that I too am a social product. Like everyone else. In this book you can detect the usual contradictions and failures of the author, a Northern white radical academic working in a globalized academy. But Stellenbosch also was a place that reminded me of two basic methodological points for any ethnography of a university. First: universities exist on a political field. Stellenbosch was historically a university of the political far right, an intellectual home for the architects of apartheid, while the French site of this book, as we are about to see, was a university of the political far left. The Philoso-

phy Department that we will study was one of the most internationalist and multilingual university departments I have seen anywhere. But second: No matter which university you go to, no matter what the dominant politics are, some feel more welcome in others. There is always a field of uneven inclusion that is also a space of symbolic violence. In France, we will see that a far left department was also a place of very uneven social inclusion.

I resigned from teaching in Stellenbosch after a year. But if I learned anything in South Africa, it's that it often ends badly to put anybody on a pedestal, especially if we are otherwise committed to liberatory values. It is not just that we need to be more thoughtful about who we memorialize. We need to be cautious about the very form of hagiography, of building pantheons, of crafting pedestals. That ought to have been what French Theory was famous for — its opposition to pedestals. Instead it became a pedestal of its own. This book takes it off that pedestal and tries to make it serve as a resonance chamber for our utopian imagination.

How I met "French Theory"

The Pantheon in Paris, with its dedication "to great men."

Paris is a city full of statues, and plenty of them are statues of male philosophers. You can find Auguste Comte, Denis Diderot, Blaise Pascal, Nicolas de Condorcet, and Voltaire. The Voltaire statue became the object of antiracist protests in 2020 and was moved out of sight by the local authorities. This gesture changed nothing about the French custom of putting philosophers on pedestals. Nor were the pedestals only for individual Great Men. The very genre of *theory*, itself historically masculine (Lutz 1995), has equally been monumentalized.

Tourists flock to see visit Auguste Rodin's generic philosophy dude, "The Thinker," whose brawny muscles contrast with his pensive, crumpled posture. This book is not the place to recount the long history of theory, which could be traced back to Aristotle's *theoria* (Roochnik 2009). Nor will I belabor the point that "theory" in its contemporary critical sense is something more than the discipline of academic philosophy. (If "theory" at its best — at its queerest, at its most critical — is about opening things up, then in a sense this is antithetical to the spirit of enclosure that animates a discipline.)

What is clear to me, however, is that today, the history of "theory" can only be written in a pluralized, global fashion, one that takes account of theory's Eurocentric and colonial legacies while not collapsing itself into them (Mbembe 2017, Chakrabarty 2000, Gilroy 1993, Said 1978). One way to write a postcolonial history of theory is from the perspective of theoretical centers in the South, starting for instance with the Dar es Salaam School (Campbell 1991) or the anti-apartheid leftism of the University of the Western Cape (Lalu and Murray 2012). Another route, which I have chosen here, is to revisit the Euro-American "centers" themselves, but to look at them askew or off-center.

If we investigate France as a space of intellectual production, we find that it has its own internal centers and peripheries, some of which are less monolithically "French" than one might expect. Many of the books that Anglophones called "French Theory" were themselves the results of colonial encounters. A recent critical literature has explored the North African, and specifically Algerian, roots of contemporary French thought (Ahluwalia 2005, Davis 2011, Go 2013, Toscano 2018). Saint-Denis, where this book is focused, is not quite Paris, is an ambiguous zone both within and outside it. The Philosophy Department at Paris 8 was largely populated by foreign visitors, migrants and exiles. This polyglot site was, nevertheless, often typified as "French," sometimes labeling its general project "Contemporary French Philosophy" (*philosophie française contempo-*

raine). Something like this more essentialized version of French Theory was the one I first encountered as an American college student.

The notion of "French Theory" was largely constructed in America, as François Cusset has pointed out (2008). And I started doing this research project in the first place because I felt unsettled by the way that that theory had once been taught to me. The "theory" that I was taught in college had a big aura. It was a *chic* kind of theory, a French kind of theory, one entwined with hipster and bohemian aesthetics, with "female effacement" (Johnson 2014:27), with things postmodern or poststructuralist, with American whiteness, and with a barely repressed spirit of commodification and elite competition. We read daunting, wild texts by Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Barbara Johnson and Paul de Man — a style of writing that gradually became familiar to me but initially was largely incomprehensible. I liked the rebellious style of much of that work. But it bothered me that ostensibly emancipatory ideas were constantly taught to us in an authoritarian, elitist fashion.

"Theory" was clearly an object of great prestige for adepts, but it remained a structure of confusion and exclusion for outsiders. My pangs of skepticism and reflexivity were generally encouraged by my teachers, although the ambiguity of their stance as insiders was lost on me, and I ended up writing a short ethnographic study of "the silent social order of the theory classroom" (Rose 2008). Afterwards, in spite of my theory professor's quip that my ambivalence might be a good thing inasmuch as it save me from "going straight to graduate school," I went to graduate school, resolved to go to France to investigate the place where French Theory had come from.

This book is the result of that project.

Un mot en français

Je voudrais dire quelques mots en français, pour présenter ce projet aux éventuel·les lectrices ou lecteurs francophones.

(Ceci n'est toujours pas ma langue ; je m'exprimerai dans les limites de mes capacités.)

C'est un livre ethnographique sur le Département de Philosophie de l'Université Paris 8. Ce n'est pas une étude de la rue d'Ulm. Ni du « centre » disciplinaire de la philosophie en France. C'est une étude décentrée, voire excentrique. Je m'intéresserai beaucoup au quotidien, à l'économie, aux rapports de genre, à la banlieue, aux échanges avec le monde postcolonial. Et à ce qui demeure politique, voire utopique, dans ce milieu. En thématisant ce que j'ai appelé « l'utopie déçue » de la philosophie radicale à Saint-Denis, l'étude se fonde aussi sur une ambivalence particulière.

Cette ambivalence n'est pas — n'était pas — uniquement la mienne. Au contraire, elle était largement partagée dans le milieu que j'ai étudié. Est-elle une ambivalence de l'autre qui s'est logée en moi ? En tout cas, l'ambivalence de ce milieu, je la comprends très bien. Comment ne pas être ambivalent·e, en effet, si on vit longtemps dans la précarité économique, dans la marginalité symbolique, sous les ombres politiques d'une radicalité passée, devant un avenir obscur ? Comment ne pas être ambivalent·e dans un bâtiment universitaire qui s'écroule ?

L'ambivalence de ce milieu, donc, je l'assume, je la revendique. Elle n'était pas un obstacle, mais plutôt une condition de possibilité de l'enquête. Une condition préalable de l'empathie. C'est toujours délicat de faire de l'ethnographie. On donne librement son oreille, ses sympathies, à toute une gamme de personnes qu'on ne fréquenterait pas si ce n'était pas là pour la recherche. On peut se solidariser, de

manière provisoire, avec des positions incompatibles, même avec des gens qui se détestent les uns les autres. J'ai entendu de belles histoires et du grand n'importe quoi. J'ai essayé, et j'essaie toujours, de refléter tout ce qu'on m'a donné, les paroles bien évidemment mais aussi les tonalités, les sentiments, les silences. J'ai été frappé par l'ironie, la réflexivité, le cynisme, et malgré tout l'optimisme incarné que j'ai trouvés à Saint-Denis. J'en ai gardé les traces dans le texte.

J'admets que ce livre ne soit plus du tout un livre d'actualité. Il se termine empiriquement au moment de la présidence de Nicolas Sarkozy. Il y a dix ans : c'est déjà ancien. Déjà historique. Je proposerai des lectures de scènes et de situations qui appartiennent à cette période ; mais ce n'est pas une sociologie structurelle, ni une histoire détaillée. J'évoque tout simplement ce dont j'ai besoin pour comprendre un moment, un présent antérieur qui commence déjà à s'évanouir.

Je dois m'excuser auprès de tout·es les habitant·es actuel·les de ce site. Je ne parlerai pas de vous ! Il s'agit de la vie passée de votre institution. Peut-être que les choses ont beaucoup évolué sur le terrain.

Au début, j'espérais croiser ce projet de recherche avec un deuxième : une étude parallèle de la résistance à la néolibéralisation de l'université française publique. En 2009, Valérie Pécresse était la ministre de l'enseignement supérieur. Les nouvelles réformes venaient sans cesse. Les mouvements de protestation aussi. J'ai commencé mes recherches en France en juin 2009, juste à la fin d'un long mouvement de protestation. Un mouvement qui a peut-être ralenti les réformes, mais qui n'a rien arrêté.

Academic Pride Parade, Juin 2009.

C'était pourtant passionnant ; il y avait une belle énergie militante dans la communauté universitaire parisienne. "Même pas mal. Résistons jusqu'au bout," disait la pancarte du président de Sauvons l'Université dans une "Academic Pride Parade." J'ai admiré toutes ces pratiques de la lutte. J'ai même participé un petit peu. Après, j'ai écrit plusieurs articles sur les politiques universitaires françaises. Mais en ce qui concerne ce livre-ci, il était finalement peu commode de raconter l'histoire de réformes universitaires dans un récit sur un département de philosophie. Les deux histoires s'entrelacent, mais elles s'organisent sur des plans différents. Ayant traité ces réformes dans d'autres textes, ici je les laisserai de côté.

A côté des manifs, j'ai essayé de cartographier le petit univers de la philosophie en France. Je l'ai trouvé à la fois très cosmopolite et spacieux, et très étroit, hermétique, voire hexagonal. Ma première semaine en France, j'ai assisté aux oraux de l'agrégation de philosophie. C'était une salle ensoleillée à la Sorbonne. La nervosité était palpable. La vitesse de paroles m'a excédé. J'ai rencontré à l'époque quelques jeunes normaliens en philo. J'y ai trouvé un mélange surdéterminé d'éloquence et d'arrogance. J'étais quasiment leur homologue de l'étranger, car je venais de l'Université de Chicago, connue aussi pour sa culture intellectuelle très élitaire. Culture à laquelle je participais à l'époque, dont je cherchais la sortie. A Saint-Denis, c'était une toute autre culture intellectuelle : plus agréable, plus accueillante, plus ambivalente. Plus modeste, plus hétérogène.

J'étais en France, en somme, de juin 2009 à mai 2011. C'était une période douloureuse et jolie. J'ai découvert toute une langue (parfois de bois), un champ social, une discipline, un espace urbain, une économie universitaire, une histoire de luttes, une vie quotidienne. Au début, j'ai vécu la région parisienne dans une aliénation totale, mais petit à petit, des rapports humains se sont construits. J'habitais la première année non loin du métro Guy Môquet. Je me souviens du petit choc que j'ai éprouvé lorsque j'ai appris qu'un ami vivait dans le même coin que moi. Je n'ai jamais eu un grand réseau parisien, mais j'ai eu des petits moments de bonheur.

Ma vie a changé après l'enquête, après la thèse. Quelle surprise, il n'y aurait aucun poste pour moi au sein du système universitaire américain. J'ai mal vécu la précarité universitaire, et cinq ans après ma soutenance, j'ai quitté le milieu universitaire pour travailler ailleurs. J'ai changé de genre en même moment : j'ai toujours été une personne non-binaire (depuis l'adolescence), mais à partir de juillet 2018 j'ai décidé de l'incarner très publiquement. J'ai plus ou moins renoncé à la masculinité ; j'ai eu toute une « transition » de genre, hormonale autant que sociale et symbolique ; et je me présente désormais en public de manière plutôt féminine. J'écris aussi sous un autre nom, celui de ma compagne. Je sais que tout

cela peut être choquant, surtout pour les hommes français avec qui j'avais construit des amitiés sur la base d'une reconnaissance mutuelle de genre. Mais les temps changent, et nos horizons de reconnaissance aussi. Si le milieu universitaire français pouvait devenir un peu plus trans friendly, ce serait à mes yeux une très bonne chose.

Et la normativité cis-masculine n'est pas le seul reproche que j'adresserai à ce monde philosophique. Si vous lisez le livre qui suit, vous verrez que je suis à la fois très critique et très optimiste par rapport à mon objet. Comme je l'explique, c'est une institution problématique à bien des égards. Mais en même temps, j'ai été émue par l'utopisme déçu que j'ai découvert dans ce monde. C'était une découverte qui m'a déplacée de moi-même, qui m'a faite sortir du pessimisme, qui m'a rappelée que la vie est toujours une forme en mouvement. L'utopisme déçu, c'est une forme ambivalente de vie collective qui donne de la résilience à nos ambitions utopiques. Par la suite, je me suis beaucoup éloignée du milieu que j'ai étudié — éloignée aussi de la langue française, de la théorie critique, de la personne que j'étais. Tout de même, une partie de cette culture utopique persiste en moi. Elle me suit ailleurs, et je peux l'affirmer sans trop d'entraves.

Vous voyez, c'est aussi un projet transférentiel, au sens psychanalytique. Et je n'en ai même pas honte. Au contraire, je reste presque fière de ce que j'ai essayé de faire dans ce texte.

INTRODUCTION: UTOPIA IN A SHAT-TERED WORLD

Radical philosophy in Saint-Denis

Just north of Paris, near where the river Seine shifts from tourist attraction to concrete tunnel of industrial abandonment, sits the dense, polycultural city of Saint-Denis. It is a city gridded and hemmed by major highways, railway main-lines, disused canals, and further suburbs like Stains and Villetaneuse. If you were to follow Rue Gabriel Péri through the city's historic downtown, you might pick up on the interspersed traces of the old white working class, the postwar "immigrant" populations with ties to North and West Africa, and the current waves of gentrifying bohemians. The city center is a study in social juxtapositions: coin laundromats and kebab shops, traditional brasseries and Arabic-language book-stores, hair salons and real estate brokers, Amstel bars and Taxiphone stores where you can call abroad for cheap. Near the river is the Place of the Victims of October 17, 1961, a plaza dedicated in 2007 to the memory of the Algerians who perished that day at the hands of the racist French police, their only crime that of protesting restrictions on their own civil liberties.[1] One day in the grocery store down the block from there, the shelves disheveled and half-empty, I watched a

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[1] For English-language coverage, see "How to Forget a Massacre," https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/how-to-forget-a-massacre-what-happened-in-paris-on-october-17-1961/.

cashier crack up laughing as a band of loud youngsters, considered troublemakers, got shoved out the door. They banged angrily on the metal shutter brought down in their faces. At the central square, the City Hall—long run by the French Communist Party—mediates spatially and symbolically between a medieval abbey and a largely African market. Municipal billboards announce "the city of tomorrow," though to me the city always felt entrenched in a hectic present. In the national imagination, Saint-Denis belongs to the bad side of the Parisian *banlieue*, the outskirts. It was situated in the notorious northern "Department 93," which has become a target for reactionary anxieties about race, crime, Islam, and the working class.

Downtown Saint-Denis.

If you kept going north past the City Hall, through a brutalist cement shopping plaza and across the tramway, you would come to the intersection of Rue de la Liberté and Avenue de Stalingrad. There, alongside a highway bridge under Avenue Lénine, you would find a famously left-wing university, the University of Paris 8 (Vincennes–Saint-Denis). If you discovered the one unlocked gate and weren't hassled by the security guards, you might eventually find your way down a worn maze of corridors to the university's storied Department of Philosophy. Looking out from the windows of the department's main classroom, listening to the largely French, white, male professors, you would see a sky blocked by wire bars that kept out trespassers. It is a mystery why anyone would have wanted to break into this drab room, unpoetically named *A028*. For many years, on the wall across from the window, a disturbing piece of protest art depicted the Philosophy Department "getting smashed" in some sort of drug trip/explosion induced by the state apparatus. Outside in the hall, a bedraggled poster read "Apathy's over, long live communism!"

The front entrance of the University of Paris 8 (Vincennes–Saint-Denis).

Yes, the Department was a storied place: it was subtitled the "Department of Foucault, Deleuze and Lyotard" in marvelous Great-Man fashion. The university had been created in 1968 in the wake of the epic protest movement of that May-June, and decades later, it remained a crossroads of left intellectuals. The halls were dirty and the department was often in logistical disarray. But newer theory stars like Achille Mbembe, Judith Butler, and Giorgio Agamben were frequently invited to speak, and classes brimmed with esoteric knowledge about 19th century socialists, theories of "the symptom" or "the revolutionary hero," philosophies of cinema or of labor. (Gender or race theory not so much, while I was there.) It was

an academic department that was in many respects the negation of an academic department, a place where the border between "normal science" and utopian rupture was repeatedly erased and redrawn. And it encouraged reflexivity — up to a point. On one of the first days of my fieldwork, I approached a senior professor, Stéphane Douailler, and asked if I could do ethnographic research about the department. He examined me briefly through his spectacles, and then said wryly, "You can take us as your object."

Douailler's department was a hospitable place for me, as it had been for many other foreigners and political radicals. I admired its tolerance for intellectual exploration, utopian gestures, and overt political conflict. These are rare things in a university environment. Yet for all that, the department was never altogether comfortable either. Work was precarious, relationships could become strained, and much was left unsaid. I was left ambivalent, and my interlocutors were largely ambivalent too.

Perhaps it is disquieting for an ethnographer to be told, "You can take us as your object." For even the utterance already reveals a certain force of subjectivity. Who in the end was the object, and who the subject? Sometimes I loved this site, finding a part of myself in it, but then, contradictions have long been my love language. The questions linger. If this institution was organized by structural forces of inequality, then how can a structurally unequal institution be the anchor point for something utopian? What does it mean to have a xenophilic philosophy department that welcomes the foreign Other, but has bars on its windows?

In the Introduction, I want to provide some conceptual grounds for thinking through these questions, an outline which the book will elaborate in more detail.

Utopia and disappointment

Just what, to begin with, is a utopia? I think we have to start by figuring out how to ask this question in a historical and materialist way. Let us assume that utopias do exist, in some fashion, and then ask how, under what conditions? Traditionally, a utopia was a literary image of a radically perfected society. But even for sympathetic critics, the most basic problem is: how does one ever get there from here? Utopia seems decidedly infeasible when we contemplate the thorny, circular problem, raised by one disappointed-utopian critic in 1845, that "it is essential to educate the educator himself."[2] But who does that?

[2] Marx (1978 [1845]:144).

The view through the barred windows of a philosophy classroom (March 2010).

More recent critics have pointed out the "unusable" quality of much utopian literature, noting its fixation with the future, its corresponding detachment from past and present, and its historical Eurocentrism and coloniality (Gordon 2004, Namakkal 2012). Pragmatically speaking, it would be hard to deny that many twentieth century utopian experiments, ranging from socialist states to small communes, produced deeply mixed results. (I say this having participated in such institutions.) The communes, for instance, so often ended up producing exclusive in-groups or collapsing under the weight of hostile social contexts.[3] And even in the abstract, there is something unnerving about the omnipotence fantasies that undergird the fabrication of conventional Utopias. Plato's *Republic* portrays a closed world governed by maximally optimized subjects. What kind of omnipotent sovereign would it take to even create such a society?

The first lesson, no doubt, is that utopias are constrained by the limited imaginations of the people imagining them.

But if Plato's philosopher-kings were a ruling class, the philosophers I met in France were only a marginal petty bourgeoisie. The "utopians" I saw were public sector workers in an embattled public sector, fighting to keep their jobs in the face of neoliberalization. And the Platonic intellectual project that Lauren Berlant called "utopian ahistoricism" (2008:856) is now basically implausible, even for philosophers. In our current moment of ecocrisis, Donna Haraway has rightly insisted that any utopian project must now also remediate its own ecosystem. Yet even Haraway despairs, in spite of her utopian longings. "There are so many losses already, and there will be many more. Renewed generative flourishing cannot grow

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[3] For left critiques of Eastern Bloc socialism, see e.g. Konrád and Szelenyi (1979). Smaller utopian projects, such as the Israeli kibbutzim, not only became key nodes in the production of an increasingly violent settler nationalism but also gradually broke down institutionally. Meanwhile the American counterculture, with its hippie communes, turned out to be quite compatible with the ideological needs of Californian digital capitalism (Barbrook and Cameron 1996).

from myths of immortality or failure to become-with the dead and the extinct"
(2015:160–1).

To put it too succinctly: there is no utopianism now without ambivalence and
repair. But this does not mean we need to reject utopian projects outright. Rather,
it implies that we should work harder to fold ambivalence and historical reflexivity
into our theory of utopian practices. One route to such a theory is through
ethnographic analysis: we can try to make sense of various actually existing
utopias. This brings us back to Paris 8's Philosophy Department, a compromised
site where utopian impulses somehow persisted. Can there be a utopian public-
sector institution? Was this an instance of one? How might a utopian institution
work?

Let's say call a "utopian institution" any social institution that systematically
fosters utopian practices and gambits, even though its relationship to these
gambits is inevitably fraught.[4] A utopian gambit is a radical proposal for social
reality to be otherwise, one which persists even though it will probably never come
true, or perhaps even because it will probably never come true. Here's a retired
anarchist, René Schérer, from my research site in France: "I define utopia as being
of the order of the non-realizable, but this doesn't prevent theorizing it or wanting
to bring it into being."[5]

What makes utopia utopian is not its *object,* but its *form of desire*. A utopia
need not fixate on creating a Platonic, ideal society. Sometimes the most utopian
demand can focus on the most mundane things (Gordon 2004). "Housework? Oh
my god how trivial can you get?" exclaims a sexist husband at the end of Pat
Mainardi's feminist analysis of domestic labor (1970). During my research in

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[4] I say *gambits* because I do not quite want to say *projects*. If projects are about solidifying our
relation to the future, providing us with structures that render a future realizable, then gambits are
about destabilizing the future, making gaps in the normative arrow of time (Rose 2016b).

[5] "L'utopie est un mode de vivre," *l'Humanité*, September 28, 2007. https://www.humanite.fr/
rene-scherer-lutopie-est-un-mode-de-vivre-378533.

Saint-Denis, I saw all kinds of small utopian desires: desires for different relations to their teachers, to preserve their communities, to shift people's ways of thinking. What made these desires utopian was the sheer intensity and *unrealism* of the desire or demand.[6] Utopians have a radical, implausible desire to negate *something* in the world.

But what happens then? Coming back to disappointment, what happens when a utopian desire gets *worn out*? Even the most minor utopian gambits were usually unsuccessful. Either they were unrealized, abandoned, forgotten, defeated; or their very success was turned against them by the logic of the academic institution in which they were embedded. As Kathi Weeks puts it, "by instantiating it in a form, utopian hope is at once brought to life and diminished" (2011:224). And yet in my research site, I found that utopianism persisted beyond any of its failures. It persisted *by* being diminished. I came to see this constantly endurance-through-failure as a disappointed utopianism.

Disappointed utopianism is a notion which aims to capture what is structural about an ambivalent relationship to utopian projects, when the past is unresolved and the future is hostile. In the place I did research, utopian gambits seldom maintained a comfortable existence. Their protagonists were often disappointed by the impossibility of realizing their own programs. This disappointment was structural: it is structurally disappointing to face an institutional dynamic which both encouraged utopianism and thwarted it. Radical, utopian aspirations were very often dramatically in excess of what a university institution could tolerate. But at the same time, local utopian gambits often ended up *serving* the university institution wonderfully, in an outcome woefully similar to the institutional trajectory of feminist studies in North America (Messer-Davidow 2002).

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[6] Like the optimism in Berlant's "cruel optimism," utopianism is a form of attachment and not a particular "content" (Berlant 2006:21). Weeks, citing Fredric Jameson, notes that "a utopia offers not so much the content of a political alternative as an incitement of political will" (Weeks 2011:207).

In putting disappointment at the center of our image of utopian endurance, I hope to make a broader provocation to left utopian thinking. As someone who came of age during the years of Clintonite neoliberal reaction, I find it easy to relate to the notion of "left melancholy" that has emerged in critical theory over the past generation. Wendy Brown glossed left melancholy as "Benjamin's unambivalent epithet for the revolutionary hack who is, finally, attached more to a particular political analysis or ideal—even to the failure of that ideal—than to seizing possibilities for radical change in the present" (1999:20). Melancholia (as Freud noted) leaves us in a blocked, depressed state, a state of failed mourning where we are unable to move on from our lost, idealized objects of investment. Writing in the late 1990s, Brown suggested that the left, collapsing into a defense of welfare state institutions, had been "become more attached to its impossibility than to its potential fruitfulness" (1999:26).

But in Saint-Denis, impossibility had its own fruitfulness. My argument here converges with more optimistic theoretical engagements with radical failure.[7] Enzo Traverso, for instance, has argued that the left has been organized around "a constellation of defeats that nourished it" (2016:22), and that melancholy has become "the necessary premise for… preparing a new beginning" (23). Such a reparative reading of left history also rejoins work on postcolonial futurity, for instance by Gary Wilder (2015) and David Scott (2004). Wilder excavates the work of Aimé Césaire and Leopold Senghor in order to explore "futures that were once imagined but never came to be… whose unrealized emancipatory potential may now be recognized and reawakened as durable and vital legacies" (2015:16). Scott, meanwhile, has a stronger sense of the discontinuities that separate us from our past futures; he observes that the political present of a critical project is always oriented towards future that may "suddenly evaporat[e] as a possible horizon of hope and longing" (2004:41).

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[7] One could also cite Halberstam: it's about making "peace with the possibility that alternatives dwell in the murky waters of a counterintuitive, often impossibly dark and negative realm of critique and refusal" (2011:2). We will come back to Halberstam in the conclusion.

These ventures in postcolonial archaeology offer models for this book's ethnography of radical philosophy in Saint-Denis, a site which, as Wilder might put it, still retains overlooked "emancipatory potential." At least, as we will see, the site may make us wonder if emancipation is still worth thinking about. But the temporal structure of my case diverges from the one envisioned by Wilder. My case has a lost future: the 1960s internationalist fantasy of "the revolution," which furnished a political horizon to French radicals, and has since been lost. But I really don't want to revive the "emancipatory potential" of 1960s French radicalism. Its politics were always fatally compromised. What I want to argue instead is that the very loss of 1960s radicalism was unexpectedly *productive* for utopian culture in Saint-Denis.

For Scott, the "evaporation" of a "possible horizon of hope and longing" could create a radical discontinuity in our politics, marking the incommensurability of past and present. But in my case, I found that the "evaporation" of a future can still leave behind a collective residue. While 1960s revolutionary doctrines had largely vanished from my research site, many people maintained a more nebulous radicalism outside themselves, a utopianism that was not premised on hope or subjective commitment. Rather, their utopianism became a collective ideal, a socialized yet furtive investment. My thought is that by keeping idealism, utopianism and political radicalism *collectively* available, these subjects were able to acknowledge their own ambivalence and banality without entirely surrendering to political defeat.

In these terms, the argument remains too abstract. The book tries to make you see how this could work in practice.

Let us begin that work here, by seeing how the concept of *emancipation* still circulated among radical philosophers in Saint-Denis, and then by linking this to the history of struggle in the Paris banlieue.

Emancipation and fire

Early on in France, my ears pricked up when I saw some senior philosophy professors at Paris 8 pledge allegiance, in the midst of their gritty urban campus, to a now-outmoded, half-forgotten, naively-radical project: *emancipation*. In the Department, the notion of emancipation was closely associated with 19th century radical thought, and it had figured prominently in left philosopher Jacques Rancière's book about radical pedagogy, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. I met several aging professors who did research on the concept of emancipation. My ears pricked up when I heard about it, because the idea of *universal human emancipation* does not really scan in our historical moment, which continues to be dominated by the perma-nausea of systemic crisis. As the "slow death" of Third Way neoliberalism gets increasingly subsumed by ecocrisis and racist nationalism, if not outright neofascist violence, it remains difficult to maintain even "compromised egalitarian" projects like social democracy and social welfare. More uncompromising radical projects often seem even less available. And yet—

A few years before I arrived in France, these urban spaces had transformed into perhaps the most iconic banlieue scene: flames rising in the night. The fires, shown widely on national television, clawed bare the metal bones of the cars, and hollowed out the empty streetscapes, and outburned the efforts of the firefighters. Nervous smoke rushed and swirled, turned amber and drained away into the sky. It was early November 2005, in a moment of Black and Brown urban uprising that was widely called "the riots," though some on the left called it a "popular revolt." It began in the Paris banlieue in Clichy-sous-Bois, a few kilometers east of Saint-Denis, and soon expanded widely across the country, lasting three weeks, leaving thousands of cars burned and hundreds injured. Helicopters and search-

lights obsessively criscrossed the public housing projects, which the media cast as symbols of the immiserated masses and margins. The protests had erupted after two young men, Bouna Traoré and Zyed Benna, were electrocuted. Benna and Traoré, accompanied by their friend Muhittin Altun, were walking home from a pickup soccer game when the police came to investigate them. They had committed no crime, and they hid from the police in an electrical substation, whose equipment carried lethal voltages. As their deaths prompted national revolts by young men and their families, a national emergency was declared. The police response was managed by Nicholas Sarkozy, then a young conservative Minister of the Interior, not yet President. It was Ramadan. Tensions rose when the police tear-gassed a mosque at prayer time. A few days later, in Courneuve, a TV crew filmed the police beating a young man they had thrown to the ground.

Those two incidents were officially disowned, but they fit neatly with Sarkozy's authoritarian, deeply racist stance towards the banlieue's working classes. Mere days before the revolts, Sarkozy had visited a housing project in Argenteuil, a few kilometers west of Paris 8. When the residents greeted him with insults and hurled cans, he declared angrily to the watching media, "You've had enough of this scum [*racaille*]; we'll get rid of them for you."[8] He had previously spoken of "cleaning" and "sandblasting" the banlieues, which one Anglophone commentator described as "as close as one can get to hollering 'ethnic cleansing' without actually saying so."[9] Conservatives read the 2005 riots much as they had read the protests in 1968: as a disastrous breakdown in "public order."

Even mainstream intellectuals rarely saw the revolts as a "legitimate" protest movement. After all, the revolts did not look like the normative image of a French protest — that is, a street march of white citizens along a Parisian boulevard

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[8] "Nicolas Sarkozy a-t-il vraiment utilisé le mot kärcher?", *Libération*, 21 March 2018, https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/2018/03/21/nicolas-sarkozy-a-t-il-vraiment-utilise-le-mot-karcher_1653412.

[9] "Inflammatory language," The Guardian, 8 November 2005, https://www.theguardian.com/news/blog/2005/nov/08/inflammatoryla.

(Pigenet and Tarkowsky 2003). Instead the revolts drew on more primal revolutionary symbols like battles with the police and fires. The more sympathetic white mainstream commentators read them as a mass reaction to the sociology of urban abandonment, whose high unemployment rates, bad schools, unmaintained public housing, social exclusion and poverty were widely cited. One of the philosophy professors at Paris 8, the heterodox radical Eric Lecerf, was moved to respond to the debates. Lecerf was someone I later became close to; I admired his lifelong commitment to political organizing. He wrote that in the debates about rioting, "there is a word that has remained singularly absent: that of emancipation" (2007:122).

For Lecerf, emancipation was not initially a political ideology or label or narrative; it was an immediate, affective experience. "The first task for anyone who cares about giving some meaning to the concept of emancipation does not consist in giving lessons to the rioters… but in trying to experience it firsthand, an exercise which does not go without saying, inasmuch as this shift to experience implies that one must partly renounce one's own articles of faith [*champs de certitude*]" (132).

A certain cynicism about emancipation had nevertheless taken root in the French left, Lecerf argued. He became preoccupied with the French left's cynical detachment from its putative values. "How indeed is it possible that a generation that forged itself in this labor of critique, fueled by the often scrupulous reading of Gilles Deleuze or Jacques Derrida's texts, does not feel engaged by the riots of this autumn? In any case, not sufficiently engaged to insert this movement in a larger process oriented towards the horizon of conceptualizing new forms of emancipation?" (129-30). The left's scrupulous veneration of radical icons was not, as Lecerf pointed out, any guarantee of good politics. In French public discourse, Lecerf lamented, emancipation had become nothing but "a rhetorical figure" (122). He hoped to reframe the riots as an unfolding moment of emancipatory *action*, an "authentic sign of life" (134), but he was obliged to characterize emancipation's

very absence from French public discourse as a symptom of a "strange, but sweet melancholy" that pervaded his historical moment (123).

Lecerf wound up ambivalent about emancipation: his stance became at once affirmative and critical, at once future-oriented and mournful, at once disappointed and utopian. He wrote that the very "absence of any reference to the idea of emancipation unveils the limits of a historical subject" (123). This was also a rather masculine subject: the political subject of a street revolt is most often a male subject. What does it mean that masculinity lay at the heart of this philosophical image of emancipatory action?

The problem of left patriarchy

The University of Paris 8 had long been marked by feminist politics. But it was also a home for what can only be called *left patriarchy*, whose malign effects had created the very need for feminist intervention. "Who does the cooking while they talk about revolution? Who watches the children while they go to political meetings?… Who takes notes while they have the microphone?… Who always sees their initiatives getting swiped…? It's us, it's always us." Thus read the inaugural leaflet of the French Women's Liberation Movement, whose first public action took place on the Paris 8 campus in May 1970. In these early years, the institution was not yet called Paris 8, but rather the Experimental University Center at Vincennes. The newly built campus was situated within the Bois de Vincennes park east of Paris, and the institution was often called "Vincennes" for short.
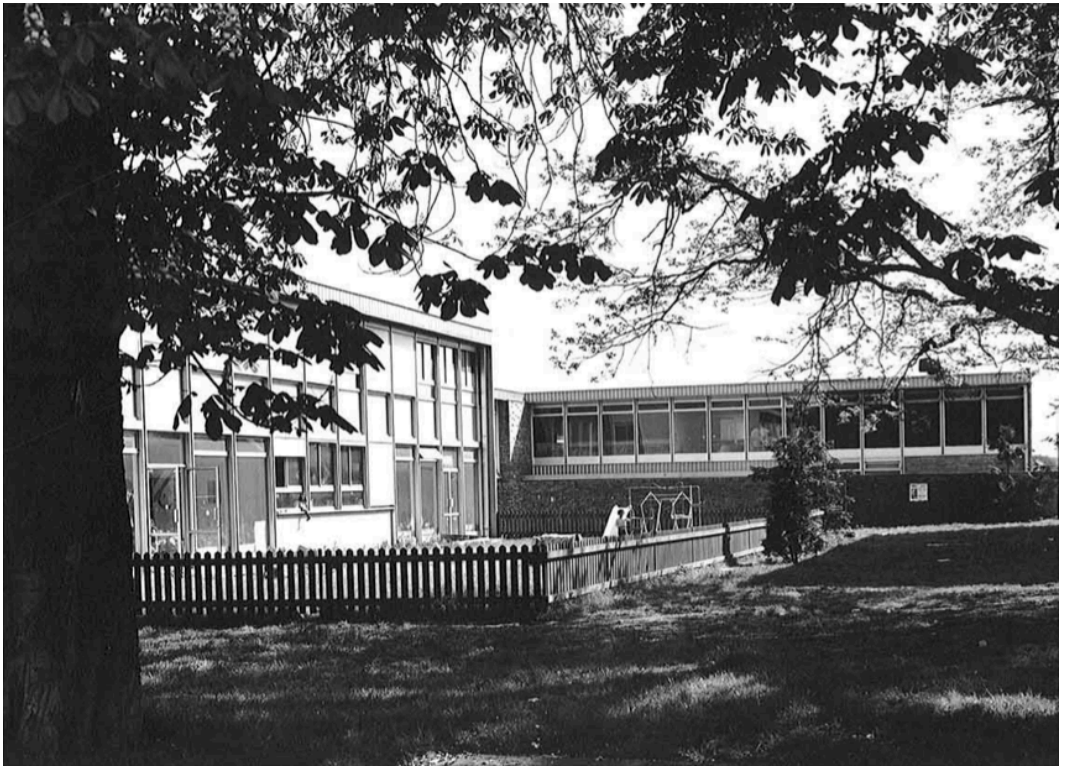
The groundbreaking campus daycare at the University of Vincennes, about 1970.[10]

    This feminist protest at Vincennes was a major break from the male-dominated far-left politics that had emerged in the aftermath of May 1968. There were feminist riffs on the surreal slogans that were common in those days: "We are all sex-starved [*des mal-baisées*]," "We are all prostitutes," and "We are all hysterics." The male reactions to feminism were aggressive in the extreme. Monique Wittig, who co-organized the protest, recalled that there were "500 men around the campus basin yelling *take it off, take it off* [*à poil, à poil*]" (Thibaud and Wittig

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[10] Photograph by Bernard Trayaud, service photographique de Paris VIII, reproduced in Soulié 2012. For a history of the crèche, see Guimier 2019.

2008:73). Some leftist men also reworked a Mao Tse Tung line, declaring that "Power comes from the end of the phallus." This was promptly turned into a feminist parody slogan — one that points to a larger theory of patriarchy.

One cannot make sense of French radical philosophy without a theory of patriarchy, which, etymologically, is the "rule of the fathers." Patriarchy of course should not be seen too monolithically; it has long been a contested concept within feminist theory. Clearly at this point, it has to be thought intersectionally and historically.[11] Yet patriarchy remains an analytically powerful term because there is an obvious systematicity to systems of male power and exploitation, even if this is a historically moving formation or, as Sylvia Walby has put it, an "open social system" (1990:19). Given the relations between patriarchal domination and other modes of power, violence and classification, a general theory of contemporary patriarchy would have to become a theory of the world at large, seen from many angles across uneven geographies. As Marxist feminists have long insisted, the relations of production and the relations of reproduction have to be read in concert. That analytical problem will come up again in Part II of this book. Here, I simply wish to emphasize the historical point: that second wave feminism emerged in this site precisely when left-wing masculine domination seemed so very total.

Patriarchy is the name, as Sara Ahmed emphasizes, of a problem: the problem of what one is "asked to endure" (2017:201). In the context of French radical philosophy, patriarchy assumes a particular form that we can call, with Tania Toffanin (2017), *left-wing patriarchy* (or *left patriarchy* for short). Left patriarchy involves a specific contradiction: the contradiction that patriarchal power and masculine violence endure in academic spaces nominally dedicated to liberation and radical social critique. At the Philosophy Department, this contradiction was all too durable.

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[11] See for example Campbell 2015, Patil 2013, hooks 200, Walby 1990, Coward 1983.

Feminists at Vincennes endured a great deal. After their first action in May 1970, the assembled men were invited to follow the women organizers into a lecture hall for a discussion. The plan was to explain the protest and then ask them to leave, stating that women would only be able to meet among themselves. But as Wittig recalled, the anti-feminist hostilities swelled into a "howling sea," including male leftists and "many hostile women" as well. In the end, the crowd was only calmed by an analogy from Black radicalism.

> After a moment, there was a Black man who stood up and said: "It's pointless to have all these hysterical, disordered, violent reactions… Personally, I get exactly what they're saying: it's just like when the Blacks removed the Whites from American political groups, they couldn't work with the Whites any more. These women [*elles*] have problems to solve together, they can't solve them with men; they need to meet among themselves, and as a man, I'm going to leave the room." But no one left. So he sat down. And then there were reactions in the room… like when hysterics are completely touched by the spirit and throw themselves like slaves [*sic*] at your feet and lose it [*deviennent fana*]. And at another psychological moment, the Black man stood up again, he made the same speech as before, and at that moment, all the men followed him out.

> [Thibaut and Wittig 2008:73]

This sounds like a striking moment of what we might now call intersectional solidarity, as feminist organizing was defended by a Black man in the face of overwhelming attacks from white radicals. The crowd "hysteria" that followed is very hard for me to make sense of, and I feel disturbed by the way Wittig chose to describe it. The archives show, however, that subsequent feminist organizing continued to be met with extreme masculine hostility. A few weeks later, when

feminists again announced that their meeting was for women only, men responded with a torrent of threats and insults. "There's no woman problem." "You're little girls with complexes and that's all you are." "If we don't support you, your movement is bound to fail." "They're sex-starved, we'll give them a good lay [*c'est des mal baisées, on va bien les baiser*]" (Anonymous 1970).

This sort of post-60s patriarchal sexism was also deeply apparent in the early years of the university's Philosophy Department. Judith Miller, the Department's best known woman philosopher in its early days, was famously outspoken in her Maoist radicalism. In 1970, she told a newspaper that she desired to destroy the state apparatus, and the university along with it, intimating that in some cases she gave course credit to students who had submitted no work. The national Minister of Education promptly intervened to dismiss her from her university appointment. What is striking, however, is that Miller's views and teaching practices were widespread among her radical male colleagues, and yet she was particularly singled out for sanction. Her dismissal was protested on campus, but to no avail, and to some of her female colleagues, she became an early symbol of women's exclusion. Meanwhile, a former precarious instructor in philosophy recalled that in these early days, "Women were reduced to the state of 'trophies.' The men didn't think we could think anything."[12]

If philosophy is a space of thought, it remains the case that not every social subject is granted equal legitimacy in that space. In the male intellectual culture of the early 1970s, the very distinction between a thinking subject and an unthinking object was already gendered. It seems that at Vincennes, women were all too easily defined by their putative lack of thought: all too easily sexualized, not intellectualized. Meanwhile the men retained the power to judge, classify and define the Other — the power, in short, to remain philosophy's default subjects. This precarious instructor in fact was an early doctoral student of Gilles Deleuze ("the philosopher who did the most to make this mockery of a department renowned," I

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[12] Charles Soulié, unpublished interview with former precarious instructor, December 2014.

was told). For two years, Deleuze consistently told this female student that her work was unremarkable. "Deleuze was not attentive to women," she explained. "He already had a wife [*une femme*], even though he loved when women were like little girls."

I think that we can no longer understand critical theory without asking: What does it mean to have a Great French Thinker who was, equally, a man who "loved when women were like little girls"? Without asking: What sort of intellectual radicality could conceivably be represented by someone whose bodily practices worked — at least sometimes — to sexualize and infantilize women students and colleagues? What sort of utopia can emerge from masculinist spaces?

And that is not the only critical question that needs asking.

The problem of a banlieue university

The University of Paris 8, wrote one philosopher, was a "banlieue university" (Brossat 2003). The *banlieue university*, in such a context, is a paradoxical social form, a dominated branch of a dominant institution, a marginalized site in a major city. Banlieue universities often displayed a love-hate relationship to the banlieue: they embraced and rejected their own surroundings.[13] On one hand, Paris 8 had began to take on the banlieue's social and aesthetic characteristics, and it integrated with it socially, drawing from the banlieue both its students and its workforce.

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[13] While elsewhere in the book I work primarily with a more affective sense of ambivalence, here I have in mind a more structural or institutional form of ambivalence, in the sense that institutions can *collectively* manifest contradictory relationships towards particular subjects, objects or spaces.

(The Paris region is quite large, and only one in four students actually lived in the stigmatized "Department 93," which encompassed Saint-Denis and its immediate surroundings).[14] Yet Paris 8 also resisted the banlieue in institutional terms, seeking to remain a space apart, a guarded space, a securitized space. The first time I ever visited the campus, I was struck by two things: the omnipresent graffiti, and the equal and opposite proliferation of walls, bars and surveillance systems. I would read this graffiti as the becoming-banlieue of the campus, and the security apparatus as the effort to keep the banlieue at bay.

The very notion of a banlieue, it must be said, has become integral to French processes of violent racialization.[15] The operative regime of racial recognition in France is enforced by the state apparatus and its categories of official visibility. The French Republic is officially "color-blind," so ethnoracial statistics are not collected by state agencies (Simon 2008). This statistical blindness does nothing to prevent institutional or ideological racism among the population, nor to prevent the French police from practicing racialized street harassment (Silverstein 2004). In public discourse, meanwhile, a series of proxy categories became stand-ins for

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[14] Méhat and Soulié (2011:16n31) cite data from the Observatoire de la Vie Etudiante, which indicated that in 2010, 24.1% of students lived in Department 93 (Seine-Saint-Denis).

[15] I must say that it remains fraught to write about race in France. Achille Mbembe has argued that France is distinguished mainly by its national will to ignorance about its own racial projects (2017:62-77). One common French argument runs that, since race is not a scientifically valid category, it does not exist. Perhaps *racism* exists, some would concede, but not race. As scholars like Etienne Balibar have pointed out, the "theory" beneath racialization has shifted over time. Today in France, "race" has largely deprived of its former ideological grounding in racial science, and Balibar correctly notes that "the idea of 'race' is getting recomposed, for instance by becoming invisible" (2013). But I do not find it helpful to borrow his expression "racism without races," since it makes it harder to make sense of the fact that French subjects constantly recognize and get recognized in racial terms, and one has to make sense of racial location and racial structure, not just racial prejudice and racial violence, to understand the continuing racialization of France. The problem is that racism, whether construed as a prejudice, a practice (e.g. pervasive police harassment) or structural violence (poverty), obviously presupposes some underlying racial logic of identity and classification. Such logics clearly do not need to be "grounded in science" to exist; they need only be embedded in institutions and collective dispositions.

racial markedness: whether one is an "immigrant"; if so, of African or Arab "origins"; whether one is a Muslim; whether one lives in the "banlieue"; if so, the "scary" part of the *banlieue*; whether one lives in public housing (*cités HLM*)...

All of these are so many bad metonyms for a system of entrenched racial recognition that singles out Black and Brown people for labor exploitation and structural violence. Dominant French ideological systems work to reproduce an internally demonized Other, albeit strictly on condition of plausible deniability.[16] Inadmissible racial prejudice and anxiety was made respectable by projecting it onto a fear of the *banlieue*, which thus became a national object of racial misrecognition. What then is a *banlieue*? Like its closest English-language analogue *ghetto*, the banlieue designates a space of urban poverty that has acquired a massive symbolic force, above all in dominant white culture. In France, the urban centers have often been preserved as bourgeois enclaves, while spaces of social exclusion are pushed physically to the urban margins (Wacquant 2008). The term is literally translated as *suburbs*, and there are plenty of affluent white banlieue cities, but given the term's pejorative assocations, I have often wanted to translate it as *outskirts*. In dominant French culture, the *banlieue* can readily come to signify abjection, desolation, violence, poverty, marginality, religious alterity (Islam), national alterity (foreigners, immigrants), racial alterity (Blackness, Arabness), criminality, terrorism, danger and death. This structure of violence was perfectly apparent to banlieue inhabitants. "France has become a nightmare, Islamophobia and racism are always surging up," declared Adel Benna in 2015, ten years after the death of his brother in Clichy-sous-Bois.[17] The police who had chased his brother were acquitted of all crimes. He left the country permanently.

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[16] This system has responded to genuine shifts in political priorities; as Emile Chabal points out, the 1980s Socialist government was more open to a multicultural "right to difference," while subsequent "neo-Republicans" prioritized integration into putatively secular French society (2014:238).

[17] "Émeutes de 2005 : "La France est devenue un cauchemar", estime le frère de Zyed," RTL, October 10, 2015, https://www.rtl.fr/actu/debats-societe/emeutes-de-2005-la-france-est-devenue-un-cauchemar-estime-le-frere-de-zyed-7780252973.

This, then, was the banlieue: the symbolic opposite of the bourgeois centers of cities such as Paris. While the public university in France was historically a bourgeois institution, its social location has been downgraded as it was increasingly opened to the masses since the Second World War.[18] Whence the ambiguity of the University of Paris 8, a banlieue university full of subaltern graffiti and patrolled by security guards. Via the security apparatus, the banlieue was collectively constituted as the *outside* of the Paris 8 campus, and not as a zone continuous with university space. Whether the banlieue was coming "in" or being kept "out," it was made to signify a *beyond*. This was of course not without ambiguity, nor was it solely the doing of the campus community. In 1980, in an apparent effort to undermine the success of a leftist university, the French state apparatus had relocated the university from the Bois de Vincennes to a new site in Saint-Denis — a site that was intentionally tiny, cloistered, and inaccessible.[19] The Communist-run government of Saint-Denis was hostile to the campus leftists, and the university initially refused to engage with its new neighborhood (Berger, Courtois and Perrigault 2015:123-132). Gradually the municipal government had become friendlier towards the campus, and efforts at community engagement became more numerous. But along the way, the campus community had come to

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[18] Historically, the university has been an institution of power and elite privilege, and before the post-60s bourgeois flight away from the French public universities (Bourdieu 1996), the university fit solidly into this dominant pole of French public culture. Yet already by 1968, as the universities were "massified," elite reproduction felt threatened. "We are no longer assured of our future role as exploiters," said some of the student protesters (Feenberg and Freedman 2001:82). In subsequent decades, the public university was progressively declassed in French public culture, portrayed as an institution of last resort for those with means (Beaud et al. 2010). Sociologically speaking, though, the university remained an institution of class stratification (Bodin and Orange 2013), and even if academic work itself was full of precarity (Rose 2016a), the French public university remained a space apart, energized by its own dominance hierarchy.

[19] There was no metro station at Paris 8 in its first years in Saint-Denis; one had to take the metro to downtown Saint-Denis and then continue by bus.

accept a categorical division between inside and outside, and it worked to police this division.[20]

The skyline of Saint-Denis seen from the University of Paris 8 campus library. The metro and bus stations are visible in the foreground, just across from campus.

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[20] For instance, it was only in February 2008 that the university formed an explicit partnership with the regional government of Seine-Saint-Denis to advance their common interests. See the "Charte de partenariat" (Département de la Seine-Saint-Denis, Université Paris 8 Vincennes–Saint-Denis), 19 Février 2008, https://www.univ-paris8.fr/IMG/pdf_Charte_Paris_8_CG93.pdf (accessed 8 December 2018).

The urban geography of the campus reinforced this divide, since the campus was surrounded not just by walls and guards, but also by a somewhat unfriendly urban infrastructure. To the east of the university was a stretch of empty lots; to the west, a long, empty sidewalk led away under a highway bridge. A few modest restaurants sat across the street, but there was no real business district. Since a majority of the university community lived outside Saint-Denis, most campus visitors remained disconnected from the neighborhood. It was common to come and go by bus or metro, never setting foot past the plaza at the campus entrance.[21]

Broadly speaking, it seems to me that a banlieue university such as Paris 8 served three major functions in its urban economy. It was a site of social reproduction, in its role as an educational institution that tended to filter racialized, working-class subjects into "pragmatic" tracks, while offering artistic and academic tracks more readily to elite subjects. It was a site of racially divided and gendered labor, in its role as a major local employer. And it was a site of ideological production, in its role as a producer of social and academic knowledge, historical consciousness and ideological anxiety. The racialized spaces of the Paris 8 campus cut across all three of these functions.

As I suggested above, the spaces of the campus came to dramatize the two opposed processes of becoming-banlieue and securitization-against-the-banlieue. We will see later how at Paris 8, subaltern labor came into conflict with subaltern dwelling, as one set of working-class subjects confronted another (Chapter 4).

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[21] I only began to understood the banlieue when I stopped taking the metro to campus. To save money, I began to bike to Saint-Denis from my apartment in northern Paris. The more time I spent on the tangled streets leading to Saint-Denis, the less I was ever able to see anything like a stark divide between one space and another. Instead, I came to see the very notion of a banlieue as a cultural category that fundamentally works to mystify racial capitalism in France. To speak of a banlieue does not help us comprehend the web of infrastructure, social barriers and flows that comprises the regional economy of Paris. The very notion of the banlieue too readily cuts up this interconnected socioeconomic world, dividing it into marked and unmarked spaces, into centers and peripheries. In a postcolonial society, one cannot comfortably presume a distinction between centers and peripheries.

Meanwhile, the halls of the campus gave a more frictionless passage to the site's more privileged actors: the largely white and French professoriate, and the more ambiguously placed population of postcolonial intellectuals. All this puts a further question on our critical agenda. What kind of utopia can emerge from racialized spaces?

In sum, then, the analytical questions that concern us are: What are the material preconditions of a utopia? What kinds of ambivalence organize our possible relationships to liberation? What kind of utopia can be a vehicle for left patriarchy and racialized work? What kind of life is possible in a banlieue university? And more existentially: What if anything can we learn from this case?

A note on methods

Before we come to the rest of the book, let me just say a few words about how I gathered the data. This project is based on a large, omnivorous ethnographic archive, assembled through full-time anthropological fieldwork in France from June 2009 to April 2011, complemented with a few short visits afterwards. I did the obvious things: I interviewed dozens of teachers, staff and students; I observed philosophy classes for several semesters; I built friendships and socialized with the locals; I attended protests and political meetings; I collected institutional documents and political tracts; I chatted on Facebook; I made audio recordings and took photographs (though seldom of people's faces); I explored historical texts, course brochures and demographic data; and I read philosophers' written work, though never exhaustively.

This Department, I should probably emphasize, was not primarily a band of revolutionaries on the verge of storming the National Assembly. It was a diverse group of foreigners, tenured radicals, disaffected youth, dreamers, cynics, male chauvinists, feminists, union organizers, shy kids, retiring patriarchs, survivors of the 70s, ex-schoolteachers, literati, amateur novelists, and institutional power brokers. It was never reducible to a single subject position, political stance, or sociological trajectory. This book is not a sociology of all those actors, but I have tried to give a sociological sketch of this world in an appendix.[22] The initial point is just that it was a diverse, multiplicitous space.

In the face of that diversity, my research archive was shaped, for better or worse, by a methodological choice I made early on. Initially, I wanted to focus on the figures at the heart of the political and institutional life of the Philosophy Department, and I ended up becoming somewhat close to the white, French departmental leadership. At the time, the department was mainly led by a group of senior male professors — Patrice Vermeren, Stéphane Douailler, Georges Navet, and Eric Lecerf — who had been associated with Jacques Rancière and his radical historicism. Someone called them the "Rancière channel," a useful label which I will retain below; it was largely through their collective work that "emancipation" remained a common theme in departmental culture. They were ambivalent, reflexive figures themselves, and they may have hoped that my work would reflect their own ambivalence back to them. Before arriving in France, I had been dismayed by a tendency in French ethnography to seek out the Others of French metropolitan society (rural villages, immigrants, the far right), and I imagined that by focusing on left-wing white academics, I could contribute to "studying up" or "studying sideways." But I was soon reminded in France that institutionally dominant actors do not stand in isolation. Indeed, they are only comprehensible in terms of their relationships to other kinds of social subjects. Relationships organized around varying degrees of hospitality, diverse relations to otherness.

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[22] See "Sociological sketch of the Philosophy Department."

Perhaps this is a book about a set of ambiguous relationships, within which, in spite of it all, a few utopian things happened.

The shape of the story

As you can see, this project has a sprawling and perhaps excessive agenda. To help give you a sense of structure, I have divided the analysis into two sections. Part I, "Historical Failures," traces three genealogies of a failed utopia. Chapter 1, "Radical Philosophy After 1968," explores the political history of the Paris 8 Philosophy Department, its unfolding forms of internal conflict and ambivalence, and its production of a left-wing pantheon of Great Men thinkers. Chapter 2, "Left Patriarchy," traces the processes of masculine domination and women's exclusion that have long traversed this site. Chapter 3, "The Neocolonial Bargain," shows how the Department turned towards the international and postcolonial academic market for survival, thereby offering foreign students a cruel bargain: degrees, but no jobs. This first part of the book is significantly historical, and quite critical of its site. It proposes that disappointed utopianism emerged from a history of political defeat and unresolved contradictions.

Meanwhile, Part II, entitled "Utopia in the present," is somewhat more affirmative in its analyses. It shows how ambivalent subjects lived in a failed utopian site, looking at scenes of social reproduction (Chapter 4), intellectual production (Chapter 5), and utopian politics (Chapter 6). It contrasts three forms of ongoingness in a fraught lifeworld: banlieue dwelling, ritualized "thinking," and utopian protest. Chapter 4, "A Banlieue University," explores the racialized production of campus and departmental space. It aims to show that everyday life was a space in which the relations of social reproduction were actively contested.

Chapter 5, "Thought in Motion," explores scenes of philosophers doing their major professional activity, "thinking." It follows them across France on a train, observes them at a conference, and then watches them go home. Finally, Chapter 6, "Whose Utopia is This?" returns to Saint-Denis to scrutinize the production of a utopian philosophical manifesto. It shows how this manifesto was produced not by a definite "utopian subject," but through a conflictual encounter between diverse social subjects. It suggests that such utopian interventions are not diminished by their antagonistic origins and disappointing results, since through them, collective habits of radicality endure.

Finally, a brief Afterward tries to ask: What does disappointed utopianism teach us?

That is the plan, at least. Before we go farther, let us glimpse what everyday life looked like in this site. Has any theory ever emerged unscathed from its encounters with ordinariness?

PART I: HISTORICAL FAILURES

Interlude — In the hallway, at the cafeteria

The door to the teachers' lounge. Sign reads "End apathy! Long live Communism!"

I arrived one day at the department office one day in March 2011 and found it closed. Open until 4:30, said a sign, and it was closer to 5pm. Flat fluorescent lights held back the shadows and impending hush of the end of the teaching day.

Aimlessly, I read the announcements taped up in the hallway, and learned that Ishmael and Marcel were no longer teaching together. The hallway outside the offices was the department's closest thing to a town square. In a period where French universities had only partly embraced digital technology, it was a testament to the persistence of print and bulletin-board culture. The walls brimmed with handwritten or taped-up notices to the students, instructions about student projects and canceled classes, announcements of conferences, political manifestos and forgotten posters. In a few yards of concrete-block corridor, alienation and sociability and bureaucratic flatness commingled. At times the students lined up in the hallway to see the secretary, and it would overflow with bodies between classes in the department's main teaching space, A028, just next door.

A handwritten course schedule posted outside the department office, November 2009.

As I left the hallway, I ran into one of the professors, who seemed happy to see me. "The situation on campus is getting harder and harder," he explained. Not everyone was on board with Paris 8's plans for coping with the neoliberal "university autonomy" reforms (Rose 2019), and the president of Paris 8 was said to have a paranoid streak, apparently refusing to speak to people who disagreed with him. Moments later, a more senior professor showed up. We shook hands decorously, and I listened to some complaints about the president's unilateralism and about bending university regulations. I didn't get all the jokes, but I laughed anyway. Ishmael soon appeared on the scene too, and our emergent group, all male, went off together to inspect the new office of a philosopher who had recently been elected Director of the Arts and Philosophy Division. The new Director nonchalantly took out his pipe and smoked beneath a No Smoking sign mounted permanently to his wall.

Bâtiment A Cafeteria.

A hundred yards down the hallway was the place where the students hung out: a cafeteria that served tiny coffees and sandwiches. My sociologist friend Charles Soulié described it to me as the main hangout for foreign students. After you had been around for a year, the sense of anonymity started to dissipate. I came in one day to a strange meeting of eyes. Even before entering, I saw by the windows at one of the tall standup tables my friends Michel and Anne-Marie. They were older students in their sixties, who had decided to get philosophy degrees in their

retirement, aided by then extremely low tuition costs. I always found it somewhat utopian to have almost free public higher education.

As I arrived, they finished their coffees and came towards the exit, and we greeted each other.

"I didn't want to interrupt you!" I said.

"We'd finished, we'd covered it all, we agreed on almost everything, which isn't a bad thing…"

"What are you talking about?"

"Everything and nothing, as usual [*tout et rien, comme d'habitude*]."

That was what our ordinary life was like: talking about "everything and nothing, as usual." A casual sociability in an otherwise alienating space. For a moment it almost felt like home.

1. RADICAL PHILOSOPHY AFTER 1968

The loss of the revolution

Disappointed utopianism in the Philosophy Department emerged from a history of revolutionary philosophy in turmoil. In postwar France, in the face of Cold War confrontation and colonial revolutions, philosophy was a political space: it had a substantial Marxist presence and was often felt to be in crisis. Intellectuals like Sartre were devising new relations to mass media and even to television (Chaplin 2007). The public universities were rapidly expanding, as the new human sciences competed with the traditional humanities. As protests against Vietnam, against bourgeois conservatism and against traditional education broke out into the student movement of 1968, radical politics crystallized around the trope of "the revolution."

The roots of disappointed utopianism lie in the tumultuous experience of May 1968, and to the broader history of radical philosophy that emerged through 20th century French Marxism. Yet I would propose that the foundational event in this specific genealogy was not exactly May 1968 itself. Rather, the foundational moment was the *loss of the revolution* that occurred in its immediate aftermath. "The revolution" in its fullest sense echoed across the Vincennes Philosophy Department's first decades as a lost object, getting more and more buffered and mediated, forming an unreachable or even comic horizon.
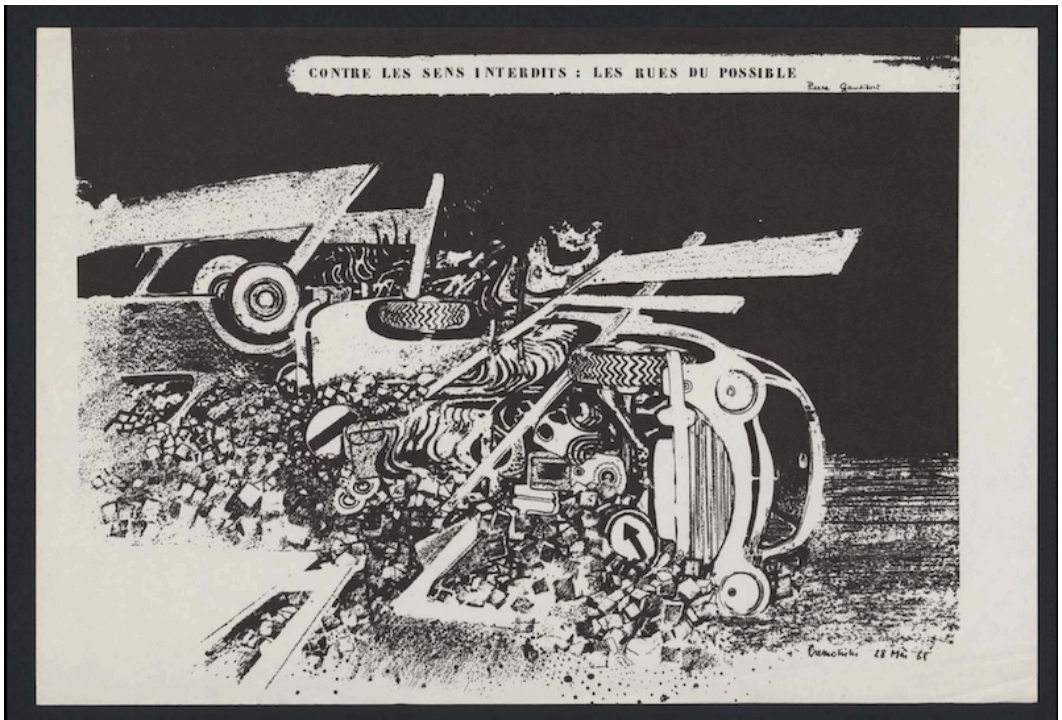
Pierre Gaudibert, "Against forbidden meanings: The streets of the possible," May 28, 1968.

This chapter proposes that as the "revolutionary" moment faded, disappointed utopianism began to crystallize in the Philosophy Department through several separate processes. Disappointment and ambivalence flourished and multiplied at the newly established University of Paris 8. A race-blind universalism enabled white French intellectuals to avoid thinking race, even while critiquing colonialism. A newly collective radicalism took form through the Department's collective debates, public texts, and early mission statements. Gradually, utopian commitments began to get entrenched as collective representations and habits of the social environment, rather than within subjectivity or consciousness. As the 1970s went on, sectarian Marxists' broadside attacks on philosophy and bourgeois

culture declined in frequency, and Marxism itself came in for strong criticism. Labor conflicts contributed to the marginalization of women and to masculine in-fighting.

As the weight of the past added up and the founding figures retired or died, the Department acquired a sense of self-consciousness that it had not had at the outset. A reflexive sense of death, historicity and loss entered the milieu. It became available to itself as an object with a history. This sense of radical history was memorialized and arguably mythicized in later decades, and promptly became a new form of alienation for younger and more marginalized actors. The resulting radical institution was always racialized, gendered and nationalized; this chapter is a study in the formation of its political hegemony, which was a predominantly French, male, and white hegemony. It is only barely surprising that this hegemony was also a place of strife and ambivalence.

Note: Much of this chapter is essentially a political history of dominant actors, drawing on a documentary and literary archive that privileges certain voices over others. If it becomes dull to read that Michel Foucault said that and Gilles Deleuze said this, you are very welcome to skip ahead to other chapters.

May 68: The revolution became immediate

Just what was May 1968? In short, it was a mass movement that produced a proto-revolutionary episode.[1] It was a moment of far left rebellion at once against the Gaullist state and against the French Communist Party. It is slightly mis-named, since the "events" continued well into June. It was a generation-making moment for many of its participants, and a *locus classicus* for student protests in subsequent years.[2] As students occupied university campuses, notably the Sor-bonne at the heart of Paris, they were driven out and assaulted by the riot police. They built barricades out of cobblestones, got hit with police nightsticks, and got radicalized by the experience of violence. Some nine million workers went on strike, often in spite of their own union leadership (Ross 2002:3). An avalanche of radical zines, statements and manifestos were written; normal life in Paris went on hold; and artists' workshops produced zany slogans and posters that lingered afterwards in the global culture of the left. "It is forbidden to forbid." "All power to the imagination." "The more I make love, the more I want to make the Revolu-tion, the more I make the Revolution, the more I want to make love."

In this period of anticolonial revolution and U.S.-Soviet confrontation, revolution organized the global political horizon. Like "emancipation," perhaps, revolution is now a difficult object for us (post-Cold War Anglophones), because it has come to feel so mediated, hyperbolized and implausible (Ross 2002:20). For much of the Global North, revolutions are now for the Other (the Arab Spring), the Past (of 1776, 1789), or the domain of Empty Metaphor (Industrial Revolu-tion, Digital Revolution). What is now unthinkable for us, however, became

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[1] For general Anglophone overviews of the May events, see Jackson, Milne and Williams 2011, Ross 2002, Feenberg and Freedman 2001.

[2] While May 1968 in France *became* a locus classicus of global student politics, I must also insist that there is nothing "intrinsic" to the French events of May 1968 that made it deserve that status; it is rather that French politics have remained a particular site of post-imperial mythmaking, while for instance Senegalese, Mexican, or Polish protests the same year have been relatively neglected (e.g. Blum 2012).

plausible through street activism at the time. The protests emerged partly from an anti-imperialist internationalism that was then popular among French radicals.

The May events have to be understood as an episode in the history of decolonization, capitalist modernization, and the global left imagination, as Kristin Ross has emphasized. "Vietnam made possible a merging of the themes of anti-imperialism and anticapitalism… All revolutionaries are involved in the same struggle" (Ross 2002:80). The May events themselves were sequels to protests that March at Nanterre, a banlieue university campus built in 1964 alongside a largely North African shantytown (*bidonville*) west of Paris. In its physical gloom and left effervescence, Nanterre set a model for left-wing Parisian universities with ambivalent relations to the banlieue. French student radicalism at the time was focused on decolonization struggles, not on urban discrimination in Paris. Consider how a Trotskyist student, Daniel Bensaïd, who later became a beloved Marxist professor at Paris 8, recalled this experience.

> While lining up in the Nanterre corridors, waiting to hear Mikel Dufrenne on the transcendental aesthetic, we had our heads elsewhere. The newspaper headlines announced the death of Che in Bolivia. We were incredulous and couldn't accept it. A myth is immortal. But we still scrutinised in perplexity the photos of his Christ-like corpse, seeking in vain for false evidence in the curve of the forehead or the shape of the beard. His tragedy was ours.[3]

> Nanterre-la-Folie well deserved its name. The press of the time often described the muddy no man's land of the campus, wedged between the

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[3] *Cette tragédie était la nôtre.* I have included this suggestive sentence from the French edition; it was inexplicably omitted from the English translation.

shantytowns photographed by Elie Kagan during the Algerian war and the HLM public housing blocks, still thin on the ground. The shack that served as a station looked like the ramshackle railway depots of the American West, lost at the edge of the desert. Once on the campus, you spent the day in cafes, dining halls and dormitories,[4] without bothering much with the lectures. One [activist] meeting followed another…

[Bensaïd 2013:295, 299-300]

This global consciousness had an exclusively masculine range of references, as its male participants were crushed by the loss of Guevara, their revolutionary hero.[5] A left activist like Bensaïd noticed the existence of racialized shantytowns and public housing, but hurried past them to fixate on activist meetings in closed campus spaces. He could take ownership of campus space, physically defending its "(almost) free territory" and placing masculine combativeness at the heart of radicality. Historians note that the women's and gay liberation movements emerged soon afterwards as reactions to this heteromasculine radicalism.

Radical masculinity was equally on display when protests began in March 1968. On March 20, the American Express building in central Paris was smashed up to protest the Vietnam War. Four protesters were arrested: they "became martrys, and tempers flared" (Jackson, Milne and Williams 2011:7). On March 22, Nanterre students occupied an administration building, protesting administrative "paternalism." Theirs was a politically diverse movement from the start, as its most famous organizer, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, recalled. "There were the unorganized, people who had never done politics before, the left Catholics, the libertari-

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[4] I have modified the published translation here slightly to better link French to U.S. university jargon.

[5] To his credit, Bensaïd later acknowledged in his memoirs the feminist critique of his youthful macho radicalism (Bensaïd 2013:810-813, Vinteuil 1976).

ans, the Trotskyists…" (Dreyfus-Armand and Cohn-Bendit 1988:124). Cohn-Bendit became an international symbol of the movement. He embodied its countercultural masculinity in his person. In 1968, he explained, he lived "in tribal fashion" with some fellow anarchists, was "very beatnik-y," and was influenced by German and American student activism. Although raised in France, he was a German citizen, and at the height of the 1968 movement, the French authorities barred him from re-entering the country.

Barricades at night, May 11, 1968. Sketch based on a photo by Guy Kopelowicz.

Cohn-Bendit soon slipped back into France, but his ambiguous Germanness facilitated a nationalist counterreaction, as the Gaullist authorities blamed the events on outsiders. "The proportion of foreigners who were detained is startling… The police continually blamed the events in Paris on a conspiracy of foreign revolutionaries" (Jobs 2011:237). Nevertheless, the events rapidly grew beyond

anyone's expectations. On May 2, the Nanterre campus was closed altogether. Students moved back to central Paris, and were arrested in large numbers while occupying the Sorbonne. The confrontations escalated: by 6 May, 600 protesters had been wounded, along with 350 police. On May 7, police tear gas faced protesters' Molotov cocktails, as 50,000 marched against police brutality. May 10 became known as the "Night of the Barricades." May 13 saw more than a million protesters march through Paris. Workers went on strike on May 14 at a Sud Aviation plant, and by May 17, 200,000 workers were on strike. A week later, the Paris Stock Exchange was set on fire. In a major concession to striking workers, the minimum wage was raised by 35%. Yet the movement was widely felt to come to an end on May 30, as a mass pro-Gaullist march took back the streets of Paris. Strikes and protests continued for weeks afterwards, but De Gaulle dissolved parliament and retained power.

Still, many French activists lived this period as a moment where the revolution seemed to become *immediate*. Earlier in the 1960s, French radical philosophers had argued that "revolution was not on the agenda," and that the task was to prepare for a revolutionary moment yet to come (Vermeren 1995:5). But in 1968, there was a sudden, collective sense that the revolution was on the verge of happening, or indeed actually happening. "YES, STUDENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE, WE CAN BE A GREAT REVOLUTIONARY FORCE," announced a Communist pamphlet on May 13, 1968. "Let us sweep aside purely academic reformist watchwords, and the revisionists' and social-democrats' little groups, which are teaming up to try to bar the way of the popular masses, the way of the revolution!" declared the Maoist group UJCML on May 7.[6] The violent confrontations with the police, in particular, seemed to create a sense that revolution was imminent.

The consciousness underlying this revolutionary frenzy was inevitably partial, and it was limited by its own blindness to race and gender.

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[6] Texts reprinted in Perrot et al. 1968:31, 68.

Aimé Césaire on the street: Race and impossible identifications

The 1968 protest movement, in its oft-Marxist internationalism, was laudably conscious of social class and imperialism, and it sought to support migrant workers in France. Yet it systematically exploited and marginalized women, pushing them to the sidelines or giving them secretarial and domestic work, as we saw in the Introduction. And it remained largely indifferent to the forces of racialization that continued to organize capitalism in the postcolonial moment.

This becomes apparent if we inspect the famous surrealist slogans that emerged in May 1968: "We are all German Jews," "We are all undesirables." These surreal declarations were acts of counter-identification.[7] After the Holocaust, the German Jews had been constituted as global emblems of oppression and violence. When, then, would not say, performatively, that they too are German Jews? Who would count themselves out of this gesture of seemingly universal solidarity with the annihilated?

This is not a rhetorical question: there were those who hesitated to chant this slogan. Consider a memory of 1968 recounted by Olivier Revault d'Allonnes, a protester who later became a philosophy professor at the Sorbonne.[8]

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[7] The slogans worked against the definition of normative Frenchness, which has long been organized around anti-German sentiment, naturalized Catholicism, and bourgeois elegance (Asad 2006, Harvey 2003).

[8] Revault d'Allonnes was also a close friend of François Châtelet, the charismatic patriarch who chaired Paris 8's Philosophy Department in the 1970s and early 1980s.

I remember a street march in 1968 that was going towards the National Assembly. In the first row there was [Jewish historian] Pierre Vidal-Naquet, there was Césaire, there was [exiled Spanish Communist] Semprun and other people. And me, I was in the second row. That very morning, [the right-wing newspaper] *Le Figaro* had labeled [student leader] Daniel Cohn-Bendit "The Jew Cohn-Bendit," and [Communist newspaper] *L'Humanité* the same day had said, "The German Cohn-Bendit." And up from the midst of the march came the slogan that would become famous, "We are all German Jews."

So me, I shouted, without being either Jewish or German, that I was German-Jewish, and then Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Semprun, etc, set themselves to crying out, "We are all German Jews." And I can still see Semprun turn towards Césaire, who remained silent, and asking him, "Why don't you shout with us?" And Césaire answered: "Because no one will believe me."

And then, finally, he shouted it out.

[Périn and d'Allonnes 2010:112]

Revault d'Allonnes then had the audacity to comment, retrospectively, that access to the universal required Césaire to renounce Blackness as a subject position:

I find superb this "No one will believe me." It's clear that when one looked at Aimé Césaire, one seriously doubted that he was a German Jew. And I think that at this precise moment, Aimé Césaire passed from négritude to the universal. Well, for me, in any case. He was no longer the Black man [*le nègre*] that he declared himself to be, he was a human being and,

therefore, he didn't care about labels. He was a human being, period. He passed from negritude to universality, that is from a political to a philosophical attitude.

[Périn and d'Allonnes 2010:112]

As a descendent of German Jews myself, I must say that I deplore the Eurocentrism and patronizing anti-anti-racism that pervade this stance. It was as if claims to German Jewishness were cast as viable ways to arrive at one's universal humanity, whereas claims to Blackness were framed as a collapse into a limited politics of the particular. And it is no accident, one must add, that this judgment emerged from the streets of Paris, which have long served as a resonance chamber for melodramas of putatively universal masculine judgment. Revault d'Allones viewed Paris as the prime intellectual theatre of France, France as the prime intellectual theatre of the world, and street protests as a prime site of political authenticity and intellectual realism. The streets of Paris during a protest thus became a vantage point for judging identities and sorting them into universals and particulars. (There was "a general preference within the [May 68] movement for the universal over the specific" [Gordon 2011:94].) Meanwhile, Revault d'Allones showed that he was not above skin-color styles of racial classification: he seemed comfortable in his common-sensical judgment that a mere "look" at Aimé Césaire sufficed to show his lack of German-Jewishness. He presumed the racial categories that he wished to transcend.

Yet contra Revault d'Allones, I would not necessarily read Césaire's hesitation about identifying with German Jews solely as a commitment to négritude. It strikes me also as a pre-emptive reaction to French racist discipline. Césaire intuited that the white European marchers surrounding him *were not going to believe his claim to belong to their collective*. In his refusal to participate in an utterance premised on excluding him, he revealed the very limits of the left universalism that organized this mythical event of radical politics.

Césaire's hesitation was fleeting; in the end, he too chanted the required slogan. But this incident shows us how French left radicalism, in its classic 1968 version, remained a tacitly racialized form. The May movement was happy to spurn the traditional French authorities and to have Aimé Césaire in the front row of protesters. But it did not do enough to parse the history of racial colonialism that organized French political culture. This avoidance of racial analysis would haunt the decades that followed.

Revolutionary philosophy at Vincennes

Revolutionary impulses persisted when the Vincennes Philosophy Department opened its doors the following winter, housed in a brand-new, modern campus in a park just east of Paris. The new university responded to longstanding demands for educational modernization; it was also said to be convenient for the French government to put all the protesters safely outside the center of Paris.[9] "For most [students at Vincennes], it was about building a political university with the declared objective of setting off a revolution" (Dormoy-Rajramanan 2004:27). While some political groups, particularly the Maoists, were more overtly "revolutionary" than others, the trope of "the revolution" was nobody's possession. Rather, "the process of revolutionary subjectivation had been opened up, made available to any collectivity" (Ross 2002:125). This included professors as well as students. As Alain Badiou recollected, to get hired at Vincennes, "it was obviously required to

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[9] The initial name of the institution was the Experimental University Center at Vincennes (Centre universitaire expérimental de Vincennes); it was only renamed Paris VIII in 1970 when the old University of Paris was split up into different branch campuses.

have been engaged in 68… in reality we were pretty much all political activists when we got there" (Dormoy-Rajramanan 2004:138).

The newly built University of Paris 8 at Vincennes. A tag on the building supports "The Struggle of the Iberian Liberation Movement" (Movimiento Ibérico de Liberación), a left-wing anti-Franco guerrilla group. (Photo by University of Paris 8.)

This revolutionary immediacy did not last, as far as we can tell from the male professors' testimonials which dominate the archive of the period. Bensaïd, who became a leader of the May protests, described a period of initial chaos on campus.

I was a part-time worker at Vincennes in fact, at least until 72. I didn't show up scrupulously for the most turbulant moments, the ones that were somewhat frenzied [*qui avaient un côté délirant*]. After 72, the Maoist thrust died down, but beforehand we went through some overwhelming years, where there were bombardments of Little Red Books at the general assemblies. Our [Trotskyist] group was a small minority, and there was a sort of "Maoizing" exaltation, with all different variants. The campus [*l'enceinte*] was periodically occupied. We witnessed a sort of chaos as well, politically, with "happenings" around the façade, and conflicts a little later around the Department of Psychoanalysis…

[Dormoy-Rajramanan 2004:187]

At Vincennes, this almost revolutionary situation was a zone of excitement, normlessness and phenomenological chaos. The sign of revolution thus brought order to a disorganized space of social experience. Yet soon even committed militants like Bensäid had to reckon with the revolution's failure to come to fruition. He recollected:

We thought that in Europe we were headed towards explosive situations… But after, finally, the revolution not having taken place, we had to think about regularizing. It became clear that we wouldn't be political for life; so Paris 8 gave us the occasion to have an interesting job that left plenty of free time for activist activity, but that only came later. There was never a career plan.

[Dormoy-Rajramanan 2004:188]

Somewhere between the mid-sixties and the mid-seventies, revolution went from "not on the agenda" to "not having taken place." It was only for a few brief years in and after 1968 that there could be "some who sincerely believed in the revolution," as the sociologist Jean-Claude Passeron put it (Dormoy-Rajramanan 2004:200). "There was a period when it was pretty exciting," the post-Althusserian philosopher Jacques Rancière said of the early days of the department. "At the

beginning we didn't think of [leaving]. There was the feeling of being a political collective. The department didn't really have curricular leadership and the student-teacher general assembly reigned supreme" (Rancière 2012:38).

This feeling of political collectivity thrived on conflict, as Maoists like Rancière and Judith Miller attacked more traditional Marxists like Châtelet and Etienne Balibar, calling them "reactionary profs" (Dormoy-Rajramanan 2004:48). Pedagogy in the early days of the Department was exceptionally left-wing, and in January 1970 the Minister of Education withdrew the Department's accreditation to grant degrees, citing the "Marxist-Leninist" pedagogy. Two months later, as I noted earlier, Miller became notorious for declaring that she wanted to destroy the capitalist university, not reform it. When the Ministry of Education reassigned her to teach in secondary schools, the police were sent in to remove a campus occupation that protested her reassignment. Even among the highly political campuses of the global 1960s and 1970, Vincennes was seized by an unusual political frenzy. But hopes for "the revolution" slowly subsided. Ambivalence — the seed of disappointment — took its place.

Michel Foucault and the birth of ambivalence

Faced with the frenetic atmosphere, the less militant philosophy professors sought to leave Vincennes for more conventional jobs.[10] So did Michel Foucault, a figure who is notable here for his precocious and vocal ambivalence about "the revolution." Foucault became known in Parisian circles as early as 1961, when he

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[10] Etienne Balibar "didn't consider himself Vincennois" and quit after a year (Dormoy-Rajramanan 2004:69). The epistemologist Michel Serres "did not feel remotely at ease" and did the same (143).

published *Madness and Civilization*. He had gone to work in Tunisia in 1966, profiting from the economic opportunities available in the newly independent postcolonies, and he was not present in Paris during the May 1968 protests. In a retrospective interview, he heaped scorn on French radicalism, contrasting it with the political struggles he had seen in Tunisia.[11] Foucault commented:

> When I came back to France in November-December 1968, I was rather surprised, astonished, even disappointed given what I had seen in Tunisia. The struggles, whatever may have been their violence, their passion, in any case didn't involve the same price, the same sacrifices. There was no comparison between the Latin Quarter barricades and the real risk of getting fifteen years in prison like in Tunisia. People in France talked about hypermarxism, the unleashing of theories, anathemas, splitting into tiny groups [*groupuscularisation*]. It was exactly the opposite of what had excited me in Tunisia. Maybe that explains the way I went through things from then on, out of sync with these boundless discussions, this hyper-Marxization, this unstoppable discursivity that was key to university life in 1969, especially life at Vincennes.

> [Foucault 1994:80]

All the same, Foucault wanted to come back to France, and he agreed in the summer of 1968 to become the first head of the Vincennes Philosophy Department. Foucault had been recruited by the feminist literary scholar Hélène Cixous, who led Vincennes academic recruitments on behalf of Raymond Las Vergnas, then Dean of the Sorbonne.[12] Cixous was charismatic and well-connected, and had been precociously appointed at age 30 to a professorial post at Nanterre. She

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[11] Tunisia became independent in 1956, and its subsequent Bourguiba regime was protested by the left (Hendrickson 2017).

[12] There is some controversy about whether Cixous was alone in contacting Foucault. "Il est difficile de savoir qui contacte M. Foucault pour Vincennes, puisque H. Cixous et P. Dommergues en revendiquent tous deux la responsabilité, D. Eribon évoquant plutôt C. Canguilhem" (Soulié 2012:94).

recollected that at the start of Vincennes "people willingly believed me and followed me": the young, successful woman academic, an exception to the rule of male dominance in the French academy. And later in life, she remained proud of her effort to create "a site which was neither a non-place, nor a utopia, nor another world, nor an alibi, but truly a *creation*."[13]

An intense androcentrism, if not outright misogyny, was nevertheless there from the start, and a gendered division of intellectual labor set in at Vincennes. Cixous founded a Center for Feminine Studies, the first such center in France. But even though feminism was central to Cixous' own intellectual project, the question of gender remained largely exterior to the Philosophy Department, where masculine domination would long prevail. As chair, Foucault did nothing to interrupt its general masculinity.[14] Instead, his hiring criteria were political, theoretical and reputational. The sociologist Charles Soulié explains that Foucault largely preferred Althusserians and Lacanians, such as Miller, Badiou and Rancière, but "to counterbalance the very marked Maoist influence" also brought in Trotskyists and more conventional Communists such as Bensaïd and Balibar (Soulié 1998:50).[15] The recruitments also had an elitist subtext. As Rancière put it, Foucault "asked Althusser and Derrida [both well-connected in French philosophy] to help him find young men who were supposed to be good [*des jeunes supposés être bons*], that's all there was to it."[16]

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[13] Yet Cixous also emphasized that at Vincennes, "Later on, misogyny got back all its teeth and all its claws" (Cixous 2009:25).

[14] David Macey reports that in the early sixties, while teaching in Clerment-Ferrand, Foucault "cause[d] a scandal when he appointed [his partner Daniel] Defert to an assistantship in preference to a better-qualified woman candidate" (2004:64). See also Chapter 2.

[15] Foucault's partner Daniel Defert was at that point a member of the Gauche Prolétarienne, a radical Maoist group.

[16] Rancière: "Foucault a prétendu, après, avoir fait un savant dosage entre tendances politiques, mais ça c'est une plaisanterie totale: il a demandé à Althusser et à Derrida de l'aider à trouver des jeunes supposés être bons, quoi, c'est tout." (http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk/interviews/ranciere.html)

Foucault's prestige helped create a philosophical milieu that was at once ideologically revolutionary *and* a space of elitist masculinism. It is a symptom of the project's underlying contradictions that Foucault himself both fostered revolutionary philosophy and sarcastically disowned it. He was unable or unwilling to become a charismatic local leader; he complained after his departure in April 1970 that "I had had enough of being surrounded by the nuts [*des démi-fous*]" (Soulié 2012:199n720). The Trotskyist leader Henry Weber recalled that "Foucault soon understood that he couldn't do much of anything as the head of this department, and the ideal course was to let everyone do what they wanted" (Audebert cited in Soulié 2012:209). After barely more than a year at Vincennes, Foucault was awarded a chair at the Collège de France, the pinnacle of the French academic system. François Châtelet, a Hegelian-Marxist historian of philosophy, replaced Foucault as head of the Department and remained in office into the 1980s.

MICHEL FOUCAULT
« *Pourquoi ce cordon sanitaire ?* »

9 Fév 1970
L'Obs.

Le piège
de Vincennes

⁂ " *Je ne suis pas sûr que
la philosophie ça existe. Ce qui existe,
ce sont des philosophes* "

● *Le ministre de l'Education nationale, Olivier Guichard, a fait part, le mois dernier, au président de la faculté de Vincennes, M. Cabot, de son intention de ne pas accorder le titre de licencié d'enseignement aux étudiants du département de philosophie de Vincennes. Récemment, à Radio-Luxembourg, le ministre a justifié son projet, expliquant que le contenu de l'enseignement de la philosophie à Vincennes était trop particulier et « spécialisé ». Pour convaincre les auditeurs, il a ensuite lu les titres de quelques cours consacrés au marxisme et à la politique. Ces déclarations ont provoqué les remous qu'on imagine et nous sommes allés interroger à ce sujet Michel Foucault, un des principaux professeurs de philosophie de Vincennes.*

MICHEL FOUCAULT. — Passons vite sur les éléments de la discussion. Il faudrait objecter : comment donner un enseignement développé et diversifié quand on a 950 étudiants pour 8 enseignants ? Il faudrait objecter aussi : à Vincennes, il y a des étudiants qui ont fait déjà 6 mois d'études, d'autres 18 ; et en cours de route on leur dit : ce que vous avez fait, c'est de la broderie, il faut recommencer ailleurs. Il faudrait objecter encore : veut-on faire délibérément plusieurs centaines de chômeurs intellectuels à l'époque où les statistiques sont, paraît-il, menaçantes ? Je pourrais ajouter enfin : qu'on nous dise clairement ce qu'est la philosophie et au nom de quoi — de quel texte, de quel critère ou de quelle vérité — on rejette ce que nous faisons.

Mais je crois qu'il faut aller à l'essentiel ; et l'essentiel, dans ce que dit un ministre, ce ne sont pas les raisons qu'il avance ; c'est la décision qu'il veut prendre. Elle est claire : les étudiants qui auront fait leurs études de philosophie à Vincennes n'auront pas le droit d'enseigner dans le secondaire.

Je pose à mon tour des questions : pourquoi ce cordon sanitaire ? Qu'est-ce que la philosophie (la classe de philosophie) a de si précieux, et de si fragile pour qu'il faille, avec tant de soins, la protéger ? Et qu'y a-t-il, chez les Vincennois, de si dangereux ?

● *Que reprochez-vous à l'enseignement de la philosophie et, en particulier, à la classe de philosophie ?* →

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In 1970, Michel Foucault expressed his views to the press that Vincennes had been "a trap" set for the Philosophy Department, since their experimentation with new pedagogies had been both encouraged and punished.[17]

Foucault's stance toward Vincennes was always shifty and ambivalent.[18] The story is widely told that at the opening of Vincennes in January 1969, Foucault entered enthusiastically into local protest politics. First he voted in favor of a campus occupation to protest a police action, and to everyone's surprise, he stayed to participate in the occupation. Apparently Foucault looked "jubilant," and demanded that someone show him how to use a fire extinguisher to fend off the riot police. Later he was tear-gassed and arrested with the rest of the protesters, which apparently "baptized" him as "a comrade" (Djian 2009:46-48). Yet Foucault also resisted comradeship: he was too old, too skeptical about revolutionary action in France.[19] Not long after he was "jubilant" about protest action, he was trying to escape the campus as fast as possible.

Soon after Foucault's departure from Vincennes, his former colleagues also began talking about the decline of radicalism, and even blamed each other for it

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[17] "Le piège de Vincennes," *Le Nouvel Observateur* 274, 9-15 February 1970, pp. 33–35. See also http://www.ipt.univ-paris8.fr/hist/documents/vincennes/Foucaut-Vadrot/Foucault_70.htm.

[18] Charles Soulié (1998) has observed that Foucault's ambivalence can be read as a reflection of his own ambiguous position as a "producer" (of new philosophical work) within a philosophical field dominated by "reproduction."

[19] There is also an undated "intervention" from this period, said to be written by Foucault, in which he declares that he was not a comrade. "Messieurs," the text says, "I can't call you Comrades, being a scoundrel [crapule] myself. I ought to say that all professors are crap [des ordures]. They're always late, and make a profession of cultivating lateness… The product we're producing is scholarly lies; THAT'S WHAT THE STATE IS PAYING US FOR; and that's what our scholarly student-monkeys are so eager to acquire" (Foucault in Djian 2009:71). The text has been reprinted in anthologies about the university, and its tone is certainly colorful. It seems to me out of keeping with Foucault's normally guarded style of self-expression, and some my friend Ishmael (see Ch. 2) argued that it was a fake, that it said what Foucault "should have said" rather than being anything that he ever wrote.

(e.g. Rancière 2012:76). There was a long discourse on how the radicality of 1968 was long in the past. And yet, I would argue, radical politics at Vincennes never really vanished. It persisted and took new forms among new generations. Philosophical radicalism was a *collective* project that exceeded any individual trajectory. And it remained marked by a hypercriticality, a hyper-reflexivity, verging on political melancholy. As James Williams notes of French cultural production at large, May 1968 left behind "a combination of melancholy and nostalgia for the brief flickerings of a utopian moment all-too-quickly smothered, compounded by anger and resentment that the revolution had been falsified by both the left and the right" (2011:282).

The making of a radical reputation

At Paris 8's inception, class analysis and Marxism-Leninism remained central categories of disciplinary critique. "As the class struggle broke out openly inside the university [in May 1968], the status of the 'theoretical' was thrown into doubt, though not by the perennial blabber about praxis and the concrete, but by the reality of a mass ideological revolt" (Rancière 2011:129). After debates in Autumn 1968 about the Department's project, Alain Badiou drafted a mission statement for the Department. He was then a young Maoist; thirty years later he would become a successful French Theorist on the Anglophone theory book market. In his mission statement, he pictured philosophy as "a particular form of intervention in class struggle, on the specific field of ideological struggle," and he argued that "the absolutely progressive line is represented by Marxist-Leninist forms of intervention on the philosophical front." Disavowing "scholastic classes on Marxism," he argued instead for an immediately political philosophy. "We [*on*]

will aim to bring concepts to life by effectively incorporating them into political analysis and practice" (Badiou in Dormoy-Rajramanan 2004:53-4).

Badiou's text never became a political consensus in its milieu. Not even close. But it still served as a model for a collective form of utopian investment. In this, it borrowed from the conventions of Marxist culture, with its characteristic forms of socialized optimism. Consider such typical symbols as the Communist Manifesto, the "Internationale," or the Little Red Book: these can become externalized forms of utopian hope that one can return to as the need arises. Badiou's text conjured up an *impersonal* utopianism, centered outside of individual consciousness. When he argued that "the task of philosophy teaching is thus to help implant in the student masses the theoretical preponderance of Marxism-Leninism," the image is of political commitment "implanted" from the outside.

In any event, Badiou's text was in no way expected to create subjective interiority. No one denied that everyone at Vincennes had their own subjective and political commitments, and no one tried to shift them by persuasion or even fiat. Yet texts like Badiou's sought to organize a rudimentary horizon of collective investment that lay beyond subjectivity. They conjured up a consensus radicalism that could transcend political differences, at least in moments of protest effervescence. The Department's General Assembly declared in 1970 that "Revolutionary political action has always had its place in the department… To protect the presence of revolutionary militants among us, the department has always shown complete solidarity and unity, across any political divergences."[20]

The first years of the Department nevertheless saw bitter internal conflicts, often advanced in polemical pamphlets. The orthodox Communists were hostile to the far left, insisting that philosophy students were "destined to enter the labor

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[20] "Le Baron Guichard repart en campagne: des artichauds à la philosophie," tract signed l'Assemblée générale du département de philosophie, probably dated January 1970. Personal archives of Charles Soulié.

market," largely as teachers. They insisted — and their insistence still resonated decades later — that the Department was not serving underprivileged students through its anarchic refusal of student assessment and traditional curricula.[21] The far left, meanwhile, denounced their professors for retreating into teaching theory and abandoning revolutionary practice.[22] Philosophy teachers were not necessarily unsympathetic to this view. A group of them wrote that "PHILOSOPHY ITSELF IS WALLED UP IN THE UNIVERSITY, LET'S BREAK DOWN THE WALL."[23] The classroom itself was an anarchic space in these days, liable to be interrupted by strikes or activist interventions. An anonymous comedian lampooned the Department's functioning, depicting it as a theatre of ants trapped in hackneyed "radical" debates inside a fishbowl.[24]

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[21] "La situation des étudiants est transitoire," undated communiqué de l'UECF Vincennes, Cercle Philosophie. Personal collection of Charles Soulié.

[22] "Où l'on voit un constat d'échec dans le Département de Philosophie," Comité de base, March 1969. Personal collection of Charles Soulié.

[23] "La philosophie est une chose trop sérieuse pour qu'on la laisse aux mains des philosophes," undated post-1970 communiqué signed "Un groupe d'enseignants du département de Philo de Paris VIII." Personal collection of Charles Soulié.

[24] "Du fonctionnement départemental de la philosophie," undated text. Personal collection of Charles Soulié.

ORIENTATION GENERALE DU DEPARTEMENT

Dès sa fondation, le département de philosophie a adopté les principes suivants :

1) Refus de toute hiérarchie pédagogique entre les diverses catégories d'enseignants.

2) Refus de toute "progressivité" dans les études : les étudiants choisissent librement les UV qui leur conviennent pour l'obtention de leurs diplômes, et celà dans l'ordre qu'ils jugent utile.

3) Discussion entre étudiants et enseignants, au début de chaque semestre, du thème d'UV proposé par le ou les enseignants, et des modalités de déroulement des recherches.

4) Possibilité de réunir, dans un même groupe, des UV dont plusieurs enseignants ont la responsabilité (y compris en relation avec d'autres départements).

5) Nécessité d'orienter les recherches dans le sens d'une critique des institutions et des pouvoirs actuels (ce qui implique aussi bien une référence aux textes qui légitiment ou qui critiquent ces institutions et ces pouvoirs, qu'à leur pratique - jusqu'à "aller y voir" sur le terrain).

6) Nécessité de relier ces analyses critiques à leurs implications, c'est-à-dire au problème politique.

The "General Orientation of the Department" in 1977 rejected academic hierarchy and a linear curriculum, insisting instead on students choosing their own courses, on student input in course topics, on the possibility of co-taught and multidisciplinary courses, and on the legitimacy of political critique and action.[25]

Over the course of the 1970s, collective representations in the Philosophy Department became less overly revolutionary, less oriented towards class struggle, and less Marxist.[26] By the late 1970s, François Châtelet would write that the

[25] "Philosophie" course brochure, 1977–78, Paris 8 University Library (ask the librarian for the old course brochures, but I forgot to keep track of which box it's in), p.3.

[26] Badiou observed: "Là comme ailleurs, le bilan renégat et droitier du mouvement des années 66-75 l'a emporté, pour des raisons subjectives et politiques: les anciennes catégories de la politique, venues du marxisme-léninisme, étaient obsolètes. Mais, après tout, l'expérience qu'il en était ainsi devait être faite" (1992:1). He also claimed that his 1980s *Organisation Politique* was "the

Department was oriented around a generically radical principle of "disparity without hierarchy." He also reported a collective attachment to "culture" as "not only [an] instrument, but [as the] exercise of freedom" — and thus as a value that transcended official careerism and the capitalist labor market. This more generic, non-revolutionary radicalism lasted into the 21st century. Without the commitment of revolutionary class struggle, it was no longer so menacing. The *form* of Badiou's radical mission statement wound up outliving the revolutionary subjectivities that had initially produced it. The flux of collective, impersonal radical discourse ultimately made it possible to attribute political radicalism to the very *space* of Vincennes. In the end, this radicalism was still ascribed to the milieu even after revolutionary practices dwindled.

Precarious teachers on strike

Increasing reflexivity was also rooted in local labor relations. Strikes were common at Vincennes. Contract workers struck over contract renewal; administrative staff struck over space allocation (Soulié 2012). In the Philosophy Department, labor consciousness intensified in the early 1970s. A harsh *critique* of labor came to focus on the adjunct or contingent teaching workforce. The French term for an adjunct university teacher is *chargé de cours*, probably best translated as "part-time contract instructor" or "adjunct instructor" in U.S. jargon. A large number of these were hired at the Vincennes Philosophy Department. According to Gilles Deleuze's biographer François Dosse, "Since everybody had invited their friends to sign up to teach a course, the number of part-time teachers had increased to at least fifty, many of whom never bothered to turn up to teach" (2010:349).

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only legitimate heir of Vincennes as it was in the first years" (p. 2). See also https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/alain-badiou-political-action-organisation-politique/

A former Brazilian part-timer reported being told on his arrival at the Department, in the mid-1970s, that "This department, it's a total mess, it's in shambles." His assessment of his fellow precarious teachers was skeptical:

"The last thing anyone asked was if they were competent."

"They were accepted as they were."

"Everyone was free to teach whatever he wanted, or not to teach at all…. There were big names, politicians, people who knew no philosophy [*nuls en philosophie*], who knew nothing period."[27]

The Department seemed to become a space of freedom and multiculturalism — at least, for men. "There was a pleasure in coming here," the Trotskyist Henri Weber recounted, "because there was this liberty, and this quality among the students. Above all, in reality, they were there because they wanted to learn, to comprehend, to refine, without any professional concerns."[28] But this space of freedom had limits, at least for the teaching workforce.

In 1973, the department chair Châtelet began an initiative to cut down the number of part-time precarious staff, apparently under budgetary pressure. His eminent colleague Jean-François Lyotard (famous for *The Postmodern Condition*) was caught in the middle of the process, and wrote a defensive statement about it. "Rightly or wrongly," Lyotard wrote, "the 'criterion' was adopted of attendance [at work] measured by public opinion. The collective of permanent professors [*des titulaires*] compiled a list of 22 part-time staff [to eliminate]. It raised anger and protests from some of those removed… Châtelet gave a mandate to Badiou, Linhart, Regnault and Rancière to implement the collective decision on part-

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[27] This and the other interview data in this section derive from Charles Soulié's collection of unpublished interviews, which he conducted in 2014.

[28] ARTE, *Vincennes, l'Université Perdue* (timestamp 49:30).

timers." Lyotard claimed that these young Maoists had played favorites along the way, creating what he called "a Jacobin-Bolshevik-style normalizing operation."[29]

The sociologist Charles Soulié later interviewed one of the co-organizers of the protest. She retorted retrospectively to Lyotard that, whatever the motivation was, "the situation for those removed would have been the same: deprived of their jobs and of their meagre livings." She recalled a gendered subtext to the affair. "You've fired all the girls!" she had protested to a chastened Châtelet. But while she recognized the force of personal connection in the Department, she insisted that the part-time staff pool was organized around a political logic.

> The part-time teachers were not the professors' personal associates. They were each supposed to represent the political stripes of activist groups linked to May 68 — former Althusserians, Maoists from the GP [*Gauche Prolétarienne*], Trotskyists, and "anarcho-désirants" as we ironically called them. The part-timers didn't do much at the Department but they were supposed to work — which at the time meant political organizing — elsewhere. Their integration in the Department was based on their militant activity, supposed to be representative of the social movement, a source of experience, of knowledge…. The Philosophy Department was made to be a resonance chamber, a political forum for the major events of the time. That was the logic of hiring.[30]

Ultimately, the precarious teachers' protests were successful — and they saved their own jobs — thanks to an intervention by the campus president, Claude Frioux. Frioux was a Communist who faced bitter opposition from the Maoists and Trotskyists in the Philosophy Department. After a number of precarious teachers invaded his office, Frioux offered them support in their protest against the Philosophy Department leadership, going so far as to withhold the pay of some tenured professors "as long as they kept insisting on firing the part-timers."

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[29] Lyotard, unpublished statement, Department of Philosophy, 1973.
[30] Soulié, unpublished interview, 2014.

The Department abandoned its initiative, and some part-time staff were later offered permanent teaching positions.

But it is a telling commentary on labor politics at the Department that the tenured professors, and particularly the Maoist men, were miffed that they had not gotten their way. Rancière, who comes across as such a righteous radical in his books, preferred to erase the protests itself from history, stating that "There was a clash between us, the *maîtres-assistants* [junior professors] and the professors (Châtelet, Deleuze, Lyotard) over a shady story with the part-timers." The protests vanished from his formulation. So did any sense of precarious workers having agency, not to mention the existence of women in the Department. Rancière added a bit vindictively that "after [the clash] we stopped caring about departmental affairs" (2012:38-39). When the university moved to Saint-Denis, he had said, "I think the people here aren't unhappy that it's over. After all, they got the best of leftism, it was time to break it off."[31]

Strangely, in the aftermath of the strike, it sounds as if the Department became increasingly depoliticized. The majority of the professors got off with a minimum of governance work, while the minority who ran the Department did what they liked, in a classic mutual connivance.[32] This tradition of indifference lasted for decades, even after Châtelet's death in 1985. In 1988, the pragmatist philosopher Jacques Poulain was hired as the new chair. He stayed in office a remarkable 22 years, until 2010. "It was by arrangement" that Poulain stayed so long, an old-timer told me, "it was convenient for everybody." "No one wanted to do it?" I queried. "No one, right."

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[31] Quoted in Guy Hocquenghem, "La Chute de Paris 8," *Libération*, June 6, 1980. http://www.ipt.univ-paris8.fr/hist/Articles/Journaux/Demenagements/LIBERATION_1980_06_10_P4.jpg

[32] Rancière recollected that after 1974, Châtelet "would call Deleuze and Lyotard on the telephone to ask what they thought, and then he'd call us, saying, here's what needs doing, you agree? We agreed. In any case we couldn't care less" (Rancière 2012:39).

Death and historicity

French philosophy had a hard time in the 1970s. University philosophy enroll-
ments collapsed nationwide. In 1968 more than a thousand students received
undergraduate philosophy degrees (the *license*). By 1980, the figure had fallen to
575, having peaked in 1973 at 1211. The old, vast University of Paris was divided
into thirteen branch campuses; the Experimental University Center at Vincennes
became the University of Paris 8 in 1971. At Paris 8, philosophy enrollments also
declined steeply after the Department lost its national accreditation in 1970,
although they climbed again in the second half of the decade. Philosophy's
national crisis was also exacerbated by controversial educational reforms (GREPH
1977), and university teaching jobs for philosophers declined in the latter part of
the decade.

Meanwhile at Vincennes, the Philosophy Department was less an object to
itself than a subject position from which to criticize *other* objects. The Depart-
ment's male professoriate remained nothing if not reflexive about the changing
spirit of the times, as a newly anti-revolutionary philosophy began to take shape in
France. The melodramatic figure of the pentinent ex-radical was exemplified by
André Glucksmann, a former Maoist and former Vincennes adjunct teacher.[33]
Glucksmann and other so-called "New Philosophers" did well by their anti-
Marxism, in a political moment marked by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag
Archipeligo*. They soon became more publicly influential than their left-wing

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[33] Glucksman had actually sought to get a permanent teaching job in the Department, but
withdrew his application after getting into a debate with Foucault (Soulié 2012).

counterparts.[34] Nevertheless, the Philosophy Department did produce an impressive series of critical books in the 1970s, such as Châtelet's *The Philosophy of the Professors* (1970), Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1972/1983), Rancière's *Althusser's Lesson* (1974/2011), and Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979/1984). And the Department stayed involved in public debates; Deleuze gave the New Philosophers a famously cranky putdown, "their thought is worthless [*nulle*]." He added: "They do have a certain newness about them: rather than form a school, they have introduced France to literary or philosophical marketing in France."[35]

Deleuze, always a prominent figure, evidently did not foresee that his own aura was becoming central to the marketing of his own department. The growing need for radical marketing went along with an evolving culture of self-memorialization and self-dignification. The University of Paris 8 started getting books written about itself in the late 1970s, after the first Chirac government began threatening the university's existence in July 1976 (Brunet et al. 1979:27). These threats culminated in the University's forced "transfer" to Saint-Denis in 1980.

As the 1970s slipped into the 1980s, the Department increasingly made the "political and social contexts of philosophy" into an object of analysis rather than a space of engagement. The original department leadership died or retired in the 1980s, and the sixties student radicals, approaching middle age, began to replace them institutionally. In 1988, when Jacques Poulain was hired as department chair, the Department's self-presentation became palpably more academic.

> Founded in 1969 by Michel Foucault at the same time as the Experimental University Center of Vincennes … The Department of Philosophy has

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[34] François Cusset notes, for instance, that Jacques Rancière's radical history project, *Revoltes Logiques*, remained a tiny niche project by comparison to the Nouveaux Philosophes (Cusset 2008:311).

[35] Deleuze (2006:139, 141). The published translation renders *nulle* as "empty," but I prefer "worthless."

played an important role in intellectual life in France and abroad. François Châtelet, Gilles Deleuze and Jean François Lyotard taught there for more than fifteen years. The Department of Philosophy has concerned itself primarily with the analysis of the historical contexts and political implications of philosophies. While maintaining this interest, the department has opened itself to aesthetics and analytic philosophies, and has confirmed its interest in phenomenology. Once again accredited for its graduate programs, the department hopes to finish the accreditation process (undergraduate program) in time for the 1990-1991 academic year.[36]

Name recognition had obviously always been part of the Department's appeal — whence the initial power of well-known figures such as Foucault and Deleuze. But by the late 1980s, with the Great Men gone, the Department opted instead to memorialize them in its own radical Pantheon. This parade of Great Men's names — initially Foucault, Châtelet, Deleuze and Lyotard, with Badiou and Rancière added later on — soon became a permanent fixture in the Department's public self-presentation. These names provided an immense dose of legitimacy. Foucault had left in 1970 and died in 1984; Châtelet died in 1985; and both Deleuze and Lyotard had retired in 1987. The names became available for Departmental marketing once the men — always men — had disappeared.

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[36] *PRESENTATION DU DEPARTEMENT DE PHILOSOPHIE*

Fondé en 1969 en même temps que le Centre Universitaire Expérimental de Vincennes par Michel Foucault […] Le Département de philosophie a joué un rôle important dans la vie intellectuelle en France et à l'étranger. François Châtelet, Gilles Deleuze, Jean François Lyotard, y ont enseigné pendant plus de quinze ans. Le Département de Philosophie s'est attaché prioritairement à l'analyse des contextes historiques et des implications politiques des philosophies. Tout en maintenant cet intérêt, le département s'est ouvert à l'esthétique, aux philosophies analytiques et a confirmé son intérêt pour la phénoménologie. De nouveau habilité depuis plusieurs années en troisième cycle, Maîtrise et License, le département espère achever le processus d'habilitation (Premier cycle) lors de la rentrée 1990–1991.

François Châtelet.

Michel Foucault et Gilles Deleuze.
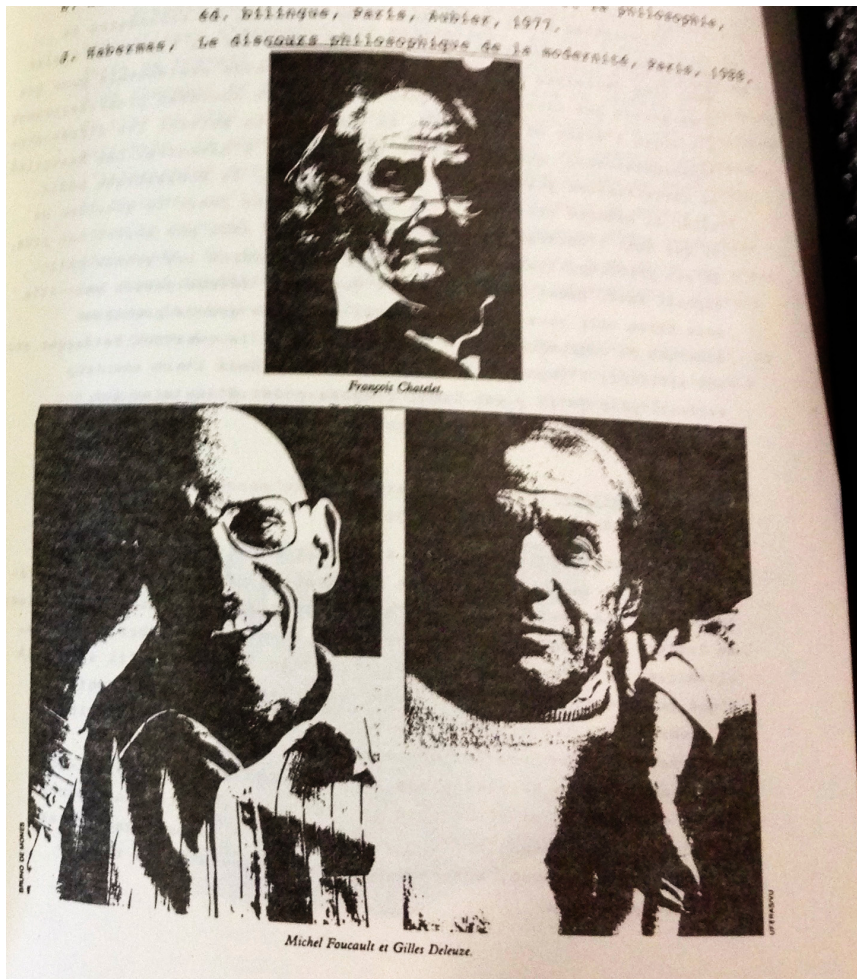
The Department's star figures (Foucault, Deleuze and Châtelet), pictured in the 1988-89 course brochure.

Meanwhile, traditional academic concerns came back in force in the late 1980s, as Poulain succeeded Châtelet as department chair. The lack of national accreditation posed a serious obstacle to students, whose diplomas were not nationally recognized. After fifteen years of languishing outside the French

accreditation system, the Department decided to return to the fold. The Department's mission statement began to mention traditional philosophical fields, such as aesthetics and phenomenology, alongside political commitments, and it invested even more deeply in internationalism (Chapter 3). The memory of radicalism lingered, but in an increasingly symbolic sense.

My friend Marcel said, "We're living on myths. We're living on figures who are no longer there. We're living to some extent on credit."

The revolution wrapped in cellophane

By the time of my arrival in France, radical nostalgia for Vincennes had become a major source of ambivalence across the Paris 8 campus. Student radicals, and even some professors, denounced the stream of 1960s reminiscences. "I rapidly perceived that the ritual invocation of Vincennes and of the Great Ancestors was serving as a screen for some pretty sorry clannish practices," commented a disenchanted former professor in 2009 (Brossat and Rogozinski 2009:17). The growth of historical self-consciousness only amplified a local culture of disappointed utopianism.

Campus entrance in June 2009.

This became vividly apparent in the politics of campus space. When I first arrived at Paris 8 in June 2009, just at the end of a nation-wide university protest movement (Rose 2014), the entryway of the university showed marks of large-scale militancy. A huge pile of chairs was left over from a blockade, militant slogans like "long live the armed struggle" dotted the walls, and the glass doors to the hall were cracked and tattered. But when I came back in the autumn, the entry hall had been closed down, and construction crews were at work. They painted over the graffiti, replaced the cracked glass doors with a glass wall, and installed display cases just in time for the university's 40th anniversary.

Campus entrance in February 2010.

When the construction work was done, the former entrance hall had become an art gallery, with potted plants, glossy posters, a film screening room and track lighting; it was decorated in the campus's official colors, black and red, rich in militant connotations. The first exhibit to occupy the space was called "From Vincennes to Saint-Denis: An alphabet," a retrospective exhibit on the university's history that had 27 alphabetically named panels, from *Autonomie* to *Zizanie* by way of *Expérimental, Imaginaire, Populaire*, and so forth.[37] I felt an immediate

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[37] There were 27 instead of 26 panels in the exhibition because M (Monde) occupied two panels.

sense of irony when I saw how the built environment had been transformed. The political present had been effaced by a nostalgic image of the political past. A chaotic, living political space had been turned into a guarded memorial to 1968.

In theory, the exhibition celebrated the university's anti-hierarchical project. "We had pulverized the sacred image of the Professor," one text reflected. But in practice, the exhibition was useful to the extant hierarchy. I saw the campus president getting his portrait taken in the exhibit hall. Meanwhile, most student activists of my acquaintance denigrated the exhibition. "The revolution wrapped in cellophane," one student called it.

The exhibition prominently featured the Great Men of the Philosophy Department. Daniel Bensaïd, the estwhile Trotskyist leader from 1968, contributed a melancholy text entitled "Resistance."

Resisting the irresistible.

One can only forgive the unforgivable, the philosopher said.

In the same way, perhaps, one can only resist the irresistible.

Resistance is indissociable from that which sets itself up as its obstacle, and thus from death, which is its ultimate obstacle. I resist, therefore I am. To the point of agony.

...To resist is always to resist "that which one fears one cannot resist." Resistance is not a commandment, an assignment, a designation to some sublime mission. It is always threatened with remaining in the grip of that which it resists, of bearing its marks, of accepting its subaltern status. There

is, however, an unconditional refusal in the act of resistance, an ancient tensing of the back of the neck that refuses to bend, an "experiment in freedom" and in courage.[38]

It was a deeply citational text. The first line is a riff on Jacques Derrida's argument that "one can only forgive the unforgivable," quickly followed by the Cartesian joke that "I resist, therefore I am." Repainted here in red and black, Descartes' argument about thought got twisted in a quite bodily direction. Resistance became a "tensing of the back of the neck," a matter of "not bending" in the face of "the grip" of the status quo, of processing one's fear of acquiescence, even of encountering one's "agony."

Bensaïd himself died the month before the exhibition opened.

But not everyone in this milieu felt the same agonies. Agony, like resistance, proved to be deeply gendered. We have just seen how, after 1968, the loss of revolutionary hopes led into a period of philosophical radicalism that was increasingly depoliticized and somewhat defensive. Let us now examine the spaces of gender, power and exclusion that organized the Department's space.

Interlude — How I was welcomed

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[38] The text appears to be a recycled and modified version of Bensaïd's 1998 interview with Françoise Proust, called "Résister à l'irrésistible." See http://danielbensaid.org/Resister-a-l-irresistible?lang=fr, consulted Nov. 12, 2013.

It was an everyday moment at Paris 8. Outside the workshop for doctoral students, the windows whitened with shards of rain. The sky was blank, and trees whose leaves were at last fully dark with summer reached nearly up to the skyline of the high rise apartments down the street. Massive graffiti faced us from the opposing wall. There was a handsome green carpet like a sea with only a few mudstains, and the chairs were even padded. That day's presenter had a black sweater over a pink shirt, a rad purse, a mechanical pencil, and had never spoken publicly in French before.

The view outside the Philosophy Department where people liked to smoke.

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"You're entering into a pretty special tribe," a female professor told me, "because, as everyone here must have told you, it was an experimental university —"

"—In the past tense!" I interjected.

"Yes, yes, completely past, indeed […] So you've arrived in a commemorative context in the institution. I can assure you that, in a way, you've made the right choice, because you've arrived at a moment where a social totality is showing itself, revealing itself in our festivals — these anthropological things."

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"In every institution, even the stupidest of institutions, the silliest, there's a bit of thought [*un peu de pensée*]," said the department chair, Patrice Vermeren, in his course on Philosophies of the People. "And thus for Foucault, critique consists of bringing this thought to light. Foucault's idea is that there's always some thought, even in wordless attitudes. So what does it mean to practice critique in such circumstances? Practicing critique means showing that nothing is as obvious as one might have believed. It's an indictment of the obvious. Critique, performing the critical gesture, has the effect that what was self-evident is now no longer self-evident. So to practice critique, for Foucault, is to make difficult overly facile gestures."

Vermeren was giving, in essence, a lecture.

I asked him about that later, since it seemed inconsistent with the participatory ideals of his university. "I see a lot of passivity at Paris 8," I said. "The pedagogy seems traditional, the students don't talk a lot in class."

"Yes," he said, "it's something I'm conscious of, it's something I do myself. This pedagogy is what's expected of us. If I don't give a lecture [*faire cours*], people are disappointed."

Speaking of traditions: to this day, the Philosophy Department has never had a female department chair [*directrice*].

2. LEFT PATRIARCHY

The reflexivity of patriarchy

Left patriarchy was a problem that the Philosophy Department had not solved by the time of my research. Early on in France, I sensed the masculine norm that dominated my fieldsite, but I felt I did not know how to talk about it. It seemed omnipresent and impervious to analysis: in a word, *naturalized*. This force of naturalization, I realized belatedly, also affected many of the subjects within the Department. "The philosophical relationship is essentially masculine," wrote a male professor. "There's a masculine norm here," I said once to a female professor; "in philosophy departments, that's normal," she responded matter-of-factly. Neither of these professors were entirely *uncritical* of this norm. Indeed, they had a degree of ironic reflexivity about it. This paradox gives us a point of departure: how can patriarchy be at once naturalized *and* a space for a certain self-consciousness? I propose in this chapter to explore this paradox in comparative terms, comparing men's and women's discourses, perceptions, and forms of belonging.[1]

The version of left patriarchy I found in the Philosophy Department was not a static or singular norm. It was an ongoing, but unstable coalition of historical processes. I do not see it as a direct reflection of "French culture" or of Western

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[1] I did not encounter anyone in my fieldsite who recognizably fell outside the conventional gender binary.

philosophy in general, even though both of these have longue durée masculinist histories. Rather, left patriarchy at Paris 8 was refracted through new institutions that had been created in *response* to May 1968. Patriarchal structures had been reinscribed at the inception of the University of Paris 8, where "power came from the end of the phallus." Forty years later, they were still reproduced. In the Philosophy Department, the multiplicity of left patriarchy made it flexible and durable, as it worked on several fronts simultaneously.

Intellectually, left patriarchy in the Philosophy Department organized the range of standard references, the parameters of the local philosophical canon, the topics of courses, the authors on the reading lists, and the masculine ego ideals that permeated the resulting pantheons. Politically, left patriarchy organized an arena of internal conflict within the Department, in which men fought with each other over the terms of institutional reproduction. Interpersonally, left patriarchy organized the whole structure of local social relationships, creating a series of male friend circles and gendered habits of recognition. Affectively, left patriarchy filled the milieu with gendered moods, rhythms of interaction, and regimes of mocking laughter. And corporeally, left patriarchy organized the relationships between bodies and the symbolic processes of sexualization, objectification, and exclusion that kept many women on the institutional margins, where they were vulnerable to gendered violence.

Naturalization emerged from the confluence of these different kinds of masculine processes. Collectively, they saturated local realities to the point where they constituted a more general norm, a default situation, a standard cultural repertoire. Left patriarchy thus acquired a more general, systemic quality, coming to organize local relations to history and to the future, providing vocabularies and repertoires for social action, and steering the political imagination. This chapter explores the experiences and histories that reproduced left patriarchy as a long-lasting social formation.

Warmth among men

Gender relations are rooted in everyday life, and as I went about my research, I discovered Saint-Denis as a lived space, full of families and ex-relationships, sociability and homosociality. Much of this centered around my closest friend in the field — a loquacious white French doctoral student who, when asked to pick his own pseudonym, said "Call me Ishmael." So I will call him Ishmael: a self-conscious literary reference that colors this ethnographic work with an unavoidable theatricality. At one point he was close to his male professors, being known for his forceful presence, but after many internal clashes, he fell out of favor. As I write, Ishmael still lives in Saint-Denis, where for the past decade he has been finishing his doctoral dissertation and facing intense economic precarity. I am no longer sure whether he will ever finish his dissertation, although no doubt he ought to write this book instead of me, since I owe him a great deal of my local knowledge.

My friendship with Ishmael was premised on social exchange and mutual recognition (or was it misrecognition?). When Ishmael moved into a new home in September 2010, I volunteered to help him move in. The apartment was in a newly renovated, high-security building on a broad avenue near downtown Saint-Denis. The street was bright as a dream, the sidewalks dotted with proletarian wanderers[2]. Young men ate together in little cafes, while shops sold cigarettes, shaving supplies, croissants and gyro sandwiches. Ishmael's moving van, crammed tight with boxes and furniture, was parked beside a produce shop. As I arrived to offer my modest services, I was introduced to Ishmael's father, his father-in-law and his brother-in-law. Our mutual friend Marcel, another philosophy doctoral

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[2] On walking in the banlieues, see Silverstein (2004).

student, also showed up to carry boxes, which is how I discovered that Marcel and Ishmael, whom I had often seen together on campus, were close friends. Ishmael's partner Anne arrived a bit later, with their baby strapped to her chest in a white sling. It was a conventionally gendered scene: men carried boxes while a woman cared for a baby.

Abandoning ourselves to the hasty flux and semi-chaos that accompanies big moves, we left the doors propped open and moved boxes into the foyer, circumventing all the security systems. The furniture left little craters in the walls of the elevator; the box of Jacques Rancière's famous journal, *Révoltes Logiques*, was inordinately heavy. Ishmael, in a rushing state of stress, was uncharacteristically untalkative. The two fathers worked together closely, while Anne's brother managed to squeeze the bookshelves into the low-ceilinged elevator, twisting them at odd angles. In idle moments, I gnawed on a sandwich I'd bought across the street, which inspired Anne and her brother to go out and look for food of their own. Anne, Ishmael and the baby had arrived in Paris by train, while their fathers had brought the moving van from southern France. It had been a major family endeavor.

After we finished the lobby, I finally got to come upstairs and see the apartment. People were eating homegrown tomatoes and pre-sliced lunch meats. A thicket of boxes covered the living room like a cubist spectacle. Anne was disappointed to find that the apartment lacked sunshine, facing north. "Still, you can see the sky, there's a lot of light," Marcel added reparatively. The light splashed up and over the facing buildings across the street. In all the commotion, I was never officially introduced to Anne, which left me feeling shy and then self-conscious. The two fathers meanwhile investigated the apartment's electrical system, flipping circuit breakers back and forth to map them to outlets.

The apartment was typical of how French social life gets divided into public and private spheres. The public-facing living room, with a kitchen nook in a corner, was separated by a door from the private realm, which had its own tiny

hallway, two bedrooms, a bathroom and a toilet. In the kitchen nook, bare wires dangled where an overhead light should have been. Little carpentry projects began. Someone proposed hooks for a clothesline. I told Marcel about breaking up with my partner that summer; he made sympathetic noises.

Ishmael and Anne only relaxed when everything was brought in from the truck. The baby woke up and nursed. Conversation drifted. A friend from the Philosophy Department had checked into a psychiatric hospital. We got to talking about the worst students that Marcel and Ishmael were teaching; they were among the small minority of doctoral students who got teaching fellowships. One of Marcel's students had turned in an analysis of Deleuze that got everything completely backwards, and even attributed Nicholas Sarkozy's legislative victory to the Jews. "Don't waste your time on this guy!" I said. "Well, we're not going to be friends," Marcel explained, "but Paris 8 has lots of people like this — it goes with the territory."

When I was finally ready to go home, Marcel decided to set out as well. Ishmael kissed us both as we left, with the cheek kisses (*les bises*) that, among straight French men, are generally reserved for women and close male friends. The kiss was masculine homosociality at its best (Hammarén and Johansson 2014): full of inarticulate, unquestioned warmth that flourished in the absence of any label more specific than "friendship." Such a gesture was new to me at the time, and thus memorable. It was a highly ritualized gesture: the intimacy of a faint brush of skin was carefully regulated by habit and convention. But in this context, the *bises* started to give me a feeling of being, momentarily, *inside* a volatile, guarded ring: the guarded world of masculine reproduction in the departmental milieu. If you were inside that ring, its homosocial warmth could easily start to feel comfortable, ordinary, and natural. In a *bise*, social relations are ratified. Naturalization sets in motion.

This zone of masculine homosociality was not internally homogenous. Does it change your sense of it to know that Marcel was a child of a Franco-Algerian

family? The zone of sociality at the heart of the Philosophy Department remained predominantly white and French, but it included certain kinds of social difference. Though not all. I asked a female professor once if we could meet and talk about the life of the department. She responded tersely that she had nothing to do with the life of the department. Her response resonated with a longer history of women's exclusion.

Sketch of a history of gender relations

Philosophical belonging had been deeply gendered since the Philosophy Department's birth at Vincennes. Under Foucault's leadership in 1969-1970, the initial teaching staff included twelve men and three women.[3] All of the women were at the bottom of the institutional hierarchy.[4] Houria Sinaceur was a 28-year-old philosopher of mathematics and logic who soon left Vincennes, going on to a very successful career in the French academy. Judith Miller, the teacher who was soon fired for her radical views, was a *maître assistant* (senior instructor) and, coincidentally or not, the daughter of Jacques Lacan. Her colleague Jeannette Colombel was a *chargée de cours* (part-time instructor); she was a longtime Communist philosophy teacher who had quit the Party in 1968 to move farther to the left (Dormoy-Rajramanan 2012).

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[3] "Programme du Département de Philosophie de Vincennes en 1968-1969," in Soulié 2012:456.

[4] The French permanent academic hierarchy at that point ran from *professeur* (professor) to *maître de conférences* (roughly associate professor), *maître assistant* (senior instructor), and *assistant* (instructor), followed by the contingent *chargé de cours* (part-time contract instructor).

As feminist organizing intensified in the early 1970s, additional women teachers were hired — albeit into precarious part-time positions. The curriculum subsequently included sporadic courses on women's issues. Yet the Department's early women hires were institutionally marginalized. Their continued presence was contingent upon personal support from the male leadership. Eventually, a few women were recruited as tenured professors, but the male-dominated social dynamic of the department did not evolve radically over subsequent decades. As of this writing, the Department has never reached gender parity among teaching staff or students.

Meanwhile, the Philosophy Department doubled down on masculine academic capital, constituting the male pantheon we noted in the Introduction. This created further problems of heritage management. When I arrived in the Department in 2009, its original famous men were long gone. Their absence raised questions about patrilineal heritage. What was the Department's identity without its former stars? "It's suffering from a lack of great thinkers, you know?" a female student told me. "Who is there?… They haven't replaced what they once had, historically."

François Châtelet, pictured in the 1986 Philosophy Department course brochure.

As the Great Men of the past disappeared, their colleagues honored them with tributes. René Schérer, a gay specialist in anarchist thought, outlived most of his generation and found himself writing many of the homages. Consider how he recalled Châtelet, the longtime department chair.

> François Châtelet's work is difficult to separate from his gestures, from his voice, from the presence that gave body and force to his thought. I am not able to avoid the moment of an evocation that is not only a pious act, a homage to his memory, but that is necessary, so much did his carnal presence embody seduction, persuasion, luminous authority and communicative certitude. His incisive, illuminating discourse, whether explanatory

or polemical, and which I won't hesitate to call sovereign, still accompanies all my memories, all my readings.

[Schérer 1989:127]

A strong theory of masculine affiliation is embedded in the very notion of homage, which does not just derive from the French word for man, *homme*, but also, etymologically, once designated a feudal vassal's promise of devotion to his lord. I do not want to erase the genuine feeling of attachment that had clearly emerged among the Department's longtime colleagues: Schérer's sense of loss was palpable, even if it was overwrought. Nevertheless, not everyone who left this Department was mourned equally. Not everyone's presence was felt to be carnal, not everyone's polemics were "sovereign," and not everyone was remembered.

Yet the Great Men were consecrated again and again and again. Classes got cancelled during my fieldwork for a Lyotard conference, and Deleuze's lectures were painstakingly getting transcribed in a project led by Burkhalter. When Deleuze and Lyotard retired in 1988, the back cover of the Department's course brochure had commemorated them.

> "I only look at movements……………………………… Your secret: we always see it on your face and in your eye. Lose the face. Become able to love without memory, without fantasy, and without interpretation, without taking stock."
>
> Dialogue excerpt, Gilles DELEUZE
>
> TWO PROFESSORS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSO-PHY RETIRED AT THE END OF LAST YEAR: GILLES DELEUZE AND JEAN-FRANÇOIS LYOTARD. The staff and profes-sors of the Department of Philosophy join together in commending them, in wishing them a happy and creative retirement, while guarding in our

hearts the savor of their presence, the richness of their proximity and the warmth of their friendship.

A sense of warmth lingers around this text, insisting that these Great Men (who have never been anything but names to me) were people with ordinary work relationships. To be sure, "men" named a diverse space in the Department. The Department became a pioneering safe haven for gay men and gay liberation politics. Christelle Dormoy-Rajramanan comments that "the Philosophy Department would be the first [in the university] to welcome them [gay men] and to give them a place" (2004:55). Yet it rarely had the same openness towards feminist or queer women, and its "great thinkers," gay or not, were not necessarily great feminists. Gilles Deleuze was not the only famous man who had issues with women. "Feminism was of little interest to Foucault and had little impact on him," wrote one biographer, adding that Foucault "was not happy when he had to attend formal receptions where he had to be polite to women in long evening gowns" (Macey 2004:109). Foucault's successor as department chair, François Châtelet, wrote in a weird third-person autobiography that "There is another Châtelet: the one who cooks even better than he writes, the one who plays a lively seducer as soon as pretty women populate his environment; the one who has loved for the first time several times…" (Châtelet and Akoun 1977). And when Jean-François Lyotard wrote on women's struggles in the late 1970s, he felt trapped by the masculinity of his efforts to escape masculinity.

> It is a philosopher who is speaking here about relations between men and women. He is trying to escape what is masculine in the very posing of such a question. However, his flight and his strategies probably remain masculine. He knows that the so-called question of a masculine/feminine opposition, and probably the opposition itself, will only disappear as he stops philosophizing: for it exists as opposition only by philosophical (and political) method, that is, by the male way of thinking. [1978:9]

The dominant genres of 1970s radicalism — radical politics and radical philosophy — thus remained masculine zones by default. No doubt, Lyotard erred in eternalizing this state of gender relations, making it out to reflect a timeless "male way of thinking." Nevertheless, forty years later, things had not changed much. In a public statement published in *Libération* in October 2018, sixty women philosophers declared: "In its current state, philosophy thinks primarily 'as a man' while stubbornly pretending to be neutral."[5] They offered an exhaustive list of sexist forms, including discrimination against women in hiring decisions, in-groupy spaces of male-only deliberation, men's tendency to reject any "heterodox" research as "too political," the erasure of women philosophers from the history of the field, and the material structures of academic work, "often irreconcilable with our material lives." Indeed, in speaking to female philosophers, a powerful insistence on the constraints of material lives was omnipresent.

Women on the margins

It was delicate for me to inquire into women's experiences in the Philosophy Department. But these were clearly not homogenous; they varied by age, institutional position, national and racial location, language, and social class. Some female students were open feminists, and some female professors had been feminist pioneers; but open feminism was not a general norm for women in philosophy. There seemed to be safety in women's numbers: female philosophers from Paris 8 signed the October 2018 statement who were otherwise not always known as feminist activists. Indeed, the statement noted that masculine philosophy had defended itself by dividing women into "feminists" and "non-feminists."

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[5] "Combien de philosophEs?" Libération, 16 October 2018, https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2018/10/16/combien-de-philosophes_1685772.

It is nevertheless instructive to compare the experiences of two women professors, one who had been active in the MLF, one somewhat younger and more guarded (with me) about feminist questions. Consider the case of a female professor hired in the 1970s, Marielle Burkhalter. She had participated in the Women's Liberation Movement and subsequently worked, above all, on documentary video production. By the time of my fieldwork, she was approaching retirement, and we never met in person. But when I began to write about gender, I wrote to ask if she would be willing to correspond about gender relations in the Department. She was — with a change of terminology.

> You call the question of "gender" what I would term the exclusion of women. This began — in spite of our presence in the department, and in spite of the 'protection' that we were given — with the exclusion of Judith Miller [in 1970] and continued through the eventual arrival of Mitterrand's daughter in the department. The "power" was and remained masculine, with its unraveling after the historic professors had disappeared.

For Burkhalter, the masculinity of power was the source of women's exclusion even as paternalistic power had also been necessary to their survival. This "protection" notably involved a personal commitment to supporting women from François Châtelet, the Department's chair throughout the 1970s. Paternalism was widespread among the university's male professoriate in that historical moment. "Towards women, they weren't necessarily 'macho,'" recalled Christiane Dufrancatel, the sole woman sociologist in the first days of Vincennes, adding that "they could be quite protective in the framework of a relationship of superiority" (Dufrancatel 2008:42). A "relationship of superiority" seems to have organized women's place in the Philosophy Department as well. And paternal protection could be unreliable, as I learned from Burkhalter by asking about her experience in the Department's early days.

I was a part-time teacher [*chargée de cours*] and there were very few of us women, only four. We too were excluded early on when there were too many part-timers [culminating in the attempt at mass layoffs that we saw in Chapter 1]. But then we were rehired, after protests, in concert with the support for Guy Hocquenghem [a prominent gay writer], who had also been excluded… The arrival of Mitterrand [in 1981] enabled us to obtain the status of instructor [*assistant*], after eight years of part-time status, so we were able to be [permanently] included within the national education system.

Paternal protection had thus not been enough to escape the precarity of her institutional position. It was only the good luck of François Mitterrand's left-wing electoral victory that had offered precarious staff a path to permanent positions. And not all women had been able to take this path, Burkhalter explained, with long-term material consequences. She cited the example of a longtime female contract teacher who had worked closely with a famous male philosopher. This woman had eventually retired with no pension, since part-time teachers had no permanent status or benefits. Women's exclusion was thus not only symbolic or political; it also entailed longterm material inequalities and permanent bargaining with the male power structure. "There was only a single woman who was able to get a position as full professor," Burkhalter mentioned, "and that was only after the unexpected death of her husband, who was supposed to have had the position."

That first woman professor was Antonia Soulez, a senior figure during my fieldwork with a reputation for rigorous engagement with students. I asked her once what it was like to have been the first female professor. She said, with great generosity and to my surprise, that she had not thought about it before. By the time of my fieldwork, in any case, a new generation of younger women philosophers had been hired, including the one who observed that a masculine norm was "normal" in philosophy departments. I will not mention her name, since the issue remains delicate, but I was struck in our conversation by her reflexive sense of the

material constraints imposed by gender. I asked her to elaborate on this masculine norm. Without criticizing any of her colleagues directly, she remarked that it was hard to participate in the Department if you had young children. "The meetings are scheduled for Wednesday morning, and we're explaining, me and [another woman colleague], that we can't come Wednesday morning. And they [*ils*, the masculine pronoun] finally managed to understand that, if they want to gather their forces, they have to move the Wednesday morning meetings."

I am sure she was choosing her words carefully, as a female professor being interviewed by a masculine foreign ethnographer. She did not align herself with a more radical feminist critique of the Department (a critique which was anchored at that point largely by a small group of feminist students). Instead, in a quite materialist fashion, she made plain the forces of gendered exclusion that emerged from the French norm that women were the primary caretakers for young children. Gender thus became infrastructural, getting hidden away in a set of unexamined institutional expectations. Childcare was administratively invisible, for instance, since the normative professor was a man. As I asked about her work life, it became clear how difficult it was to separate work from home.

She showed me a weekly planner with the dates of her courses. "I'm pretty forgetful. I don't have a lot of meetings. No students doing dissertations, which keeps it down. And no students finishing their MAs because I wasn't there last year…"

"So if we take a pretty typical day in your week, what exactly does your work involve? I'm imagining that you work at home, like most [Parisian] professors?"

"Yeah."

"Do you have a little office? Or you work in the living room?"

She laughed. "I have an office, which is my son's bedroom, and I have a big living room that is increasingly turning into a kind of office. But since the bookshelves aren't in the living room, I migrate from one space to another. I don't really have a typical day. I work a lot in bed with my books — my real office, to tell you the truth, is mostly organized around my bed. If that could be mentioned discreetly, anonymously…" She laughed again.

"In reality," she continued, "we're never teaching the same courses, so for me, it takes a ton of work. On Sunday and Saturday, I'm preparing for my Tuesday classes. Wednesday and Thursday, I'm preparing for my Friday classes."

"And usually it's based on a text that you're teaching to your students?"

"No, normally, since I started, I've done research workshops… I read a lot, to be able to present in class, and then, above all, I read student work, since their job is to turn in homework each week. I correct that, and then I use those corrections as the basis for the class session… It's a mix of a class on an author and a class on methodology."

Parisian public university professors rarely had individual offices on their campuses, which were cramped and underfunded. At Paris 8, there was only a shared teachers' lounge (*salle des enseignants*) per department, which had to accommodate student meetings, oral examinations, teaching preparation, storage, eating space, and sometimes administrative workspace. I was not surprised that this female philosopher worked largely at home, like most of her colleagues. But I was struck by the intensity of her teaching labor, with its massive reading and evaluation load. And I was struck by the solitude, in a worklife where the books — themselves predominantly written by men — seemed to be the most constant companions. In this solitude, there was also a respite from the iffy gender dynamics that organized campus life.

Our aggressors are already inside

Starting with the earliest days of this left-wing university, women had been objectified and trivialized, and there were constant reports of sexual assault and harassment. "To be a woman at Vincennes… is regularly to get treated like a sexual commodity, and in case of refusal, to get insulted or physically assaulted; to fear going alone to the bathrooms or to the cafeteria; to carve out a carefully circumscribed territory on campus where you can feel safe."[6] The demographics of the student body evolved over the course of the 1970s, shifting towards a heavily foreign public. An education professor and gay activist, Georges Lapassade, explained in 1977 that "Vincennes has always been a society of men. Now it is a society of foreign men"[7] (Soulié 2012:187). The campus was most likely one of the most racially diverse in France at that point.

This raised questions about how to think about racial difference within feminist spaces. Feminists called sexism "a racism just like others," and feminist organizing acquired an internationalist bent. In 1978, the campus Women's Group [*Groupe Femmes*] was joined by the group of Latino-American women and the Coordination of Black Women, proposing the slogan, "women's oppression has no borders" (Guimier 2019:97). Black women needed their own space, as the Guadeloupian feminist Gerty Dambury recalled, "because we felt insufficiently — or not at all — represented, because we were not allowed to speak and we did not want to be spoken for by others" (2017).

While 1970s politics are heavily documented, I do not have the archival sources for a general history of gender relations or feminist organizing at Paris 8

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[6] Undated political tract, "Etre femmes à Vincennes," reproduced in Guimier 2019:94.
[7] Cited in Soulié 2012:187.

in the 1980s, 1990s, or early 2000s. But I found during my fieldwork, in 2009–11, that feminist politics remained relatively marginal on an otherwise very activist-friendly campus. Gendered sexual violence was a reality in French university spaces, as French activist groups have sought to make clear for decades.[8] Yet administrative processes for handling sexual harassment remained controversial, and official discourses cast campuses as spaces of refuge against hostile environments. In a January 2017 communiqué, left-wing student activists responded to campus securitization with a fierce rejoinder. "While they pretend to 'protect' us by enclosing our universities within an apparatus of security and control, we affirm: our aggressors are already inside!"[9]

When I spoke to a feminist student in the Philosophy Department, Jocelyn, I heard a critique of everyday masculinism that was far removed from public departmental discourse. I must note here that, while I was generally an awkward interviewer, on this issue my awkwardness was even worse than usual. I am embarrassed to read my part of this transcript; yet it demands to be examined.

> *I prefaced my question about gender relations by describing a climate of pervasive, awful sexual harassment in American analytic philosophy, which was documented on blogs such as <u>What is it like to be a woman in philosophy?</u>[10]*

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[8] In 2002, the most prominent national activist group came into existence: CLASCHES, the *Collectif de lutte contre le harcèlement sexuel dans l'enseignement supérieur* (Collective for fighting sexual harassment in higher education). Yet It was only in November 2018 that detailed campus-level research was published on violence against students, including sexual harassment and assault (Lebugle et al. 2018).

[9] "Harcèlement, violences sexuelles et sexistes dans l'enseignement supérieur : défendons-nous !", *Solidaires Etudiant-e-s*, 24 January 2017, https://www.solidaires-etudiant.org/blog/2017/01/24/3536/.

[10] See https://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/.

Eli: But for the [Paris 8 Philosophy] Department, spontaneously I haven't had the impression that it's as bad as that, internally. I haven't had the sense there are acts of sexual harassment that are very—

Jocelyn: No, I think there are.

Eli: Oh? I'm so clueless about this.

Jocelyn (whispering even though we're alone): No, I think there are. But um, without details, meaning that I say it like that and yet... In any case there are profs that I wouldn't want to be around, which is already saying something. And moreover, just the fact of feeling it is already pretty dubious. As is learning, from having talked to others, that there's a certain vibe that I'm not the only one to feel...

I had certainly experienced for myself that the Department was a very male dominated space. But as a male-labeled and male-socialized researcher, I either did not witness or failed to recognize the gendered harassment that Jocelyn described. She readily classified the male professors into two groups.

Jocelyn: So, I think you have two categories [of problem men]. [Firstly,] personally I know of two profs with whom I just would not feel at ease, you know?

Eli: Who are they?

[I'm so embarrassed that I was so indelicate about this topic.]

Jocelyn: It's, um, X. And Y. With whom it absolutely isn't OK. Especially Y because I find — myself, I find that he has a way — a way of looking at me that I find [sharp intake of breath]. You know?

Eli: —Sexual.

It proved very hard to talk about this sort of objectification directly, partly because of my own gendered position, and partly because strategic ambiguity was intrinsic to this mode of male sexualization.

Jocelyn: Yes, but then I say to myself, wait, admittedly I don't know him, I've never taken his class. Possibly he's just getting singled out because I'm speaking definitely here. And then there's X, because I always find him iffy [*limite*] with his women students. I often find him leaving with his women students, you know, alone, along the lines of, going to smoke with the students, you know, on a little bench, in the Paris 8 gardens.

Eli: Yeah.

Jocelyn: So you know, what is this lunacy, right? You know, he's always very physically close to them, and I find that absolutely, truly, very very iffy [*très, très limite*]…. (*Long pause*) Which doesn't say anything whatsoever about what they've actually done, or not, but —

Eli: Right.

Jocelyn: I find it—

Eli: It does create a pretty recognizable impression.

Jocelyn: Yes yes yes. I find it very iffy [*très limite*]. And in any case it wouldn't get you punished for sexual harassment. But still it could be called sexual harassment, what they're doing. So there's a first category [of, in effect, toxic men].

The *iffy* — my translation of *limite* — traced the bounds of Jocelyn's efforts to make sense out of her experiences, which had a certain ambiguity, and yet ultimately were decidedly unambiguous.[11] Indeed, they revealed a strategic use of ambiguity by certain male professors themselves, creating plausible deniability for sexualizing their students. Alongside these specific forms of sexualizing conduct, Jocelyn also noted a more infrastructural sort of sexism embedded in men's habits and ideologies.

Jocelyn: And then you have a second category that's more problematic – where you have at a minimum, these ultra masculinist attitudes. And you find them among practically everybody… That much is quite certain and [intake of breath].

Eli (lost for words): Hmm.

Jocelyn: And then there's the fact that there's no courses whatsoever on questions of gender or sex.

Eli: Yeah, it's shocking.

Jocelyn: It's aberrant. You know, it's aberrant.

Eli: Yeah.

Jocelyn: … And even our friend A, he's sure he's a feminist and all that. But he just doesn't get it, really he doesn't get what it's about… I like him a lot, but he has a real problem with this, and B too. Not in quite the same way as A, but still.

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[11] I owe this point to Megan Steffen (personal communication, 2018).

Eli: It makes me think I should have reacted more strongly to this sort of thing. Because this behavior presupposes at least tacit support from people around them.

Jocelyn: That said, we could have insisted on doing a student seminar on gender questions. Maybe we should still do that. We could have done it, but— [long pause]

Eli: It would be good to hire more women professors.

Jocelyn: Yes, that's for sure.

Eli: I don't really get the sense they're thinking about that.

Jocelyn: But well, that's for sure, yes.

We went on to talk about the longer history of sexual harassment at the university, dating back to the 1970s, and the ongoing struggles to establish institutional procedures for sexual harassment cases.

There was something clandestine about this part of our conversation, as if it was unsafe to talk about these issues.

It seems to me a long-term historical failure of this Philosophy Department that this was still the situation, 40 years after the Women's Liberation Movement began on that very campus.

Interlude — I tried to join a feminist collective

I found French society to be a very gender-normative place, a very binary place. That included the left milieux I knew. I left all my femme clothes at home at the start of fieldwork, and I remember cutting my hair short, anxious about blending in.

But after my first year in France doing research, I was suddenly ready to participate in local life, not just observe it. So I tried to join a campus feminist collective, because I was frustrated with the overwhelming masculinism in local institutional culture. But when I showed up to a meeting of this collective, it turned out to be the first time a nonwoman had ever showed up. This sparked an internal controversy, as the women debated whether to become definitively separatist (women-only) or gender-integrated. In that debate, the political was not necessarily personal, at least for my one friend in the group, a Brazilian Marxist-feminist, who was exceptionally warm and welcoming to me while ardently defending separatist politics. I longed to defend a policy of inclusiveness towards genderqueer people like myself, but I was ineloquent in French and in any case it was obviously not my place to impose my views. Instead I left, feeling dismal about having prompted disagreements in a group I wanted to support.

DROIT A L'AVORTEMENT

REUNION PUBLIQUE

MERCREDI 3 NOVEMBRE
12H00 SALLE B106

INTERVENTIONS DE PROFESSIONNELS ET DE MILITANTES **PROJECTIONS** ☆ **DEBAT** ☆ CONTRE LA FERMETURE DES CENTRES IVG ☆ POUR LE DROIT DE DISPOSER DE NOTRE CORPS☆ **VENEZ NOMBREUX·SES !**

QUI SOMMES NOUS?

Le collectif féministe s'est créé sur la fac en mars dernier suite à une réunion publique féministe unitaire pour le 8mars. Nous sommes des femmes jeunes de Paris 8, qui voulons nous battre contre les inégalités hommes/femmes et contre le sexisme et la LGBTI-phobie.

Nous pensons que pour ça, il est nécessaire de s'organiser et de lutter toutes ensembles. Nous invitons toutes celles qui le veulent à nous rejoindre.

MOBILITATION NATIONALE POUR LE DROIT A L'AVORTEMENT 6 NOVEMBRE A 14H PLACE D'ITALIE

CONTRACEPTION AVORTEMENT LIBRE ET GRATUIT !

"We are young women from Paris 8 who want to fight against gender inequalities and against sexism and LGBTI-phobia." (Feminist collective tract in favor of abortion rights, October 2010.)

It would be anachronistic to call them TERFs. By the end of the 2010s, trans and queer politics had become a recognized presence in campus politics, but this was before all that. For these separatists, trans and nonbinary people were not really conceivable. Their feminist space was designed for cis women, period. And yet I learned a lot from them, from their materialism, from the seriousness with which they took their political process. I loved that they were such an internationalist space, able to include foreigners without drama.

3. THE NEOCOLONIAL BARGAIN

The spatial fix

French radical philosophers of the 1960s embraced international revolution, and in turn they were largely shunned by mainstream French academia.[1] Yet the Paris 8 Philosophy Department still needed to survive institutionally. How could such a department survive in the conservative French academy? In a word: through international expansion. The global academic market offered a diversified student pool, international collaborators, institutional allies, and international legitimacy. By the time of my fieldwork, this internationalist orientation was long

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[1] Most of the "French Theory" stars did not become professors at the Sorbonne, which was the pinnacle of French academic reproduction (Bourdieu 1988, Lecourt 2001), and their disciples and followers were even more totally excluded from the academic system. Senior professors at Paris 8 felt this exclusion viscerally. "You kind of have to mourn your academic career," Georges Navet told me as he explained his unconventional research topics. Students from Paris 8 had a hard time with job placement, and the Department's degrees were nationally unaccredited from the 1970s until the late 1980s. While the Philosophy Department endured as a department, it remained marginalized and largely shut out of the national field of philosophy in France. As the national assessment agency put it in 2013, describing the department's doctoral program and research laboratory, "It is no doubt a bit atypical in the French university landscape, for, if it is very widely known in the intellectual milieu, it 'interacts' relatively little with the academic milieu: no projects funded by the National Research Agency, few contacts with other centers of contemporary philosophy (ENS Ulm, Toulouse, etc)" (AERES 2013:8).

settled; the Department was the most internationally-focused philosophy program in France.

The mainstream academic system viewed this in creepy technocratic terms: "The LLCP [philosophy research laboratory][2] is successfully conducting a logic of 'exportation', especially in South America and Africa, by way of numerous partnerships, by co-organizing research projects, by participating in numerous conferences, and by hosting numerous foreign doctoral students" (AERES 2013:8). In short, it was a philosophy department in Paris that became enmeshed in trading partnerships with the global South and with the postcolonies. How should we understand an intellectual exchange between a former colonial empire and the postcolonial world?

I would note that that contemporary capitalism, always a crisis-prone system, has continued functioning in part thanks to what Marxist geographers term the "spatial fix." When capitalist production reaches the limits of its contradictions and comes to an impasse in some particular site, capital can simply relocate itself to some more favorable site elsewhere in the world, finding a "spatial fix" for its impasse (Harvey 1981). After 1968, everything happened as if the Philosophy Department were following just such a logic. Facing a precarious situation within the national field of philosophy in France, it developed a spatial fix for its problem.

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[2] The research laboratory was technically a distinct organizational entity, operated separately from the Philosophy Department (although affiliated with it). The Philosophy Department, which belonged to the university's Arts Division (UFR0), held the faculty appointments and managed the undergraduate and Master's programs. The research laboratory, which belonged to a Doctoral School, was entitled the Laboratory for Research and Study on the Contemporary Logics of Philosophy (LLCP), was comprised of all the doctoral students, most of the departmental faculty and a few outside members. The French title is Laboratoire d'études et de recherches sur les Logiques Contemporaines de la Philosophie. A French research laboratory in the human sciences is essentially what an Anglophone might call a research center: an organizational entity with its own budget, its own events and programs, and possibly facilities or specific infrastructure.

"France and the Third World," a major economics conference held on campus in 1978. Internationalism was not just for philosophers. (Photo by University of Paris 8.)

The Philosophy Department, in particular, was driven by a permanent imperative to accumulate symbolic capital and to ceaselessly *produce*.[3] The university system *demanded* that it produce new graduates, new research publications, and

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[3] To be sure, the Philosophy Department was not a capitalist enterprise and it was not highly motivated by economic profit or even by the accumulation of material resources. The national evaluation agency frequently commented that its material resources (money and facilities) were grossly insufficient for a department of its size, and noted that it did not appear to be seeking significant outside funding. Yet as Pierre Bourdieu amply demonstrated in his research on French academia, economic capital is not the only kind of capital. Unlike Bourdieu, I do not read social life mainly in terms of capital accumulation and social domination. But without reducing everything to them, these processes do exist and they matter.

new "scientific activity." Indefinite growth was not necessarily expected. But the Department was at least supposed to maintain its accustomed outputs. In an increasingly quantified assessment system, student metrics were especially scrutinized. The 2013 national evaluation noted skeptically that doctoral enrollments have "slightly fallen: 202 currently enrolled, against 229 in 2008" (AERES 2013:10).

If the Philosophy Department was organized around a "spatial fix," having partly abandoned the national market in favor of the postcolonial and global market (especially at the doctoral level), then this fix was not without further contradictions of its own.

1) The ideological place of foreigners was at odds with the social experience of studying at Paris 8. Ideologically, foreigners of all continents were welcomed at Paris 8. But in practice, life for foreign students in the Paris region was often marginalized, segregated and economically precarious.

2) Intellectual reproduction became radically *decoupled* from professional reproduction. If you were enterprising, self-motivated, and able to find a good dissertation director, you might have a good intellectual experience at Paris 8. But there were no jobs waiting for you afterwards. It was very difficult to get an academic position in France, and the jobs continued to go mainly to white French academic elites. The neocolonial bargain offered to foreign subjects at Paris 8 was, in essence, to *get a degree and then go home*. And indeed, many postcolonial subjects did return to university positions in their home countries.

3) The Philosophy Department endorsed emancipatory project of transcending nationalism and Eurocentrism in global philosophy. But the spatial fix that sustained the Department itself *presupposed* ongoing structural inequalities in global higher education. To draw in hundreds of students from around the world, Paris 8 needed to offer something that was not readily obtained closer to home. The draw may have been the symbolic force of getting a French credential, or the

training available in the Department, or the access to Parisian philosophical networks and academic venues, or merely the chance to continue practicing as an intellectual in exile. The attraction varied with individual circumstance. But what is clear is that Paris 8 also *needed* its metropolitan advantage over the peripheries — the very advantage that it then sought to transcend intellectually.

My aim in this chapter is not merely to show that a spatial fix and a neocolonial bargain *existed*. The actors established this themselves, all but openly. My aim here is instead to ask: how was this bargain *lived*? Let us first look at how internationalism was framed institutionally, and then turn to five specific cases: those of a Haitian and an Egyptian doctoral student, of a white French professor who had established strong Latin American ties, and of two North African administrative workers.

A "xenophilic agora"

The Philosophy Department's internationalism had roots in the economy of decolonization. The North African situation had been highly salient for the founding figures of the university. Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida had both been born in Algeria before its independence. Jean-François Lyotard had taught there from 1950 to 1952, and Michel Foucault had taught in post-independence Tunisia from 1966 to 1968.[4] Neither man had family roots in North Africa; both went there for career reasons (Macey 2004:77). Yet both were deeply affected politically by the experience. Lyotard became involved in the far-left journal

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[4] The charismatic organizer of much of the early Vincennes recruitments, Hélène Cixous, also became known for writing about her experience as an Algerian Jew.

Socialism or Barbarism, and Foucault briefly sheltered an underground militant in his home (Macey 2004:82).

Upon his return to France, Foucault hired a Tunisian, Mohamed Hassan Zouzi Chebbi, to work in departmental administration. Perhaps Foucault felt a strong sense of solidarity with Tunisian people. Yet I find this gesture paradoxical: Foucault, the white bourgeois Frenchman, would include a Tunisian, but also would exclude him in the same gesture, providing him with primarily administrative duties and inaugurating an implicitly racialized hierarchy within the Department's workforce. Zouzi spent his working life at Paris 8. A central figure in the life of the Department, he characterized it in poetic terms.

> The philosophers… set up the climate [at Vincennes] by inaugurating philosophy education as a 'xenophilic' agora. It had an appetite for the foreign and for the foreigner and it was kneaded with variegated and mestizo speech, with the scent of spices, tatooed all around.

> [Interview in Berger et al. 2015:234]

Zouzi was right to describe the Department as a place of variegated speech and hospitality (although in my experience, its primary scent was that of cigarette smoke). And he was certainly not the only one to voice the theme of hospitality. In a video from the Vincennes period, a foreign voice commented that "Vincennes, it's like a family, there's warmth. The most important thing here is the contact with people from every nationality…"[5]

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[5] *Vincennes comme espace vécu* (black and white film), Marielle Burkhalter and Annie Couëdel, 1977, http://www.archives-video.univ-paris8.fr/video.php?recordID=107 (time index 2:18).

Activist art from 1979: "That's Vincennes! It's possible here: Cultures mixing together! Opening up to the world! Would our Gallic ancestors be afraid of us!"[6]

Nevertheless, the "xenophilic agora" or the "Vincennes family" remained romantic images of social experience at Paris 8. It is not that xenophilia — the "love of the foreigner" — did not exist. But it was a paradoxical love, because foreign students were often institutionally marginalized, experienced intense

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[6] Sticker produced in 1979, personal collection of Charles Soulié. Reproduced in Soulié 2012:402.

economic precarity, and were largely excluded from getting permanent academic jobs in France. As one white French doctoral student put it, "We have two hundred doctoral students, mostly foreigners — but if they had the slightest chance of getting teaching jobs in France, we'd get shut down." A senior professor put a happier spin on it, saying, "People go home afterwards, in Europe or around the world, and they then put their knowledge to work in their own traditions."[7] The Department did hire a racially diverse group of professors and administrative staff, but I would argue that it also remained a site of structural violence, since racially minoritized and foreign students were so much more likely to be students than ever to become professors.

Meanwhile, the local keywords for internationalism seemed to shift with the historical moment. In the 1970s, the "Third World" remained the keyword. By the 1980s, the department chair, Jacques Poulain, preferred terms like "international discussion" and "intercultural dialogue." A cultural pluralism came into vogue, sponsored partly by international institutions like UNESCO, which published studies of various national traditions in philosophy. Finally, during the mid-2010s, the Department hired a cohort of postcolonial theorists, which brought terms like "subalternity" more decisively into its vocabulary. This shift towards postcolonial idioms was apparent in a manifesto that the Philosophy Department released in Spring 2018.

> Our university-world opens itself up to alterity and subalternity, with
> which it learns and works. One cannot measure the success of this effort in

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[7] Rancière described a longer social evolution: "Parmi les étudiants, il y avait aussi beaucoup de gens chassés de chez eux, comme les Chiliens par exemple, les Brésiliens, pas mal de Latino-Américains, qui sont passés par Paris-VIII. Il y a eu une circulation plutôt militante différente de ce qu'on a vu à la fin des années 1990 à Paris-VIII, quand le département de philosophie a retrouvé ses diplômes et qu'on a vu des étudiants arriver des quatre coins du monde pour avoir un diplôme dans le département de Foucault, Deleuze ou Lyotard. Un diplôme qu'ils ont pu faire fructifier pour avoir des postes dans leurs pays, ce qui était inimaginable dans les années 1970" (2012:37).

quantitative terms… nor in terms of developing "humanitarian" operations of "knowledge transfer" from the North towards the global South. The movement must go *both ways*…

That requirement inflects our conception and practice of philosophy, which need to be reclaimed from a geography which still, today, confuses its own limits with the real or fantasy borders of the West. One would need to think philosophical languages as Creole languages: fruits of new conceptual creation and linguistic encounters that defy territorial closure. Not to mention the unequal order of places between a center and the peripheries. […] We cling to these multiplicities: philosophy has no natural language! Philosophical practice is not, for us, the defense of a national privilege or a form of social distinction. It is indissociable from a reflection on the logics of emancipation that shape our pedagogies, our research, our engagements, and our ways of living.[8]

One can sense the ongoing commitment to an internationalist utopia, where philosophy would no longer be a specialty of French culture, and would become a space of radical mixing, "Creole languages" and cultural pluralism. But material realities did not always live up to these utopian dreams, as the trajectories of four postcolonial subjects suggest.

An earthquake in Haiti

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[8] "Manifeste du département de philosophie sous condition de grève," Department of Philosophy, University of Paris 8, 8 June 2018.

For many foreign students the Philosophy Department did feel like a place of genuine opportunity and hospitality. Witness the case of a male Haitian doctoral student, Jean Herold Paul, who was writing his dissertation on Immanual Kant and Karl Popper. When I met him in 2010, he had a rare teaching fellowship, and was capitalizing on the literary opportunities opened up by the Department's publishing connections. He published two books of poetry with Harmattan, *Je tresse mes mots* in 2010, and *Et caetera desunt: poétique du tremblement* in 2011. The latter book began with a poem called "The night that we are" (*La nuit que nous sommes*) which he wrote in the immediate aftermath of the calamitous Haitian earthquake of January 12, 2010.

We got in touch afterwards; I translated the poem into English; and we met soon afterwards in the context of my research project. As Paul explained his trajectory of intellectual migration, it seemed to me a simultaneous product of agency and structure. Haitian higher education was deeply divided by class, Paul explained to me, and in the aftermath of the Duvalier regime (which ended in 1986), rich Haitian families sent their children abroad, while poor children studied in Haitian public institutions, where French was used in school. Paul had decided to come to France after meeting a Paris 8 professor, Georges Navet, who had come to Haiti for a teaching stint at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Port-au-Prince. "I wouldn't say I *chose* Paris 8," Paul remarked. "As a foreigner, you don't know the French system."

The media cast Paul as a success story of Paris 8, labeling him a "Haitian philosopher and poet." He inhabited the intersection of intellectual, literary and postcolonial identity that figures like Zouzi had long pioneered in this milieu. Paul was photographed in a student magazine, *l'Etudiant*, and characterized as someone who had benefitted from Paris 8's internationalism. The magazine profile drew on tropes like openness (*ouverture*), accessibility (*disponibilité*), and freedom (*liberté*) to characterize Paris 8's internationalist environment. Yet Paul, like most

international students, remained at a distance from the internal life of the institution. His political and artistic identity centered on the Haitian situation. *L'Etudiant* explained that "the beginnings in France for Jean-Herold were difficult: 'I arrived all alone, without family in France and without a fellowship.'" Yet as the journalist recounted, Paul had succeeded in family and professional reproduction. Not only did he get a teaching fellowship, he had also "met his wife at the university and started a family."

I met Paul just as his first book of poetry was getting published. Two male philosophy professors wrote prefaces for his books, and Zouzi contributed an enthusiastic afterword. It was an exuberant moment for him. Yet the poems themselves were anything but clearly optimistic. Even before the earthquake, his poetry was highly attuned to the tragic, the ambivalent, and the hostile.

> *Fournaises dantesques où se consume l'avenir*
>
> *aux quatres points cardinaux de la promesse*

> Dantesque furnaces where the future consumes itself
>
> at the four cardinal points of promise

[Paul 2010:50]

The future consumes itself: such an image also encapsulated life at the Philosophy Department, where futures never felt completely closed down, but often remained profoundly uncertain and shadowy. The sense of a destroyed future

became even clearer in Paul's poem about the earthquake, which he first read in 2010 at a benefit for the survivors.

The night that we are

(in memory of Jésula and Wilmichel)

bric-a-brac of apocalypses

bric-a-break of our utopias

and if…

and then…

but are we still?

in the night where we are

in the night that we are

a horrible night

where only our dead appear dimly

without name or register

without farewell or burial

in the night where we are

in the night that we are

what's left of us?

bric-a-brac of apocalypses

bric-a-break of our utopias

in the night where we are

in the night that we are

it's always night

at least our presence is reflected there

a simple sensation of being somewhere

without knowing who we are

where we are

without knowing with what or with who we are

in the night where we are

in the night that we are

when will we be able to mourn

for ourselves?

This was the earthquake: utopias in pieces. The apocalypse left behind the impossibility even of mourning. The impossibility of burial, or even of naming and counting the dead, seemed to be the point where subjectivity broke down. The historical subject of this poem seemed to lack an identity, a self-concept, a location, or anything but a "reflection" of presence. I am sure I cannot imagine an earthquake like the Haitian earthquake. I did not know Jésula or Wilmichel. But Paul's poem leaves me momentarily bereft, I am not sure of what.

Still, the poem does have a definite subject, even though it reports on a cataclysmic breakdown of subjectivity. It is a poem based around *we*: a poem of belonging. The *we* of this poem seems to me not just to be the specifically Haitian subject who has lived through the earthquake. After all, the poem was read in France and written in French. A transcultural reader was being addressed here, and was invited into the new public constituted around the event of mass catastrophe.[9] This inclusive *we* — the sense that anyone could become the subject of the catastrophe, that anyone could feel the affective impact of the earthquake — became key to French philosophers' solidarity with Haiti in the aftermath of the disaster. Numerous friends of the Paris 8 Philosophy Department died in the earthquake. *Solidarity* then became their operative term for material aid and

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[9] This kind of public had a longer history. In the 1970s, on Charles Soulié's account, the "strong foreign presence at Vincennes, which took in successive waves of migrants and political refugees, contributed to making it a resonance chamber for major international political events" (2012:185).

emotional care. As Paul put it in an email to the department about the poetry benefit, "Yesterday an evening of very moving poetry took place, where a constellation of poets from all horizons made loud and clear their solidarity for dear Haiti [*Haïti chérie*]."[10]

Solidarity could, nevertheless, coexist with structural exclusion. Paul's teaching fellowship was temporary; and several years after his dissertation, he had not found a permanent academic position, whether in Haiti or in Europe. I sense in this the very real limits of solidarity in a neocolonial system.

Very happy, very scared

We can contrast Paul's story with a different and less poetic case, one which returns us to everyday academic life farther out on the margins of the margins. It is the case of my friend Lila — as I will call her — a middle-aged Egyptian woman who had come to France to write a dissertation about Egyptian politics. Like Paul, she was respected as a foreign, postcolonial intellectual. Yet she occupied a more marginal position in the Department. She received no fellowships, and I felt guilty, the first time we met, when she insisted on paying for both our coffees in the small cafe near the Department. When we eventually held a more formal interview, Lila conveyed an intense experience of being a postcolonial

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[10] The language of solidarity was taken up by French academics, but it had originated with Haitians academics themselves. On 15 January 15, a Haitian professor wrote to his colleagues at Paris 8 to ask if "an active solidarity between French and Haitian universities would be imaginable?" The Department responded as actively as it could, sending a collection of donated philosophy books to replace the destroyed library at their Haitian partner institution, the Ecole Normale Supérieure-Port au Prince.

woman in the Department, for whom the French language was already anxiogenic.

When I was doing my first enrollments, I was very scared, because I'm a foreigner. My French isn't good. And I don't know how the professors can accept me, I don't know. When I first went to the department office, I was really scared. There's the secretary, as you see, and they're not very organized. But I really don't care about that kind of thing! That's Paris 8 for you!

[She spoke of Zouzi, the former secretary.] He's very open with people. He helps a lot. That's Paris 8. There, *voilà*, that's the Left! [*Laughs.*] That's what it is for me, anyway.

As a secular Egyptian activist "in the political scene," she said she had picked Paris 8 "because it's the university of the left." Tellingly, it was the Arabic-speaking administrator, Zouzi, who embodied the left for her; Zouzi's care labor worked to humanize the university institution.

Meanwhile, Lila explained that she had left Egypt for intellectual reasons, since philosophy in Egypt was "not especially good," and she loved "French writing, their way of presenting things." Like Paul, though, her major political involvements were related to her country of origin. And she conveyed a deeply ambivalent structure of feeling, at once happy and scared.

Lila: And since Mr. Vermeren has accepted me [as his student], I'm very happy.

Eli: And you were scared at the time that he wouldn't accept you?

Lila: Yes, of course. And now I've much more scared, because, the first year happened, it worked out. But—

Eli: Now it's the second year?

Lila: Yes — you have to turn in a lot of work, and I find that I need to deepen my knowledge further, and I'm very scared.

Although Lila had a few friendly acquaintances on campus, she found the university an isolating place. "In class, no one talks to anyone, we pass the whole year without really talking." And outside of the university, she said, it was even lonelier still. "I don't have time at all, at all. I'm running all the time," she reported, running from campus to the Arabic teaching job that she had taken to make ends meet. Her language teaching work was hard, she said, because it took so much time. And she was relatively pessimistic about her future in philosophy. "I don't think I'll finish my dissertation. It's so much, and it's very hard."

Still, in spite of her pessimism, Lila was invested in a recognizable telos of philosophical work, with a protocol of disciplinary socialization and a structural attachment to the future. She explained that, although she hadn't been trained in philosophy, Vermeren had helped her "get those foundations." Her work involved two simultaneous projects: "To read Foucault's system, and to accumulate facts about Egypt." When I pressed for details about her intellectual method, she commented that "You must not impose theory on reality; you must study reality and try to utilize theoretical tools for—" Just then, a white French woman chimed in, a mutual friend of ours: "You try it out and you see if it works or it doesn't work, if it lets you get somewhere." "Yes, that's it," Lila agreed.

A certain kind of ambivalence emerged in our conversations. This ambivalence could lead you to continue your intellectual labor in a system not made for you, in

a system that offered only a very marginal space to you. It was a distressing structure of feeling: to admire the white French professoriate, which may offer you a very hospitable welcome, but nevertheless constitutes a world apart, a world which will probably never fully include you. Lila's anxieties were not just about the French language and economic precarity; they were also the anxieties of philosophical work itself, the fear of never finishing one's thesis, the fear of simply being overwhelmed. Still, Lila continued, in spite or because of her anxiety about her marginal existence. (She eventually did finish her dissertation.)

Both Paul and Lila had to do work to be locally accepted, and both were working on processing postcolonial history through their philosophical work. Still, the contrast between Lila and Paul teaches us something about national and gender differences within the Department's social field. Haiti was a major focus of the Department's foreign investments, and a community of Haitian students formed at Paris 8, which Paul belonged to. I do not believe that a similar community existed for Egyptian philosophy students; if so, Lila had not discovered it. That lack of community had direct consequences for the loneliness and vulnerability of life at this university. The isolating mass space of the campus hallways, with its flows of bodies not necessarily talking to each other, came to dominate Lila's experience.

This experience was also inevitably shaped by gender difference. Masculinity tended to confer access to intellectual networks and to spheres of masculine mutual recognition, even across ethnoracial or national lines. While Lila was liked and respected by her dissertation advisor, no one arranged to publish her poetry or wrote her a book preface. Her ambivalence about her future in philosophy seemed amplified by her isolation. Male homosociality could provide a powerful holding environment, a powerful space of networks. The absence of such an environment was both stressful and detrimental to any sense of a future.

What then was utopian for Lila? Her precarious life and her stress were not legible, from the perspective of the Department's official discourses. If she had any

space for processing her experience, it was perhaps in the cafeteria, talking with other foreigners like me, or with her retired French friend, a woman who often smiled and offered her emotional support. If anything was utopian for her, it was perhaps just social acceptance and belonging in an institution that tended to offer neither: "Since Mr. Vermeren has accepted me, I'm very happy"; or of Zouzi, "he *helps* a lot. There, that's the Left!" The left, such as it was, still retained a certain capacity to channel optimism across national boundaries.

I had to take care of them somehow

Who was Patrice Vermeren, who had done so much to make Lila feel accepted? During my fieldwork, I found that certain white French professors had become deeply invested in mediating foreign exchange. Vermeren had come to embody the Department's connection to Latin America. His xenophilia was in part a response to his own ambivalence about French academic institutions. It emerged from a very particular historical conjuncture: from a relationship of solidarity that he had developed with Chilean philosophers under the Pinochet dictatorship.

Vermeren became chair of the Philosophy Department in 2010, at the end of his career. He had been born 61 years earlier in the provincial city of Reims, and he shared the anti-institutional mood that oriented his post-1968 generation of philosophers.[11] Above all, he was known for supporting Latin American philosophers, who thanked him prolifically in their dissertation acknowledgements:

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[11] Vermeren's major book, *Victor Cousin: The play of philosophy and the state* (Vermeren 1995), was a detailed study of the institutionalization of philosophy in 19th century France. His reflexive work often felt like it had something in common with my own, and he always supported my research project.

Carlos Contreras Guala, 2008: "To Patrice Vermeren for his initiative, constant care, ongoing generosity and for his unswerving militancy in favor of the right to philosophy for all men and women [*para todos y para todas*]."

Carlos Perez Lopez, 2012: "I must also thank Patrice Vermeren in my own name and in that of so many friends who, without him, would not have been able to carry out their studies in France."

When I interviewed Vermeren, I learned that this Latin American connection had begun in the 1980s. Through the Parisian philosophical circles of the time, Vermeren had encountered a group of left Catholic Chilean philosophers who needed support, cast out of the academic world by the Pinochet regime. When Vermeren visited Chile for a solidarity conference for these marginal figures, he explained, it made an impression.

I remember something quite moving. The son of Miria, who had been Allende's secretary, had died in the assault on the Moneda Palace. There was his portrait, and the woman was crying, talking about her son. Demanding his burial — for he had disappeared. So in Chile I found these very interesting people. And I realized that, in terms of their philosophical questions, they couldn't really talk about current events. They couldn't criticize the way that the University of Chile had basically been destroyed. And so they switched to doing genealogy. Several people were working on the history of philosophical institutions in Chile.

What I really remember was the fear. It was really something, the fear. I remember Rodrigo telling me, look, that man speaking, this woman speaking, with minor roles in student life, they could disappear. And so the dictatorship had already advanced: there were still people disappearing, but much less, and much less in Chile than in Argentina…

When he got home, Vermeren reached an existential conclusion. "I couldn't go on as if I had merely given a talk abroad, I had to take care of them somehow." He had worked with UNESCO to organize a series of trans-Atlantic intellectual exchanges, and after the end of the Pinochet regime in 1990, his work culminated in a particular kind of symbolic recognition.

Eli: You had a position in Chile, honorary professor?

Patrice: After the end of the military dictatorship, my Chilean friends wanted to thank me for my efforts on their behalf. But it was important for them because — what they always said was that, even if I hadn't done all that much, they no longer felt so alone. And that mattered. So then Humberto Giannini, a major figure in Chilean philosophy, basically invented a position as Honorary Professor at the University of Chile. So there was a ceremony, and a diploma, which I still have.

Initially, I did not take this very seriously.

Eli: But it wasn't a permanent position?

Patrice: Uh, that is, it's not remunerated, but it's a permanent position. I have the title of Honorary Professor at the University of Chile.

Eli: But that doesn't mean you have an office, a teaching load and all that?

Patrice: Uh, I don't have an office, but when I go to the Philo Department at the University of Santiago de Chile, I'm at home there. When I go there, I talk to everybody. It's a real title [*titre*], in the official sense. The rector was there, and the dean, and the professors. No it's, it's a real title!

I felt had I had to apologize for my dismissal, but my apologies provoked a fleeting moment of unambivalence.

Eli: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to say—

Patrice: No no, it's just that — what I meant was — in any case, for me, it's really the most important title that I've ever gotten. Because symbolically, it corresponds to something that's — well, what are you doing with your life, eh?

Eli: Yes, absolutely, absolutely.

Patrice: Even if it isn't much…

The Department's postcolonial relationships were thus maintained in part by the "care labor" of its own senior professors, a sort of labor that interrupted the nationalist conventions of French philosophy to build new ties abroad. It becomes interesting, however, to compare the care labor of a professor like Vermeren with the care labor of a North African administrator.

Care labor and the love of the Department

While the professors often cared for their students, they did not handle all the domestic or bureaucratic work of the Department. One of the department secretaries, whom I will call Rabah, considered it his job to facilitate internal sociability within the Department, freely serving coffee and tolerating large amounts of non-work-related banter. Rabah was a North African philosopher who had gotten his doctorate from the Department, and like other North Africans, he spoke freely about endemic racism in France.

His work kept the Department functioning not just bureaucratically but also socially and affectively. As Lila had observed, the Department was often disorganized. I asked Rabah how students reacted to its bureaucratic problems.

Rabah: They get used to it, and I try to reassure them as well. To not dramatize. You have to go slowly. Keep everything relative.

Eli: So what do you tell them?

Rabah: I invent something every time. I say something to each to student to keep them...

Eli: But I'm guessing they get pretty worried?

Rabah: Yes, they worry a lot. A lot of the students get worried. But I reassure them. I tell them: go to class, and you'll get your diploma, don't worry about it. And they leave more calmed down.

Eli: You have a therapeutic side there, eh?

Rabah: Oh, well, you gotta, right?

Rabah thus understood his own labor as not only about bureaucratic procedure, but also as salving the emotional wounds of a disorganized institution. I learned that not only did he provide subaltern emotional labor, he was poorly compensated for it. I asked why he stayed involved. "I don't know," he said. "Maybe out of love of the department, maybe to stay close, to stay plugged into philosophy and to see what was happening up close."

At the time of our interview, he was still a contract worker, rather than having a permanent administrative position. When I asked him if he wanted to stay, he said laconically, "I'm not sure yet." He did stay, though, in the end (I heard he got a permanent staff position). It was as if the possibility of leaving were also a condition of his ambivalent attachment.

Throughout our interview, Rabah was interrupted constantly as professors entered the office (even though the door was closed) to make requests and run errands. I began to wonder how we might understand Rabah's subjective position. Who *recognized* Rabah? — Everybody. Who did Rabah recognize? — Almost everyone in the Department. Rabah's gaze was largely synonymous with the Philosophy Department as such, but he was in no way the sovereign subject of the Department; his work was the under-recognized work of institutional reproduction, rather than the work of philosophical "production."

If he was viscerally aware of anything on campus, it was the force of institutional power; but what power did he have himself? Above all, he seemed to have a reparative, therapeutic, technical power: the power to share affect, coffee and recognition; the power to arrange boundaries, documents, and institutional belongings. He buffered you from the state apparatus even while being part of it. Such was the state of administrative labor in this context: it was a force that interrupted structures and softened structures even while itself constantly being

subject to interruption. It was somehow persuaded to work for the low wages of love for, and proximity to, a utopian space.

Men aren't disposable

As a final incident suggests, the bitter precarity that afflicted the students could also reach the staff. One year at a department meeting, an older North African administrator, Hamid, stood up to give a speech. Earlier that year, he had given up his position as department secretary to take on a year-long research contract. Officially it was a retirement. But I gathered that it had been a matter of some institutional maneuvering with the university administration, and the new position was nonrenewable. He must have known that at the start. He rose, nonetheless, to ask that the Department help him keep his job.

> "It's the moment to pass the baton," he said. "I'm making a fair amount of effort: I've left a real job for a fictional job, in order to hold on to a teaching line for the future of the department... I have problems with physical mobility; administrative tasks and public transportation are getting hard for me."

> The assembled professors considered his request, but it seemed that there was no institutionally legitimate way to extend his job, and there was a reluctance to go outside normal channels.

This reluctance seemed to frustrate Hamid, who gave a further speech about all that was going wrong with the department. He railed against a new enrollment deadline in August, which he read as a portent of fascism. "It's the disappearance of philosophy, the only thing guarding us against technocratic and administrative fascism at the university…"

"Men aren't <u>disposable</u> *[les hommes sont pas <u>jetables</u>]*," he concluded painfully.

Eventually there was a brief debate about whether to even put the matter to some sort of a vote. But the uneasy consensus was that there was nothing to be done.

So nothing was done.

Hamid too was quite attached to philosophy, and to the Philosophy Department in particular. Philosophy, he declared, was a guard against fascism. He maintained himself, too, as a moral subject charged with a particular masculine dignity: *men* aren't disposable.

Yet Hamid's very protest served to reveal the precarity of this intellectual workplace. It showed philosophical belonging was vulnerable to shifts in labor relations. It showed the disturbing ease with which certain subjects slip from the margins of philosophy to just being outside it. Not all marginality is even nearly utopian.

A precarious subject such as Hamid would not necessarily be honored with a memorial conference or an honorific notice in the Department's subsequent course brochure. For a year or two he did, however, continue teaching his preferred class, "Arabic for Philosophers." He was remembered most prominently by a large painting of his face which hung above his former desk in the Department office, an index of a present absence.

Bring your own precarity

This Philosophy Department thus led a double life. It could be a utopian refuge that helped people escape malign structures, including those of the French state apparatus. Within the Department, foreign and postcolonial subjects genuinely were welcomed and recognized for their intellectual work. A whole series of transnational relations, social investments, affections, and even kinships came into being. Jean Hérold Paul got married while in France; Patrice Vermeren for his part got married to an Argentinean. Figures like Hamid and Rabah became invested in the Department, became at home there, professed a certain love for the place.

And yet the Department also remained a place where people were routinely *getting* crushed by structures. The structural racism that pervaded French society also existed within the Department. Students and staff alike suffered from economic precarity, institutional marginalization, asymmetrical relationships, historical traumas and disciplinary anxieties. Neocolonial economies thus maintained themselves.

"Migration is not a crime," seen on the campus walls in 2017.

I do not want to suggest that the Department's professors were indifferent to these contradictions, even if they rarely addressed them in public. The Department's spatial fix rarely felt stable to its key institutional actors. There was a long stream of institutional crises, and this was not without consequence for the Department's general relations of intellectual reproduction. In the Philosophy Department, reproduction itself was not understood through the eternalizing schema of a conventional scholarly discipline, which presumes implicitly that it will stay alive forever. Rather, the Department's model was one of staying alive from year to year, of having ultimately loose relationships with its disciples. It was a system of bricolage reproduction, one could say, always balancing on a structural precipice, and lacking the ideological power to make itself (seem) eternal.

This structural vulnerability made people aware that reproduction itself had politics. Daniel Bensaïd, the Department's most eminent Trotskyist, had noted as much in his book *Marx for our Times*.

> Inheriting is never an automatic process: it poses questions of legitimacy and imposes responsibilities. A theoretico-political legacy is never straightforward: it is not some possession that is received and banked. Simultaneously instrument and obstacle, weapon and burden, it is always to be transformed.

[Bensaïd 2002:xi]

In these terms, the heritage and culture of the Department were themselves both instruments and obstacles. If one holds that a doctoral degree ought to provide a future, or the means to provide some sort of economic existence within capitalism, then the Department's neocolonial bargain was indeed brutal. For it offered only half a future: thoughts without money, degrees without jobs. Still,

Paris 8 sought to advance a different theory of the doctorate: you bring your own future, and then see how philosophy fits into it.[12] Which amounted to also saying: bring your own precarity, and expect no salvation from it, however racialized and classed and gendered it might be.

Should we conclude, then, that the ugliness of the neocolonial bargain was inseparable from the utopianism of the Department's hospitality? In a postcolonial academic world, it remains a utopian gesture to break with philosophical nationalism, to provide hospitality and openness to the Other, to insist that anyone could be a philosopher if they wanted to. And yet all too often, disappointed utopianism threatened to become a merely disappointing utopianism.

It is a curious ruse of neoliberal history that the Philosophy Department ultimately looked like a success story in the eyes of the French state. What had once long a marginal site in French academia suddenly found itself highly ranked by the new neoliberal assessors, as French policymakers began to reward international rankings and international collaborations. As we know, neoliberal classifications can invert or reshape the "traditional" disciplinary orders that they seek to govern. But by the same token, the positive evaluations from the French state were nothing one could rely on. The 2013 evaluation complained that the Department had no data on its students' subsequent job placements. The Department founded by Foucault promised to start collecting them.

It seems to me a long-term historical failure of this Philosophy Department that, for all its hospitality, it remained dependent on a neocolonial economy for its own survival.

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[12] To be fair, historically, the doctorate was not the foundation of a philosophical career in France. If one wanted to teach philosophy, one would typically get an initial degree — if possible at the elite Ecole Normale Supérieure — and pass the teaching exam (*concours*). One would then teach philosophy in secondary schools (*lycées*) and, while teaching, one could write a doctoral dissertation, which might provide grounds for a mid-career switch to the university system.

I do not say this to "accuse" or lay blame. My point is that we only understand a "utopia" by also understanding that which it leaves undone. By understanding the ways it leaves *us* undone.

PART II: UTOPIA IN THE PRESENT

Interlude — The Basilica and the Stade de France

To save money on metro tickets, I began to ride my bike to campus most days. The convoluted route taught me a lot about the economic geography around Paris. Saint-Denis, especially in its southern zone adjoining Aubervilliers, had once been a massively industrialized space. But it had faced rapid deindustrialization in the 1960s and 1970s (Guglielmo 1986). Instead of factories, I saw warehouses, construction sites, a postindustrial campus for the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme Paris Nord, a tire business, an Islamic social service agency, plebian cafes, street markets and a few glassy office buildings. There was space for rent. Old buildings lingered as orphans, as the absence of their original neighbors was evoked by their undecorated side walls, forlorn and windowless. The streets were full of hostile traffic and inhospitable empty zones to cross. The bridges, canals, railroads and highways cut the city into pieces. It was anything but a uniform Cartesian grid, and you had to navigate partly by landmarks. At the halfway point, you passed a lone skyscraper, the Pleyel Tower. If you looked up, you might notice two massive state monuments protruding from the horizon.

The Basilica of Sacré-Coeur seen from the banlieue.

The two monuments give us historical coordinates: they were accidental bookends of the twentieth century. Looking south towards Paris, the Basilica of Sacré-Coeur glowered at the clouds from atop Montmartre, the hill just behind my apartment in northern Paris. The massive church had been built between 1875 and 1914 as a Catholic symbol of the "return to law and order," in the aftermath of the Paris Commune's bloody defeat in 1871 (Harvey 2003:323). Republicans understood the building, correctly, as a reactionary affirmation; in 1880, the Paris city council denounced it as "an incessant provocation to civil war" (Harvey 2003:329). By the time of my fieldwork, this history of anticlerical struggles and

failed revolutions was entirely submerged in the Basilica's modern identity — a bohemian tourist trap with a good view. White tourists were not told that the adjacent neighborhood, Barbès-Rochechouart, was the liveliest, most racially diverse zone of working-class life in Paris. It bustled with commerce and energy, and was full of political conflicts over immigration, Islam, and police harassment. What *were* the tourists told? A crypto-racist message: to beware of pickpockets.

The Stade de France and the abandoned zones nearby, seen from Porte de Saint-Denis.

In the other direction, looking north and a little east of downtown Saint-Denis, you could spy the tall, spidery masts of the 80,000-seat national stadium, the Stade de France. The Stade, first opened for the 1998 World Cup, was credited as a turning point in banlieue modernization, ushering in a new post-Fordist economy in Saint-Denis, which centered on cultural industries and gentrification (Bordes 2007:38). France had won the World Cup in the newly-opened stadium; its multiracial team was then headed by Zinedine Zidane, whose working-class Algerian origins made him a national symbol of racial integration. Yet the stadium itself, as a monumental state project, was politically ambiguous, equally displaying the failures of Republican social inclusion. During my fieldwork, the homeless camped along the industrial canal by the stadium, symbolizing the left-behinds of the post-Fordist economy. And on 13 November 2015, the stadium became a target for three suicide bombers sent by the Islamic State, in parallel with similar attacks on Paris restaurants and the Bataclan nightclub.

The Basilica and the stadium were accidental monuments to France's ongoing social fractures. They loomed on the horizons of Saint-Denis.

4. A BANLIEUE UNIVERSITY

The space of the masses

Historical knowledge is often so ambiguous. The next question is always: What do we make of it in the present, how do we live with it, what do we do with it? In Part I of this book, we have seen three genealogies of historical failures in Paris 8's Philosophy Department. We explored the decline of revolutionary hopes after 1968 (Chapter 1), the history of left patriarchy and women's exclusion (Chapter 2), and the neocolonial bargain that offered education, but not full economic integration, to postcolonial subjects. We met some of the actors involved in these stories, and explored some of their ambivalent subject positions. But subjects never exist on their own. If we want to understand utopian practices, we also have to study their social environment.

In Part II, turning towards thicker ethnographic description, we inquire into the structural conditions of subjectivity in this site. What kinds of everyday spaces, knowledge rituals, and political practices made it possible to sustain disappointed utopianism? This chapter begins with the urban environment, asking how the Philosophy Department fit into its neighborhood, and how it fit into the banlieue's racial economies. It takes us to the mass spaces that surrounded the Department, inspecting an activist occupation of a cafe, a loveless graffiti artist, a senior male professor crossing the corridors, and a young man facing physical disability and social abandonment. My question here is: what were the relation-

ships of social reproduction in this milieu, and how were these reshaped through the actors' use of campus space?

The Department did have some space of its own. It possessed an administrative office, a teachers' lounge, a small seminar room, and a few classrooms (the windowless ones were called "closets"). One could tell plenty of stories about its classrooms — where the pedagogy was often quite traditional, "magisterial" — or about the administrative offices, where all sorts of personal and institutional problems came and went. One could tell stories about the informal life of the Department, the socializing fueled by coffee and cigarettes, the little friend circles that formed or fell apart. But I found that the most interesting encounters emerged when philosophers left their departmental venues and traversed the public spaces of the campus.

Every form of subjectivity in a French public university is rooted in mass space or in an enclave within mass space. Campus spaces were termed "public," meaning that on paper, anyone had a right to be there.[1] This formal right was not actually unconditional. University regulations prohibited "any act liable to trouble the security and tranquility of members of the university community."[2] In practice, security scrutiny focused on young men from the nearby *banlieue*. But during my fieldwork, the main entrance to campus still remained open to anyone, with no systematic barriers.[3] The campus remained a mass space.

I say *mass* because I think we need a stronger word than *public* to capture the extreme anonymity, elasticity, social diversity and anarchic potentials of the

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[1] The University's Internal Regulations began by stating, "The public domain of the University of Paris 8 constitutes an open space freely accessible to the public" (2007-2008, p.14).

[2] Guide de l'Etudiant 2007/2008, "Règlement sur le respect des personnes et des biens à l'Université," Art. 4, p. 15.

[3] Identity card checks were mandatory at some more central Parisian university locations, notably at the historic Sorbonne complex, and they were intermittently implemented at Paris 8 as well.

campus passageways and courtyards.[4] I might call a classroom or a library a *public* space, but such public spaces still have a fairly standard theatricality. They insert their users into a particular social drama; they give you a role with a label, like ” student“; they heavily regulate your behavior. By contrast, the corridors outside the classrooms felt to me more intensely liminal. They were spaces of motion and connection, although their velocities were variable and almost turbulent. You could hurry through them, or linger there, or malinger. You were rarely told what to do. You never knew quite what you might confront. “It's a personal and constant haze [*flou individuel et constant*],” one student film said of these spaces. “Everything is in movement… losing yourself in this world seems the only alternative to a social-ized nothingness.”[5] I would call them mass spaces because if they belonged to anyone, they belonged to the masses.

This omnipresent mass space became a frame around the theater of university life. And it too has a history and a politics. The “massification” of higher education has also been called democratization, designating the global process in the second part of the twentieth century that opened up higher education to women, to racial minorities, to colonial and postcolonial subjects, and to working-class students.[6] The postwar period saw a series of new public universities built in France. But their modernist architecture, banlieue locations, and educational structures were often depicted as degraded and alienating. “A modern economic system demands mass production of students who are not educated and have been rendered incapable of thinking,” lamented one group of far-left Situationist students in 1966, in their famous pamphlet *On the Poverty of Student Life* (Internationale Situationiste 2000). Their view was itself the social product of a severely anomic

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[4] Mass urban space of this kind is both a French political project and a phenomenological precondition of current French politics: the streets of Paris may get their cultural definition partly from the political history of barricades, but the barricade is the exception

[5] Virgile Regnault, *Perceptions Paris 8*, http://www.archives-video.univ-paris8.fr/video.php?recordID=710.

[6] For a global study of massification, see Schofer and Meyer (2005); for French details, see Le Gall and Soulié (2009).

social experience, as Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron wrote in their famous critique of French class reproduction, *The Inheritors*.

> The unstructured chronology of university life brings students together only negatively, because their individual rhythms may have nothing in common beyond their different ways of differing from the major collective rhythms. (31).

> Most students have nothing in common beyond attending the same lectures (32).

> More akin to a fluid aggregate than an occupational group... (36).

> It is doubtless no accident that Paris students, condemned by the present system to mere spatial coexistence, passive attendance, and solitary competition for qualifications, crushed by the experience of anonymity and the diffuse aggregation of crowds, tend to abandon realistic criticism of reality in favor of the conceptual terrorism of verbal demands which are, to a large extent, satisfied merely by being formulated (37).

> (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979 [1964])

Bourdieu and Passeron saw French students as isolated, atomized, bourgeois individuals, produced by an institution that basically produced stratification and

inequality, which it legitimated by transforming social capital into educational merit. Decades later, while sociologists argued that the French university was no longer dominated by the French bourgeoisie (Felouzis 2001), it remained, as François Dubet put it, "at once a mass world and an atomized world, which is not a contradiction" (1994:511).

While students were asked to find their own paths through the institution, they were also depersonalized, made into statistics, and subjected to arcane bureaucracies. Meanwhile, this emergent mass space remained classed as well as deeply gendered and racialized. If the white French bourgeois man was able to constitute himself as the universal subject of post-Revolutionary French society (Goldstein 2005), then the very *meaning* of massification in France was in large part that minoritized subjects — women, postcolonial subjects, proletarians — were increasingly allowed to become university students.

In short, a highly charged, historically contradictory mass space became the precondition for any kind of university subjectivity. At Paris 8, even the most well-connected insiders were constantly surrounded by flows of strangers. The pedestrian spaces of its campus oscillated between density and emptiness. At peak times, the central arteries overflowed with students in motion and the tinny cacophony of overlapping voices. But student flows always died down, leaving behind spaces of drifty near-solitude, inhabited by stragglers, daydreamers, and small groups finding space to sit. The campus was a mass space full of still or rushing bodies, of outdoor cafes in the courtyards swept over in winter by the cold and damp, of social relations that formed or sprang up almost from the void.

I remember being surprised the first time someone hailed me in the hallway. A young man, Etienne, called out my name and asked how my day was going. The hallways were spaces of possible encounters. Everyone was always walking, but we were not Walter Benjamin's flâneurs: it was too proletarian, too degraded, too unreliable to be a good space for a "viewer who takes pleasure in abandoning

himself to the artificial world of high capitalist civilization" (Lauster 2007:140). It was more like a place for the anxious inhabitants of *low* capitalist civilization.

This mass space was perhaps the extreme limit case of a holding environment, in a psychoanalytic sense (Slochower 1991). Far from being a maternal space of care, campus space was often cold and potentially lonely. Nevertheless, mass space held us together as subjects, and provided vital technical affordances. When we wanted to travel, this mass space let us move around. When we wanted to speak publicly, it had walls that could be written on or talked about. It held onto the public speech of graffiti and flyers as long as they lasted. It provided solitude if you sought it out, or potential to encounter strangers.

For women it readily become a space of sexual harassment. "Sexual harassment is a daily reality" — wrote SUD Etudiant, a radical student union — "a violence exercised in a situation of domination, inscribed in an oppressing and alienating sexist logic."[7] Meanwhile there was widespread indignation about hygienic issues. "Oh, this is nasty!" a visiting African philosopher exclaimed once when he saw the state of the public toilets. Student activists sought to reclaim space for themselves, in a series of campus occupations. But the university's mass space, which was kept alive through the unrecognized work of its cleaning and maintenance staff, outlasted all critics and all efforts at reappropriation.

Securitarian leftism

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[7] SUD Etudiant, 2012, "HARCÈLEMENT SEXUEL : REDÉFINIR, OUI, MAIS EN FAVEUR DES VICTIMES !"

The mass space of the campus nevertheless had limits. At the edge of the campus were high fences, gates, and security cameras. Beyond them was the *banlieue*, with modernist housing projects, empty lots, and the urban spaces of Saint-Denis. We saw earlier how the banlieue is a symbol of abjection in French national ideology. I suggested that the university's structural ambivalence about the banlieue was also manifest in the tension between graffiti and widespread securitization. But what did this ambivalence look like in everyday life?

The wall separating a campus building from the street.

The "safety" and "security" of the campus community were protected by a small, outsourced force of security guards. These guards, termed *vigiles* (sentries), were particularly visible at the main entrance to campus, which they monitored from a tiny booth with tinted windows. Their main assignment was to protect campus from the "kids from the projects" down the block. This figure, the "kids from the projects" or *jeunes des cités*, became the main cultural trope for processing anxieties about race, class and the banlieue environment.

The entrance to some of the university's largest lecture halls.

Yet the university was itself largely populated by students and staff who hailed from the banlieue. Racial divides did not map neatly onto the boundaries of campus. The security guards themselves were a racially minoritized (and always male) workforce. In this they were reflective of the local pool of working-class labor. In practice, their job consisted largely of waiting and watching, and visible interventions were relatively uncommon. At one point, I did see them physically protect the university president from a crowd of campus protesters (Rose 2019). And every so often, the virtual presence of the banlieue congealed into a public incident.

In Autumn 2009, I stayed late on campus on Monday nights to attend an alternative seminar about "the university." The seminar was run by "UFR0," a marginal-utopian student project that I will explore in more detail (Chapter 6). Their seminar on the university was primarily a scene of intellectual freestyling. Someone might read a few lines of Derrida out loud, and then free associate while everyone listened. Most of the participants were extremely institutionally marginal young men. It was an emotionally volatile space, as the participants were quick to disagree with each other. It became a sexist, sexualizing space too, since some male participants, especially my acquaintance Etienne, were quick to stare or awkwardly flirt as soon as any woman came within sight. "The prettiest girl is always in the subway train across from you," Etienne declared wistfully one night, "you never see the girl in the train you're on." The participants smoked interminably and shared pastries and fruit. We never spoke about gender issues, though I heard outsiders critique our masculinism. (I let myself blend into masculinity too, in those days.) I gathered that their seminar had been well-attended and energetic during the campus protests in 2007 and 2009 (Rose 2014), but by the time I arrived, its momentum had dwindled greatly.

One night we were sitting around the "seminar table" — a folding table set up in an atrium — and a young man came down the hallway openly carrying an enormous kitchen knife. He seemed to be wandering aimlessly, not interacting with anyone in particular; the scene struck me as more incomprehensible than dangerous. He looked around briefly at the group of us and approached within a few meters; I think someone tried to ask if he was OK. We stared at him incredulously and he wandered off into the maze of campus corridors. My seminar mates normally kept their distance from the authorities, but this time, unprompted, someone left directly to alert the security guards. We did not see the knife-carrying man again, but we heard that he had been escorted off campus, and possibly met by the police.

In institutional terms, all this was a completely normal scene where students called on security guards for protection from outsiders. When I recounted my experience to local academics, they generally expressed horror and surprise. There may have been speculation about the man's mental health. No one had been hurt; but I understood that this story fed into a set of stereotypes, as if it were a proto-typical scene of the "kids from the projects" coming to threaten the campus.

Securitization, as Abigail Boggs and Nick Mitchell have recently recalled in the American context (2018), is a major mechanism of racial subordination and political pacification in university spaces. In France, the hyper-policing of Maghrebin and African subjects certainly worked to constitute them as a menace, not least to white French women (Ticktin 2008). Certainly, gendered sexual violence was a reality in French university spaces, as French activist groups have sought to make clear for decades.[8] It would thus be nonsensical to attribute campus violence primarily to outsiders.

[8] In 2002, the most prominent national activist group came into existence: CLASCHES, the *Collectif de lutte contre le harcèlement sexuel dans l'enseignement supérieur* (Collective for fighting sexual harassment in higher education). Yet it was only in November 2018 that detailed campus-

Security cameras mounted on the corner of university buildings.

In fact, the only physical assault I ever saw myself on campus was between two white men, both philosophy students. At a crowded activist meeting, they had begun to argue about whether to shut a door to the room. Arguments soon became insults, and one, suddenly enraged, slammed the door into the other's body. The assembled crowd, including a few older philosophy professors, was stunned by this escalation. A diminutive male activist came to separate the two,

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level research was published on violence against students, including sexual harassment and assault (Lebugle et al. 2018).

interposing his body between theirs. The room cried for calm, which held together tenuously, in spite of threats by the victim of the assault to "settle things outside later." The threats, fortunately, went unrealized.

The security services were not called to respond to this incident, in spite of the widely witnessed physical violence. No doubt they would have come to investigate if asked, and perhaps would have taken further action. I cannot derive an institutional pattern from these two incidents alone. But it is clear that a collective *discourse* existed about the "kids from the projects," and a racialized social type to go with it. No such collective discourse focused on the risk of white-on-white male violence on campus, nor did the security personnel normally scrutinize white middle-class bodies moving through the campus. In this sense, the figure of the "kids from the projects" became the institutional rationale for a double standard enforced by campus security. What, by contrast, was the experience of the *unmarked* subjects in this environment?

A worn out walk through campus

We can begin to comprehend dominant subjects' experience in this site by exploring the path to the Metro, which was the easiest way to reach the campus from Paris. The University of Paris 8 was literally at the end of the line. A metro line called *la treize,* the 13: identified in the warrens of Parisian public transit by a sky-blue circle, it came to an end right across the street from campus. Near the north border of Paris proper, the line split apart at a station helpfully called *La Fourche*, the fork, and if you were going to campus, you acclimatized to the rhythm of a certain announcement always muttered with monotonous optimism by the train crew: *Attention, ce train est en direction de Saint-Denis Université,* attention,

this train is going to Saint Denis Université. The equipment was worn out, and quite often the train was overcrowded to the point of chaos.

As the train went north past the city limits, you could recognize its entry into Saint-Denis by an odor of sulphur perpetually lodged in the tunnel at a certain spot. You passed beneath the pedestrian city center of Saint-Denis that we saw earlier, the train emptying out as you neared the last stop. One day, leaving the metro platform, I discovered that I was just behind Stéphane Douailler, the senior philosophy professor who had first welcomed me to the department. He had thinning gray hair, wire glasses and a keen face. I thought about saying good morning, but he was in motion and looked rushed. I set off behind him towards the department offices.

A nearly empty platform, Métro Saint–Denis–Université.

There was only one logical way to get there. We left the shadow of the peaked roof of the metro station, came across the gray asphalt of the plaza, across the low curbs of the almost nameless street that ran past the campus, up to the university's main entrance with its featureless outer gates set beneath the library windows. Then through a courtyard and past a security post in a dim lobby and up the escalator, which for once was not broken. Out into a wide passageway that crossed over the Avenue de Stalingrad, with a view to the east through wide windows, leaving the passageway bright with the day. Douailler was walking as fast as he could, stooping a little, barely looking at his surroundings or not seeing them at

all, perhaps lost in thought. We crossed the passageway and descended a second escalator, passing the bookseller who set up shop most mornings in the atrium. Through swinging doors and into Building A, the original building built when the university was forced out of its original Vincennes campus in 1980. We ignored the claustrophobic low ceilings, the bedraggled tiles, the dirty fluorescent light. Turning the corner away from the coffee shop, we passed a wide staircase leading up to a decrepit balcony, and then the bulletin boards with fraying posters for the Union of Communist Students. Finally we turned down a side hall and into the Department.

Campus passageway leading towards the Philosophy Department.

During my research stint in 2009-11, Douailler was one of the professors who "kept the Department going," doing far more than his share of the work. He had single-handedly written a report for the Ministry listing four years of everyone's research activities. He had a devilish capacity, I was told, for institutional invention, for drawing up new international exchange programs, for being pedagogical with the students. I often saw him teaching the Sophists, one of his specialties, or mediating between radicals and pragmatists. He invited his students to drop off their papers last-minute in his Paris apartment, if that helped them. One day I saw him complain that he was worn out from all the administrative work. *Je n'en peux plus*, I can't take it. He *looked* worn. He was approaching the mandatory retirement age.

He has since retired, but at the time his retirement was hard to imagine. *Where would he be without his institutional life?* someone asked. He was worn out, and yet it sticks in my head how avidly he crossed the campus hallways that morning, how little he noticed the familiar surroundings, how lost he seemed to be in institutional concerns. How eager he seemed to be to get back to the scene of the institutional action, even though his institution was arguably at the end of the line. He worried that the Department might disappear, someone mentioned. Yet that day, his very pace seemed to encode structural optimism about the institution. The habitus and its bodily routines themselves become symptoms of institutional investment. This investment became invisible, like the invisibility of old professors whose social characteristics let them walk through these corridors almost without seeing. The building was built for them to teach in, and it remained theirs even though in its fluxes of mass occupancy it was almost no one's.

A door towards a thing

A senior figure like Douailler had a privileged view of the Philosophy Department, and it is worth considering how he theorized the space. By virtue of his role, he was often asked to become a spokesman for his institution, and to evoke a dignified image thereof. He was asked to make the institution recognizable, marketable and presentable, to conceal its crises and emphasize its functions. When Douailler described the Department's future to me as it seemed in 2010, he reformulated his image of philosophy in what I might call "dignified radical" terms.

> The question of the future that you're bringing up strikes me as a good one. The future doesn't appear with the same figure and in the same forms as in the seventies. That's clear […] The meaning of the future would be an *other* world, the way in which another world could appear on the horizon. In 1970, the idea was that the future was in revolts, in social inventions dealing with feminism, with the struggles of prisoners...

> There was a feeling that, within all that, a future could appear on the horizon. So, today, maybe it's still a question of the future, but now the future is reformulated in terms of the absolute necessity of any world other than this one. It gets framed in a quite empirical manner and with a very basic conception of time: it will be in a future, in a time to come, but it's a weak notion of the future. And it applies to the question of the students that you're raising, right?

Douailler went on to describe the way the future appeared to the students:

> I think all of these [student] groups will at least agree on what we were just saying. That is: that they're <u>finding a door towards a thing</u> *[une porte envers une chose]*. You can even call it a future. With the feeling that, coming here, they won't even start out with the theoretical tools — we

wouldn't know how to give them any because, well, you don't necessarily know what works the best, you can't say that it's Foucault who will work best, that it's Deleuze who will work the best. We no longer know what the right curriculum is, you know. But on the other hand, they know they have a space to decide for themselves. As a space to offer them, it's pretty weak, but for many of them, it's already a start.

Thus even if the department attracted some politically active students, the future it could offer had become more *diffuse*, more abstract, converging with the empty altermondialisation slogan, "Another world is possible." The post-1970s future — in this moment of neoliberal globalization and looming ethnonationalist backlash — was a future without content: if radical philosophy's future amounted to a "door towards a thing," then neither the door nor the thing were well-defined terms.

Students entering one of the smaller, windowless philosophy classrooms.

This vagueness encoded a politics and a strategy. By not dictating the students' future, Douailler was arguing, the department was refusing to impose any imperialistic pedagogy, refusing to claim to know what kind of knowledge was best for the students. It was as if the "space to decide for themselves," in an otherwise routinized and neoliberalizing university system, was the most utopian thing the department could offer. What Douailler codified was an alternative form of an institution, to be sure. He envisioned a philosophical institution without curriculum in a field where the curriculum [*le programme*] had historically been very strict (Pinto 2007; Fabiani 1988, 1983). He endorsed a form of non-hierarchical self-teaching in a university system that had long fixated on the professor's magisterial radiance. This went along with his strong sense of philosophy's decline as a discipline.

From their [sociological] point of view, the situation is grave, in the sense of a future prognosis. After all, we're in a period where the whole set of schemas that asserted that philosophy still had a kind of prestige, had its codes, that it was classy to do philosophy, leading to certain careers, like diplomacy or culture — all that has collapsed. What the sociologists could observe today is a frightening collapse of those who held onto a certain doxa of distinction about philosophy and things of that order. They can show it in the statistics, apparently. For first year [undergraduates], major universities like Nanterre or Strasbourg are enrolling four or five students. Which means that — it's terrifying. If there weren't a body of students from the Third World, I mean, or from emerging continents — it's over. It's over, meaning that the idea that philosophy is a subject with any real draw, or that is really central to culture — in some places it's declining, or is going to disappear.

As the national market for philosophy seemed to collapse, the postcolonies (termed "emerging continents") seemed to offer a solution, or at least a deferral of the end of philosophy. And in the face of this collapse, Douailler set himself to formulate an institution. He dignified his department with a theory of an egalitarian pedagogy that just happened to spare the teaching staff from having to determine a definite curriculum. His stance here was arguably reparative about an institution that he also knew to be hollow, fractured, and torn, a department of "frenzied individualism" without a clear curriculum. Yet his reparative image of a "door towards a thing" also tended to *resolve* ambivalence into something provisionally affirmative.

Not an unmitigated success

Not everyone's ambivalence resolved into something so affirmative. Let us compare the structural optimism of a senior professor with the more tempered feelings of a more marginal teacher, a white French doctoral student whom I will call Marie. We sat down for an interview towards the end of my research work, in a North African tea shop on the grounds of the campus. It was a sunny day in early spring with cold shadows.

Marie had had an unusual trajectory for a Paris 8 philosophy student. What made it unusual was precisely that she had had a conventional French philosophy training. Unlike her peers, she had been trained by the elite part of the French educational system, the Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS). She had attended a branch campus of the ENS that had recently been set up in Lyon, succeeding afterwards at a prestigious civil service exam for philosophy teachers (the *agrégation*). As a student at the ENS, she had secured a stable French teaching career

from a young age, having signed a ten-year government contract, which provided a stipend throughout her studies and then offered teaching work afterwards.

After her studies in Lyon, she had continued with additional graduate work in Paris. Her reasons for moving there were "pretty practical," she explained: she had two children and her boyfriend worked in Paris. Initially she had finished a master's degree at the Sorbonne, advised by a prominent and well-connected Spinoza expert. Her master's advisor had then suggested she could contact Patrice Vermeren at Paris 8 for her doctoral studies. Vermeren, she recounted, was always warm and welcoming, even though her dissertation project was not well-defined at that point. But arriving in Saint-Denis must have been a shock.

"I arrived at the campus without really knowing its history or its reputation." In fact, Marie was not welcomed warmly at Paris 8's Philosophy Department, precisely because of her own academic background. She was was a *normalienne*, a "pure product of the system": that is, a representative of mainstream French philosophy and French elite education, the very things that Paris 8 had historically sought to overcome. (Needless to say, it was that same mainstream that had produced almost all of the Department's famous professors…)

For her part, she found Paris 8 a very different institution from the ENS she had come from. She was used to a more functioning administrative system; in Saint-Denis she found an institution that was highly disorganized. It was often unclear which room to go to, where to find the key to the classroom. The classrooms were mostly kept locked for security reasons. Even the enrollment paperwork was a Kafkaesque experience.

And yet not all the surprises were bad. It was her first major experience as a classroom teacher. She found that she had "immense freedom" in terms of the content of her courses — more than in a more conventional philosophy curriculum. She agreed to teach philosophy to first year undergraduates; the first year was trying, but the second year, she reported, "things got clearer in my head." She

found it "really nice" to teach beginning students, and yet also "really nerve-wracking," because the students themselves were in a perpetual state of anguish. She was struck by the gentler approach to giving student feedback — "you never correct in red pen here" — but also by the students' lack of preparation. "They lack a framework."

How could the students *not* have lacked a framework, a broad training in a discipline, in a department that was dedicated precisely to *not giving them that?*

But by the time I met her, in her third year of her doctoral studies, I found that she had actually become quite well integrated into the institutional life of the Philosophy Department. She was teaching classes; her teaching was funded by her ten-year national contract and thus did not require any university funding; she even took on departmental administrative work. We will see in Chapter 5 that she served as the primary organizer of an transnational philosophy conference — the logistics of which were all but flawless. The female professors knew her as a fellow academic mother.[9] Marie's trajectory, in short, had taken her from being an unwanted outsider to being a community member. She narrated this trajectory in somewhat ironic terms. "They found out I could be useful after all."

When I asked her to comment on the Philosophy Department's political mission, she was openly ambivalent. "I have mixed feelings about it, I'm pretty skeptical. Paris 8 isn't an absolute success." I remember feeling, by that point in my field research, that I understood exactly what she meant.

Marie eventually became a professor at the Sorbonne, after a stint teaching in Guadeloupe and in a high school in Brittany. She was the only Paris 8 doctoral student I knew who ever had that outcome. She was only at Paris 8 for a few years, a relatively temporary member of the Department, and yet her transience was not a failure: it seems that she got what she came for.

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[9] I wish I had asked more about what academic motherhood was like.

A student who was trapped

Not everyone in this institution was ever able to locate "a door towards a thing." Consider a young Frenchman who was my classmate in an Autumn 2009 seminar on the psychoanalytic concept of "the symptom." Let's call him Jacques; I barely knew his name even though we liked to greet each other. He had dark, long hair, a prematurely tired face, a pair of metal crutches and a disabled leg. One day we had coffee after class. He was in trouble, he said. He didn't get what was going on in any of his seven classes. He wasn't sure what he was going to do when the exams came.

We talked about how hard it was to see what the Department's pedagogy had to do with its politics, as if — this is my retrospective thought — utopianism had become a very distant horizon for both of us. Jacques suggested that a small link between politics and teaching involved the friendly relations between professors and students. Our teacher in the seminar — a female doctoral student from Germany — seemed much more approachable than a traditional French professor. We used first names and there was a lot of class discussion, much more than in the classes taught by old men.

Nevertheless, I was struck by a curious fact: Jacques didn't know the teacher's name, just as I barely know his. He didn't know any of his professors' names, he explained; he was only there "for the ideas." Jacques left Paris 8 at the end of the academic year, returning to his home town in southern France. He had been living in Paris in a cheap apartment, but had never been happy there, and hadn't made a lot of friends, he said resignedly.

Jacques himself was a symptom of something. Perhaps of the alienation that comes of not being tightly held in the world. This alienation was a product of low status, youth, lack of Parisian social networks, and non-membership in the local world of philosophical discourse. He really believed in the intrinsic value of philosophical ideas that Paris 8 offered, but by his own account, couldn't make sense of them. His alienation had flourished from the moment of his first encounter with the university, with its complex bureaucracy, its transient community, its "take it or leave it" attitude. His stance was emblematized by a piece of Philosophy Department classroom art where a student dangled haplessly from a coat hook.

Philosophy Department classroom art.

In the French mass university, someone like Jacques did not even need to know his teachers' names. He formed fleeting relationships with his classmates (like me), only to see them disperse. He became overwhelmed by institutional requirements that he could not master. If Jacques's relationship to philosophy at Paris 8 offered him space for reflective self-knowledge, this was only as a bitter compensation for his exceptionally *non*-utopian disappointment with university life. I am not saying his experience was typical, but I believe it was not uncommon, and I bring up his case here because he shows so vividly that, in a mass university, not everyone was able to become much more than an anonymous mass subject.

Graffiti and recognition

Other marginalized students developed a more agentive relationship to campus space. Etienne, the young man from UFR0, took a minor shine to me. I never knew what he studied, but he was plainly a working-class banlieue figure, racially ambiguous to me. I never interviewed him formally. He was one of the many subaltern subjects at Paris 8 whose visceral distrust of institutions made me disinclined to introduce my tape recorder. But Etienne did appreciate a different recording device, my camera, since he had none of his own and he was an enthusiastic graffiti artist.

The graffiti at Paris 8 was a constant presence. It was certainly not *everywhere*, but it was common enough that its appearance in public spaces was rarely surprising. It tended to explode during moments of student protest and occupation, when the protesters temporarily had free reign in campus spaces. It was concentrated on the campus's older buildings, especially in the most remote corridors,

stairways and courtyards. The university did not have the resources to remove it all.

Political graffiti, 2010.

Much of the graffiti was political. It was closely associated with another major form of unofficial visual expression on campus: the omnipresent posters, activist flyers, stickers and banners that lined the campus spaces, particularly the main entrance to campus. But unlike the posters, the graffiti acquired a particular power to signify degradation and, via the chain of cultural stigmas that we examined earlier, to signify the banlieue itself. Graffiti was associated with other signs of

banlieue abjection and criminality, such as theft, vandalism, and generalized uncleanliness.
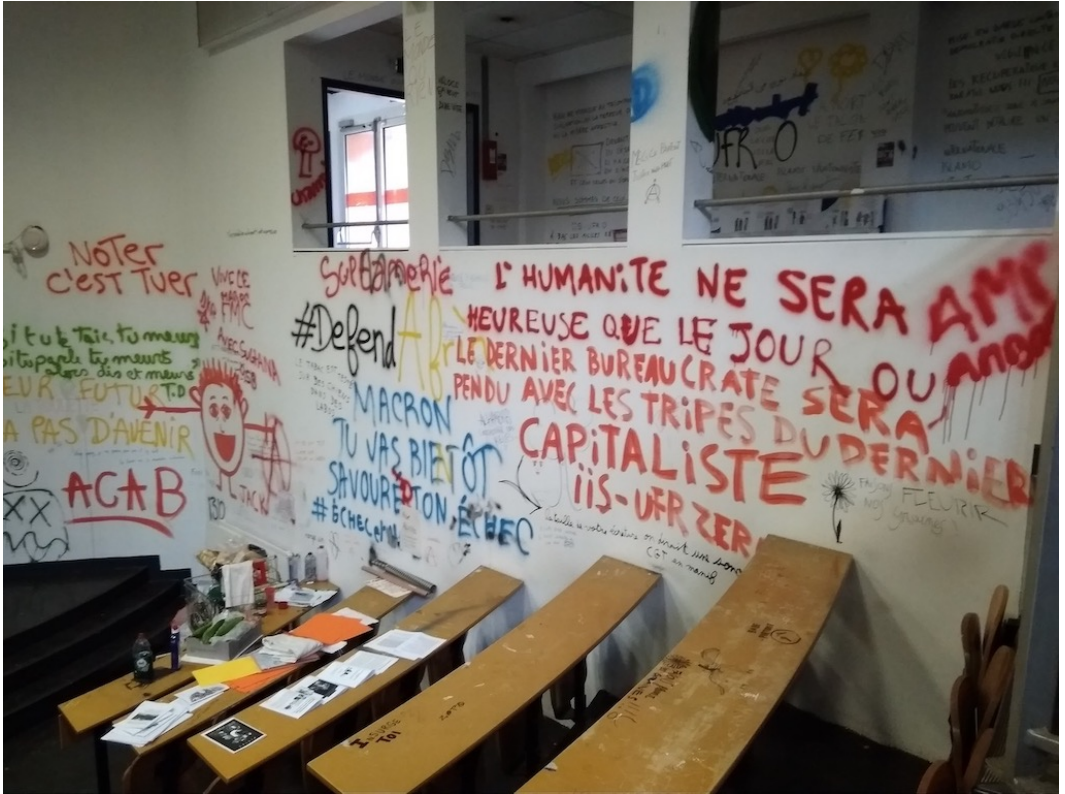
Graffiti covering a lecture hall during a campus occupation, 2018.

There is no necessary connection between graffiti and the banlieue. All sorts of French university buildings contain graffiti, even at the Sorbonne in central Paris. May 1968 was famous for its radical graffiti, which may have been construed as a sign of disorder but was not associated with the banlieue. Nevertheless, graffiti has become a banlieue signifier in the contemporary Paris region. To arrive in Paris by train involves traversing the banlieue, witnessing scattered encampments of the

homeless and masses of graffiti alongside the railroad. One can find graffiti scattered across Saint-Denis too, not so much in the downtown or on populous streets, but in liminal zones, under bridges or in empty spots. Ironically, Paris 8's campus was possibly the most heavily tagged space I ever saw in Saint-Denis.

Etienne was himself an ambiguous, liminal figure, the only graffiti artist I ever met in person. His graffiti practices were also eloquent commentaries on the dilemmas of dwelling in a banlieue university. In fact graffiti itself *was* a form of dwelling in the university, and a way of contesting the local relations of reproduction. In Spring 2010, there was a protracted student occupation of a restaurant, whose spatial politics we will examine below. During my visit to the occupied space, I ran into Etienne, who had taken full advantage of the unobstructed access to campus spaces that the occupation afforded him. He wanted to give me a tour of his extensive graffiti work, and was eager for me to photograph the results, asking me to send him the results.

The ensuing graffiti, generally taking the form of quips and slogans, spoke volumes about Etienne's radical form of subaltern, masculine consciousness. It made clear, above all, who his enemy was: the police. One tag read "Anti-cop: in or out of uniform." Another made clear the lethal scope of this vision: "A good cop is a dead cop." A third made clear the subversive relationship that opposed the campus occupiers to the security guards: "They are sentries, let's be pirates." And a series of other slogans, like "Anti-France" and "Property is Abolished," made clear a generalized opposition to the state apparatus.

Etienne was particularly proud of a large-format tag in English, "Loveless (we need love)."

"Loveless."

The "loveless" slogan was further surrounded by a whole series of masculinist love slogans. "It's not love but the lack of love that we replace with sex," attributed to an illegible name. Just left of "Loveless," Etienne continued the ruminations on heterosexual voyeurism that I had heard at UFR0: "You please me but you don't see me." Nearby he had painted further English slogans: "We need love, fuck money," and "Give me love forever." Farther off, other tags, perhaps not by Etienne, made more violent sexual statements.

The graffiti constituted a medium of especially unrestrained speech, since it was anonymous and public. The content of these tags seemed to be some kind of commentary on marginalized masculinity at Paris 8. Etienne's graffiti presented him as someone suspended between heterosexual desire and state interpellation, caught between loathing for the state apparatus and craving for love and aggressive heterosex. One can read these messages as symptoms of a toxic abjection, given the violent desire to kill the police and the intensely objectifying relation to women. Indeed, women's voices had no place in this masculinist discourse, and Etienne seemed to project onto their bodies an imaginary solution to his own sense of sexual lack.

Without downplaying the disturbing content of Etienne's slogans, we can also sense a desire to overcome his marginal social location. Through their very assertiveness, they illustrated his agency, made him visible, and manifested his desire to desire. To get "love" would perhaps have put an end to the loneliness that Etienne seemed to feel in his everyday social life, which was primarily with other young men. And to kill the police would have been, symbolically, to reverse the actual power relations of banlieue policing: the fantasy was a symbolic annihilation of the apparatus that seemed bent on annihilating people like himself.

The banlieue was more generally marked by strategies of subaltern reappropriation. Many of these involved the transcendence of legitimate forms of motion, via jumping turnstiles, *parkour*, or just hanging out in the street, and thereby existing publicly, taking up space. In this sense, it is telling that UFR0 met not in a classroom — which could likely have been arranged — but at a table in a campus hallway. A second form of spatial appropriation was the graffiti, which was a means of redecorating and resignifying the campus space. Etienne's graffiti was no doubt meant to take power back from the campus authorities, to make security forces feel a little threatened, and to make manifest his desire for women. Yet I suspect that Etienne's graffiti was above all meant to speak to men like him, with whom he sought to share his sense of precarity, of social antagonisms, of political righteousness and legitimate rage in the face of all these. It made the space *theirs*.

And by asking me to document the results, he sought to get outside recognition of his spatial tactics.

These strong, non-normative assertions of subaltern presence on campus, such as Etienne's graffiti, did not go unchallenged. The affront to the campus authorities and their normative "university community" was real, and it was met with strong efforts to overcome and erase it. Many considered the graffiti to be a pure degradation.

A self-managed space and its demise

While the campus administration was busy creating glossy monuments to the radical past, student militants were demanding "self-managed space" on campus. The administration never gave them any, but eventually they took some for themselves, crafting an autonomous, mixed-gender space of sociability just across from the glossy exhibition space.

"How do you get in?" I asked. The gates of the university were shut and it was a Saturday night.

The light fell from the windows of the occupied space, shining over the dirty surface of the sidewalk and the white bricks of the walls, blurring and dimming as it ran out to the bus depot and the metro station, dwindling into the night and the empty lots and avenues running off into the long banlieue cityscape. The streets were quiet. As I approached the occupation, I discovered a chair set beside an open window. A young woman in a red sweater was cooking at a large industrial

stove, and she gestured me to climb through the window. The scene was vaguely nautical: "They are sentries, let's be pirates," said the graffiti beside the window.

Window entryway to the occupied space. Paris 8, April 2010.

The space had been a commercial cafe, with counters and an industrial kitchen, windows half-covered with metal shutters, long tables and chairs backed with metal bars. The security post at the entrance ostensibly kept an eye on the occupiers. As the occupation continued, concerns mounted among the local

administration. But according to the occupiers themselves, the occupation was outside the security force's jurisdiction, since the occupied cafe was leased to a private company and hence outside their immediate rights of intervention. In any event, on the night of my visit, I found a space transformed, redecorated, re-arranged, and suddenly full of light.

Agit-prop tables.

One corner was a communal sleeping spot, with mattresses and a few dividers for privacy. Near the entrance were piles of activist literature, a feminist library,

and a clothing swap. Signs and posters told the history of the effort to inhabit the space, including grocery lists, lists of chores, a list of names for the space, and a list of bakeries and supermarkets with spare food. I felt almost at home, even though I saw only a few people I knew. There was Iris from philosophy; we were not yet friends. An activist with the New Anticapitalist Party, whom I'd seen before, filled me in on the news. "The owner stopped by and said he's going to file a complaint, but hasn't done it yet. There's a procedure for squats, we don't get kicked out right away, you have to see the commissariat…"

Half-eaten food, with a sign declaring that you need to wash dishes if you eat.

They fed us pasta with a bit of cucumber and tomato, beans, and purloined bread. I was asked not to photograph anyone's faces. In the courtyard two short-haired men were talking about Georges Sorel and French anarchists' role in the origin of fascism. There was a lot I didn't catch, a lot that was too quick and too soft, and it was night, the beams of the building towering over, an anomalous dog barking in the night. A law student with an injured eye told me that a former university president, known for corruption, had sold off public property to a company, which had leased it to a second company, which had leased it to the current tenants. Failing to make a profit, the space had been deserted with two months left on the lease.

It was a multiracial and fairly subaltern space. It was also an activist space, one far to the "left" of representative campus governance (Rose 2019). It was a space of mixing, of consumption, and of experiments. By breaking down the usual security barriers around campus, by embracing graffiti messages and highly diverse group composition, the occupiers created a university space that was both in and of the banlieue.

Yet it was conflict with the banlieue that was the undoing of the project. The night after I visited, there was a fistfight. Apparently it took place between the occupying students and some of the teenagers from the neighborhood. No one would explain it in much detail, but I understood that it ended in injuries and hospitals. Someone eventually told me that there had been a dispute over "theories of joint property." Apparently, the neighborhood kids had attempted to make off with kitchen equipment from the occupied space, and had been opposed by the student occupiers. Afterwards, the organizers, including Iris, sent around a communique which testified to their demoralization.

Sunday night around 8pm, grave incidents took place at the occupied site at Paris 8. The occupants present at the time have therefore decided to close the space for the night. No cops, no security guards, just the reality of the fact that self-management sometimes has its shortcomings.

The occupied space at Paris 8 will only be occupied when people want to bring alive some projects, workshops, alternatives. Otherwise it's just a big heated room for scratching our balls. Our utopias go a little farther than that, right?

Come on Monday April 12th at 11:30am to clean up, and 6pm for the General Assembly, where we'll discuss our developing projects.

What happened instead was that the university administration took the opportunity after a few more days to padlock the doors to the space. The occupation ended. "The open space is now closed," Ishmael wrote to me sardonically. One of the occupation's many spray-painted slogans had read: "Let's eat them before they eat us." But as it turns out, it was the occupation that got eaten first. It was a disappointing outcome.

This disappointment was itself a reaction. The organizers had previously explained, in the communique announcing the occupation, that they were occupying in response to their own disappointment with the mass university. This university was premised, they noted, on a passive, consumerist role for students.

Since Tuesday April 6th, a space abandoned at the entry of the St. Denis campus territory has been recuperated. This reappropriation is a necessity. Today, the campus is doing nothing to allow us to meet, exchange, organize or struggle. The university cannot be a mere passageway or of the consumption of coursework. Opening this place up is taking things into

our own hands [*prendre les choses en main*], ceasing to be passive, transcending the standard academic framework, bringing the city to life within the university. It belongs to no one; anyone can live there and bring it alive.

We are reappropriating this space to make it into a place of solidarities, of sharing, of struggles. We want to organize ourselves outside the logics of representation and the frameworks imposed by the university: schedules, institutional policy, occupation of space. We are experimenting with a place for debates, a place for sharing knowledge and practices.

The aspiration was admirable. Yet in the end, the occupation could not produce a genuine integration between the university and the city. It testified instead to the fundamental ambivalence that organized this relationship. Whatever else may have happened, it is clear that the occupation could not fully integrate socially with the inhabitants of the local neighborhood. Rather, its violent ending indicated the physical tensions that separated one group from the next. Yet the provisional life of the occupation also revealed the desire to make the university into a home. The occupiers sought to develop an alternative form of university governance, "self-management" (*autogestion*), which was centered on direct democracy and an abolished division of labor.

I would not call this occupation an intervention into the relations of intellectual *production* at the university. It had relatively little bearing on the production of diplomas or scholarly research. Rather, it was an intervention into the relations of *reproduction*: the politics of space, of everyday life, and of *dwelling* in the mass university. It seemed on its surface to have been a failure: a year later, it was all but entirely forgotten. Yet if nothing else, it helped sustain the longstanding campus tradition of occupying university spaces. The university had first been occupied in its very first month of operation, in January 1969, and occupations had continued frequently over subsequent decades. In 2018, some 200 African refugees occupied

a campus art building for almost five months, before they were finally removed by the riot police.[10] What was the deeper truth of all these occupations — their utopian arts of dwelling, or their ultimate failure and removal?

To be utopian is to create space, to redefine the way we use space, to protest dominant uses of space. It might mean reopening that which has been enclosed. It might mean reopening tensions that are impossible to resolve. To be utopian is to be honest about how spaces fail.

Interlude — Loneliness

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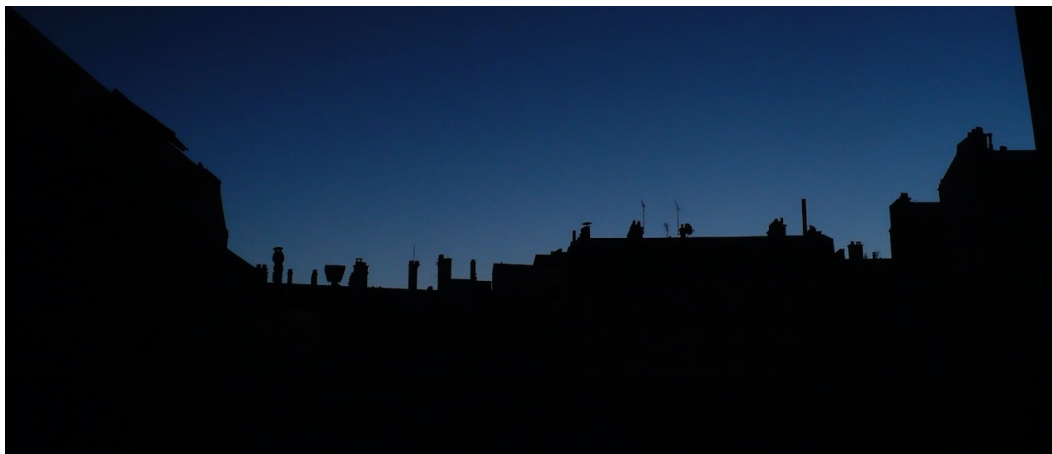
[10] "Université Paris 8 : des migrants évacués du bâtiment qu'ils occupaient," *Le Parisien*, 26 June 2018, http://www.leparisien.fr/seine-saint-denis-93/universite-paris-8-intervention-des-forces-de-l-ordre-pour-evacuer-des-migrants-26-06-2018-7793931.php.

It was September of my second year in France.

The light spreads out on the ceiling, an abyss of grooves between the planks running off from the eye towards the dawn. The light comes through little clumps and dots into this, my fifth bedroom since starting fieldwork, a low space seen from the bed up on its loft, smushed almost into the ceiling. It's early morning, and the windows of the neighboring apartments are all dark but one. I'm all anxiety and helplessness and anxiety about anxiety, and the dark feelings are fighting against my sleepiness and my desire to be ok and my longing for some sort of new effervescence, for something not lonely. I'm lonely but I have a vivid memory of what it was like not to be lonely, to have a partner, some part of me feels sure that all that will happen again someday, how could it not? and it's kind of comforting to imagine that.

Mind wandering. This was supposed to be a note about fieldwork anxiety, how dysfunctional it makes you, how paralyzed, how omnipresent that anxiety is. How much of a failure I am as an ethnographer, how much I didn't write down, how much I was overwhelmed.

But the dawn is tempting: wouldn't it be nice to put down my notebook and go out into the early light?

5. THOUGHT IN MOTION

Philosophers in the knowledge society

By now, some readers may be wondering: Doesn't it miss the point to write about philosophers without writing about their *philosophies*? Some philosophers would even say: Who cares how philosophers live, when the point is what do they *think*? And even: Why is this such a painfully *empirical* book, so historical, so experiential, so nonconceptual?

Here, then, is a chapter about thinking. And I might recall that I went to France to see the material circumstances in which thought was produced, since thought is inseparable from its historical circumstances. I might echo my own French interlocutors: "In every institution, there's a bit of thought: there's always some thought, even in wordless attitudes." I've tried to overcome the idealist distinction between thought and world; in my writing, I have mixed people's thoughts and reflections into my account of social reality. These are not such separate spheres. They are permeable. They co-constitute.

And yet I would be remiss to finish the book without a more careful look at philosophers' research and writing. In this chapter I examine one of the philosophers' key concepts, *thought*, and look at some of the social circumstances where philosophers were thinking. Before we come to the ethnographic details, though, let us recall the political context.

In the years I was writing, there was a dominant discourse in Europe about knowledge as an increasingly central force in capitalist production. The "knowledge society" was a political discourse that went along with national investments in technology and life sciences, with mass access to higher education, with constant pressures for credentials and certifications in the work world, with the growth of "human capital" as a neoliberal theory of the workforce. Even beyond Europe, the period since 1945 had seen a more globalized expansion of technoscience and of the university (Schofer and Meyer 2005). In European politics, there were struggles over whether the knowledge society was going to denote a basically economistic or scientistic project, or whether, conversely, it would also pay attention to culture and the humanities. For the most part, the economistic approach won out: consider a communiqué from the European Commission entitled "For a Europe of Knowledge."

> Economic competitiveness, employment and the personal fulfillment of the citizens of Europe is no longer based mainly on the production of physical goods, nor will it be in the future. Real wealth creation will henceforth be linked to the production and dissemination of knowledge and will depend first and foremost on our efforts in the fields of research, education and training and on our capacity to promote innovation.
>
> [European Commission 1997]

The "Europe of Knowledge" discourse was closely linked to a set of neoliberalizing reforms of European research and higher education. These, in turn, attracted substantial protests from students and academic staff, which I have explored elsewhere in more detail (Rose 2014). The protests tended to arise from parts of the academic world that were excluded by the technoscientific and pro-business focus of the reforms. What place is there for philosophy in an economistic moment?

Figure 5.1: Europe of Knowledge is Burning, activist art from Spring 2010.

Having read these kinds of discourses, I was surprised when I got to Saint-Denis. Philosophers certainly respected each other's knowledge and expertise, but in their local disciplinary culture, there was something they valued more highly than "knowledge" (*savoir* or *connaissances*). That something was "thought" (*la pensée*), in keeping with a philosophical tradition stretching back to Descartes' *I think therefore I am*.

Thought may have provided indubitable truths to Descartes, but it did not provide anything self-evident to me. I found myself wondering: What is *thought* to a philosopher? I initially suspected that "thought" was of a piece with categories like "the author" and "the work" (l'oeuvre), the conceptual artifacts of an obsolete, individualist humanism that has long been criticized in the post-war period (Foucault 1977). But in fact, the recourse at Paris 8 to a fundamental category of Cartesian intellectual work was more than the return of a repressed orthodoxy. Certainly, "thought" in France continued to name a philosophical tradition, a disciplinary distinction. As if the other disciplines were sites of mere knowledge, while philosophy was distinguished by its *thinking*. But when thought was invoked in the heterodox context of Paris 8, it also named the scene of an intellectual struggle over the definition of philosophical inquiry.

Thought goes beyond reality

I started asking philosophers about thought in interviews. Some reacted scornfully to my question, as if it were too naïve. Consider a senior professor with mainstream French philosophy credentials.

> Ethnographer: I keep trying to understand [what 'thought' means]...
>
> Philosopher: We've talked a lot about Aristotle, about Plato, about Descartes, about Spinoza, about Hegel, about Kant, about Derrida — everyone knows what it is, it's philosophers and thinkers, it's a perfectly identifiable object, these are people who have written original, interesting

things, which help to understand their worlds, often in such a way — by inventing thoughts, words to express them, and who have a systematic vision of things which is complete enough. Never totally complete, but complete enough; much more complete than other people of their epoch.

Ethnographer: —Yes.—

Philosopher (with a tone of finality): All in all, that's a sufficient characterization.

Ethnographer (trying to save face): —OK, thanks very much.—

Philosopher: It's really not a strange object.

On this account, thought was indeed not strange. It was the familiar province of the usual Great Man. Here "thought" corresponds to a familiar set of canonized social actors — Aristotle, Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Hegel, Kant, Derrida, etc — who are classified as "thinkers." What distinguishes and legitimates these actors is their relationship to the prevailing "vision of things" in their "epoch," and the fact that the thinker produces something "systematic" and "complete enough." Perhaps thought helps to understand worlds in "original, interesting" ways, but above all it seems to elevate the thinkers themselves, creating them as a group apart.
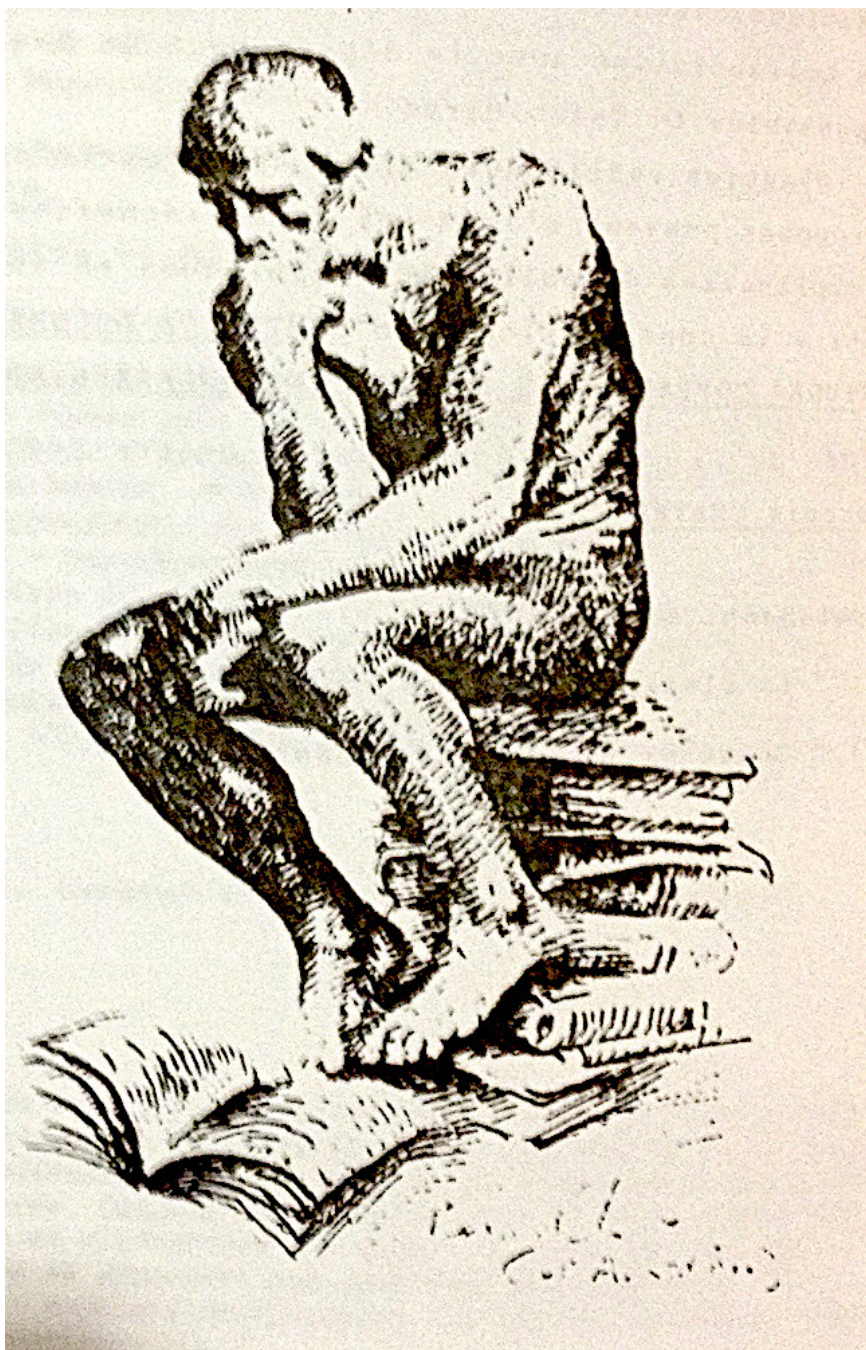
Figure 5.2: Departmental course brochure art (1986)

It is interesting to see how this system of distinction is reshaped in a second philosopher's response — this time from a more marginal professor who was not trained in the traditional French academy.

> Ethnographer: I wanted to start with this question of what thought is, what the mind is...
>
> Philosopher: Well, there, you have to go back to Greek concepts... It's where thought takes place, it's the organ of thought. Thought, it's a capacity to reflect on ends, to reflect on how things are possible, to reflect on oneself, and, consequently... it's a capacity to put reality — what one calls reality — in suspense. Thought goes beyond reality...
>
> There's a point of view that exceeds the facts, which is the point of view of the mind, of thought. It's that which is desired, which I'm trying to save in a context where cognitive capitalism seeks to annex thought to itself... Thought has become, thought is on its way to becoming — it was always a minor touch of soul [*supplément d'âme*], today it's even more clear, the workforce today, of the reproduction of capital, it's no longer the worker's physical strength... There's a major change in most of the developed world, the major labor force today comes from engineers' brains, from those who are now working with computers, so there's a major displacement.

Some of the Cartesian conventions were still in place. It was basically the human subject whose mind is the "organ where thought takes place." And thought is something that escapes from empirical reality by "going beyond it." But there is an interesting slippage here too: thought starts out as a "capacity" of the mind but

soom gets reframed as having a historical life of its own. In a post-Marxian vein, this second interview portrays the pristine realm of thought as being actively threatened by historical developments in the mode of production — by "cognitive capitalism" in particular.

In this view, philosophical thought is fundamentally at odds with a capitalist knowledge society. Thought just might destabilize the drive to accumulation through alienated expertise that was at the heart of its economy. Fortunately, this image also offers the philosopher a hopeful and even heroic role: to try to "save" thought from capitalist degradation. In this somewhat grandiose view, thought is not just a professional activity; it has a world-historical mission.

If we read across these two examples, we see how polymorphous thought could be. At times "everyone knows what it is" and it's too banal to talk about it. Other times it becomes a sharply political, polemical construct. There is no space here to retell the whole biography of this concept (nor am I a good historian of philosophy anyway). But we might note that radical philosophy in the 1960s and 70s had frequently been very meta and had thus aimed theorize thought and the production of knowledge. Michel Foucault had attacked humanistic images of thought in texts such as "What is an author?" and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (both published in 1969). A decade later, Jean-François Lyotard had helped to legitimate Paris 8's Philosophy Department by writing *The Postmodern Condition*, a study of knowledge production in the capitalist university (Rose 2014:201–215). A whole set of radical authors in these years were trying to contest what counted as thought, whose thought would count, and how thought could come into existence in the first place. Gilles Deleuze had put this dramatically in *Difference and Repetition*:

> There is only involuntary thought, aroused but constrained within thought, and all the more absolutely necessary for being born, illegitimately, of

fortuitousness in the world. Thought is primarily trespass and violence, the enemy, and nothing presupposes philosophy: everything begins with misosophy. Do not count upon thought to ensure the relative necessity of what it thinks. Rather, count upon the contingency of an encounter with that which forces thought to raise up and establish the absolute necessity of an act of thought or a passion for thinking. The conditions of a true critique and a true creation are the same: the destruction of an image of thought which presupposes itself, and the genesis of the act of thinking in thought itself.

[1994:139/1968:181–2].

One could read this as a quasi-anarchism — "thought is primarily violence" — that also puts contingency back at the heart of our understanding of thinking: thinking becomes a series of creative reactions to arbitrary encounters in the world, something that revises its presuppositions about its own process. Deleuze and his collaborator Félix Guattari — always breakneck writers — went on to elaborate an image of thought as a kind of motion among concepts. "The problem of thought is infinite speed" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:36). That image of speed apparently became widely accepted; I heard it echoed decades later in newspaper interviews with Philosophy Department professors.

To think is to move in an extremely rapid fashion between the analysis of a reality such as it presents itself immediately to us, such as we refuse and critique it. The very movement of thought consists in this game of back and forth between contraries, the junction of opposites, which logic and rhetoric call "oxymoron."

[Schérer 2007]

Thought then is something extimate, to borrow a Lacanian term: not radically apart from the world but enmeshed in an antagonistic intimacy with it (Dolar 1991). Jacques Rancière commented as well that "thought does not separate itself from what it works on, that it is present in the given and in the transformation of its own givens, and not in the enunciation of general theses on the world or on history, the fact that it continually transforms itself with its objects" (Rancière 2012:88).

These brief citations give us a point of departure. They sketch out a field of philosophical discourse that we can only sample. Let us be more concrete. If thought "transforms itself with its objects," how did philosophers understand this process of transformation? I was generally told that it could only happen in writing.

Thinking and writing

Writing for these philosophers was not seen as a simple or transparent medium for transmitting or conveying thought, but rather as an intersubjective space in which thought took place, and could be seen by others to take place. "To think is to think within the coordinates of a historically formed language. Language organizes our perceptions," I heard someone say in a lecture on Descartes. Another declared in writing, "Thought passes by the work of language upon language. Not that one should confound philosophy, literature or poetry; but, since philosophy inhabits a language or is inhabited by one, one must put concepts to the test in and by writing" (Vermeren 2011:20).

Figure 5.3: The view from a doctoral student's desk.

Writing, nevertheless, was not a straightforward or easy activity. Commonly, it was a struggle.

> The classical image, the philosopher who rests his chin on his hand and writes something well-formed, intensely, just like that. Well, let me tell you, I'm really not capable of that. Meaning that something starts to happen when I start writing. And I think that, when you rest your chin on your hand, in reality, you aren't really reasoning in organized sentences, but

really just in big blocks. And there you are, what will thus permit you to write, departing from these large-scale blocks, when you actually try to write, you find that what you had been conceiving as luminous, that in fact it raises problems. What I mean is that, linked to writing itself, there's a necessarily analytic component, which brings you to see that what you thought was simple, well then, it's not as simple as that, because you come up against such and such an obstacle, and so on.

(Interview with senior professor, March 9, 2010)

The only time when a presentation wasn't good, was when someone hadn't written their presentation. For a thesis, thought can only happen in writing, otherwise it's not really interesting.

(Conversation with doctoral student, May 2010)

Writing, it's more about clarifying, clarifying yourself to yourself, than about finding the moment for a thought that would have already existed. To put it differently, there is no thought except in the moment of writing. In any case, I can assure you that it's that way for me.

(Interview with senior professor, June 9, 2010)

Writing on these accounts is the only way that thoughts become fully-formed; thought and writing are not identical but they develop in tandem. And thought/

writing, on this account, pass by way of an eerie dynamic of incorporation and externalization, a process where "something starts to happen" that surpasses your point of departure. In this, a moment of individual subjectivity was part of the disciplinary norm. The imperative to think in the first person was transmitted explicitly, in introductory courses on philosophical method.

> *The professor spoke to the class.* One person started out by writing: "Plato was a Greek philosopher, from such and such a century, in such and such a city…" But we're not on Wikipedia. It's *your* writing. You should begin with a scene of speaking, a first sentence that leads into the heart of your remarks. It's not archaeology, this isn't a text found in a museum. The idea isn't to have a relationship of exteriority to the text… You're free to use any rhetorical style you like. Play between direct and indirect discourse. But you are supposed to enter into a subject.

> (Later:) Doing philosophy means reading, reading, reading, writing, reading, talking a bit to people around you… [Writing means working with] the drafts of ideas that you're within, and which are called 'thought.'

> [Fieldnotes, October 26, 2009]

The "heart" of philosophical inquiry thus centered on encouraging the students to read, write and think *in the first person*. Writing in an overly objectifying style, with too much focus on general historical background, was construed as not philosophical but archaeological, museological, overly encyclopedic. "You're not writing philology," the professor added at one point. It is scarcely surprising that

the formation of philosophical identity happened through contradistinction to other humanistic disciplines.[1]

The same professor told me in an interview that the writing process eventually would lead you to something like a flash of deepened insight.

> When someone starts doing the work of a doctoral dissertation, like the one that you'll do, where there are fields, readings, that are going to unfold a whole question — at a given moment, this chain of thought inevitably confronts an interrogation that we could call its fully philosophical sense. And at a given moment, there's the mark that the problem is considered in all its force. I mean, without depending on a knowledge, or an epistemology. At a given moment, *voilà*, the subject of this work must let their thought come up against philosophical interrogations, whether from the past or the present, in all their — their power [*toute leur puissance, quoi*]. And often, this is when the thesis is finished. Sometimes it's a bit difficult, because they must already have a lot of stuff done, they have to start again from the foundations… They have to say: I myself, I'm in dialogue with a great philosopher, with certain great texts. And this is difficult.

The "craft" view of philosophy, where you slowly make your way through a large body of literature, thus went alongside a demand for a rupture in established knowledge, a moment of theoretical "confrontation" with a philosophical problem that finally is "considered in all its force," all its "power."

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[1] The embrace of the first person was also a reaction against the historical focus of much French philosophy pedagogy. François Châtelet wrote in his memoirs, "As a student, I cheerfully mocked my friends who, as pure historians of philosophy, were content to think the thoughts of others" (Châtelet and Akoun 1977).

Figure 5.4: A doctoral student's bookshelf.

While this confrontation might be something you could do alone at your desk, it was also a highly social activity, premised on dialogue and a community of interlocutors. Sometimes these philosophers even envisioned their work as a *critique* of philosophical individualism. For instance, in a 1993 announcement for the Department's book series at Editions Harmattan, *La philosophie en commun* (philosophy in common), the editors Douailler, Poulain and Vermeren wrote:

> Too exclusively nourished by the solitary life of thought, the exercise of reflection has often led philosophers into a frenzied individualism, reinforced by the cult of writing. And the quarrels engendered by the worship of originality have too readily supplanted all theoretical debate.

What then did philosophical writing look like when it was not solitary, when it was highly social, even gregarious? Here ethnography can become illuminating.

Traveling by train

These philosophers were not sedentary thinkers, any more than their numerous research objects were stable. They frequently crossed borders and went on voyages. Just as border-crossing was necessary to the philosophers' spatial fix (Chapter 3), a certain reflexivity about borders become integral to their intellectual production.

"Philosophy and Borders" was the name of a fancy conference that the Philosophy Department organized in March 2011. It did not take place in Saint-Denis, nor even in the Paris region. Instead it was held across the country in Céret, a beautiful mountain village in the Pyrénées that had been a center of modern art in

the early twentieth century. The conference sought to honor the memory of Jean Borreil, a French philosopher with Catalan origins, who had taught in the Philosophy Department until his premature death in 1992. The theme of borders was meant to resonate with Borreil's own work, and with the conference's location in Catalan country, that is, which spans the Franco-Spanish border. The event was lavishly funded by the Céret Museum of Modern Art, whose director, Joséphine Matamoros, had previously collaborated with Borreil. For the older philosophers, who had been there before, it became a site of memory. But for me and several other doctoral students, it was the site of a stressful rite of passage: to give a philosophy talk in front of an audience. Talks which had to be written at the last minute.

We first met each other in Paris for the trip to Céret, leaving from the cavernous Gare de Lyon. When I arrived in the station concourse, high-ceilinged and full of bakeries, ten people were already waiting. At the center of attention was Marie, the conference organizer who we met in Chapter 4. Marcel and Ishmael were already there, tending a duffel bag and a rolling suitcase, and mingling with several South American philosophers, who largely spoke Spanish. I chatted with one of the South American philosophy professors: we were both anxious about presenting in French. I learned that I was going to fill in for an absent presenter called Mendoza from Barcelona, who could not attend. It was Thursday. My talk, then unwritten, would be on Sunday morning.

Marie shepherded us to our train, heading off the senior professors when they tried to go the wrong way. We sat in the bottom level of a long TGV train; I was across from Marcel and Ishmael. Soon, a female professor sat down beside me, formally dressed. She introduced herself as Christine Bouissou, the Vice President of Paris 8 — clearly a powerful person to associate with. Patrice Vermeren introduced me from across the aisle, making much of my status as their American observer.

Figure 5.5: Traveling by TGV.

As the train departed, we all set to work on our conference talks. I searched my laptop for something to write about. Bouissou took out a mass of papers and began to write her talk in longhand. Across from us, Marcel and Ishmael sat tugging on their chins, staring off into space, and not really talking. Marcel flipped through a worn volume by Deleuze, and when I said something to Ishmael, he looked disengaged. "You're tired?" I asked. *Je suis dans mes pensées*, he said, "I'm in my thoughts."

The space of our train compartment thus became the contingent place where thought happens, one of those ambiguous spaces that are so functional for today's knowledge workers, blurring the lines between work and non-work. On the train, brief convivialities mixed with crowded solitudes, and little diversions became entwined with our approaching academic obligation to present conference talks. No one at that point was yet overwhelmed with writing anxiety. There was still time to maneuver, to get lost in thought or page through one's books, to enjoy the privileges of hesitation and procrastination.

Thought against world

"I'm in my thoughts," Ishmael had said.

It could be a portrait of the modern philosopher: a French man withdrawn from his immediate surroundings, at least momentarily, and deep in contemplation, we knew not of what. It struck me, at the time, as an ethnographic enigma. Thought was happening right in front of me, and yet I had no access to it, no understanding of it. Ishmael was in his thoughts and they were in him; they left no obvious interactional traces. They were unobservable. And they were indecipherable, since *thought* was at once inward mental activity and meaningful participation in a key ritual of philosophical action. To think, for Ishmael on the train, was also to be *seen thinking*, to look busy (deliberately or not) in front of your colleagues. And yet it was not purely performative: something was actually being produced in the thoughtwork, something which may have been immaterial, but still had a use-value and an exchange-value.

My ethnographic participation in the conference had involved a transaction. In exchange for my free hotel room, I had had to agree to give a talk at the conference. This left me with the dilemma of what to talk about. I wrote to Marie: "I am not at all sure that I have the disciplinary or intellectual legitimacy (not to mention the linguistic competence) that a presenter ought to have." But I also had a desire to perform. After having observed philosophers for more than a year, I wanted to show that I had something to tell them. I wanted to bring my reflexivity to the table, to make this reflexivity into a mirror in which they could see themselves. As if to provide a countergift for their many gifts to me.

I hit upon the idea of talking about the very notion of thought, since the French term *la pensée* cropped up constantly in philosophical discourse, much more than in American analytic philosophy. I proposed to Marie to give a talk called "Ethnography of the universal: thought and its national limits." It was very last minute; on the train to Céret, I scoured the Philosophy Department's texts for uses of the word "thought." I was soon struck by a very long sentence in the Department's course brochure, which I found hard to understand.

Opposant à l'injonction ordinaire des univers culturels demandant à la pensée de « se faire monde » une résistance plus forte que n'ambitionnent généralement de le faire les philosophies pragmatiques attachées à réduire les figures d'hétérogénéité au sein des structures logico-mathématiques du langage et de l'action ou les philosophies herméneutiques se vouant à les maîtriser dans des logiques et éthiques du consensus, ils s'obligent à explorer systématiquement les ressources critiques de la philosophie contemporaine et des pratiques humaines et sociales capables de retenir les aventures réelles du présent de s'identifier spontanément aux partages préformés des vies et des pensées, aux existences organisées sous l'État selon le réseau donné des liens économiques et juridiques, aux représentations artificieuses et rassurantes de la modernité.

> It [the Department's teaching and research] opposes the ordinary cultural injunction that asks thought to "become world" [*se faire monde*]. It opposes it with a stronger resistance than one generally finds in the ambitions of pragmatic philosophies, which are invested in reducing the figures of heterogeneity to logico-mathematical structures of language and action, or in hermeneutic philosophies, which aim to incorporate them within the logics and ethics of consensus. It sets out to systematically explore the critical resources of contemporary philosophy and human social practices, and to use these to keep the real adventures of the present from identifying with the predetermined divisions of life and thought, with State-organized existence within the extant networks of economic and legal relations, with modernity's artificial, consoling representations.

"The department's teaching and research… oppose the ordinary cultural injunction demanding thought to 'become world.'" What might this mean, for thought to "become world," I asked myself? I turned to Marcel, sitting across the table from me. Marcel examined the passage, seeming to get lost in the length of the sentence. Ten lines went by without a period in the French original, which was long even by philosophers' standards. Marcel also found it puzzling. To "become world" (or more literally, to "make itself world"): what, precisely, could that mean? Neither of us knew. We speculated that perhaps it was one of those ceremonial phrases in institutional discourse that no one ever really reads. It was only a stray sentence introducing a course brochure, after all.

Soon I discovered the author, Stéphane Douailler, sitting in the row behind me. As we have seen, Douailler was often solicited to produce collective representations for his Department. But he didn't seem surprised that I was perplexed by the sentence in question. He explained that it sought to express an opposition to the expectation that "thought" should have to realize itself in the world, should have to become the world, should have to be realizable, or perhaps pragmatic, functional, operative. He added that another part of this long sentence was supposed to express a resistance to any "thought" that would seek to be total or

complete. Thus the utterance aimed to oppose both a completely practical, technocratic relationship to thought, but also to oppose any philosophy that might seek to govern and transform society in a totalizing, unhesitating fashion.

This was not just thinking: it was thinking about thinking. It was thinking about the politics of thinking. It was thinking in public for an implied audience. (We may not be quite sure who that audience was, but as non-French non-philosophers, we can be sure we were not it.) And without parsing this long sentence in full, it is worth noticing that it reveals a strong sense of borders *within thought*. If thought is a space, it is not an undifferentiated one. Douailler's discourse took pains to distinguish what happened in the Philosophy Department from various other kinds of philosophy, such as "pragmatic philosophies" and "hermeneutic philosophies." And he invoked the local trope of thought as *adventure* — an adventure which involved some sort of escape from "modernity's artificial, consoling representations."

I have nothing against consolation, and it seems to me that the text too had a certain consoling function. It reassured its readers that the Philosophy Department itself had a mission. A highly oppositional, conflictual mission. A reflexive mission — one which had indisputably moved on from the 1970s-era Maoist-revolutionary mission statements, arriving at a more gently stated critique of "ordinary cultural injunctions."

One could say a great deal about what a complex statement like this was trying to convey. But the more general point is just this: thought was never a tabula rasa. Rather, the philosophers were thinking in a densely organized, mythicized, symbolically jagged landscape, like Freud's Rome with its many overlapping layers of history. In short, thought had baggage, it had barriers within it, and it was always already highly reflexive. My conference paper sought to make some of these points, but I have to say it was very underdeveloped.

Writing after midnight

The conference proved to be a space of effervescence and anxiety. The anxieties of conference performance had something in common with the anxieties of having an ethnographer along. To be seen is to risk anxiety. I complained a little about the awkwardness of my role, but my friends corrected me. "Reflect a little before you complain about being viewed as the Foucauldian police." "An ethnologist complaining about being the observer is like a psychoanalyst complaining about transference." That's what I was told — ironically, of course — as I climbed up the hills with Ishmael and Marcel, the night before the first conference session.

It was evening. The spring buds were traced out in black alongside big floppy leaves, the sky darkening, the mountains in the distance blue in silhouette against the west. We found our way first though a narrow alley and then up a hillside. The hills are dense in that part of the world, covered with orchards, stone terraces, and

tongues of scrubby bushes. Our path ran alongside an open sluice that had once supplied the town with water, but had gotten dried out and overgrown with moss.

Figure 5.7: Hillside near Céret.

As we set out, it was at first hard to find our way out from the houses. We found ourselves facing a driveway marked *Voie sans issue: Propriété privée* (dead end: private property). "Private property *is* a dead end," said Marcel, but he was kidding, not trying to be dogmatic. They climbed ahead of me, hands in their pockets, and we looked back at the town, with its shuttered windows and red

roofs. The slopes were rocky, and Ishmael, as usual, was only wearing sandals. At dusk we turned back towards home, at a bend where an electrical pole looked like a cross silhouetted against the sky. When we got back into Céret, we found that many of our conference mates had also gone for walks, and soon we all sat down for dinner, told jokes, gossiped, and told stories.

But after dinner, the mood changed. A nervous haste set in. It was late in the evening, but for many of us, it was time to go to work — time to finish our conference talks. "To our pens!" Marcel exclaimed as he vanished into his hotel room. We seemed to be living in the temporality of just-in-time intellectual production, and just-in-time was threatening to overflow into too-late. People's writing, by their own accounts, was chaotic and frantic. Ishmael would report getting up at 4am to write, and Marcel would say he had tried to wake up at 5am, but couldn't get coffee until 7am. Stéphane Douailler reported getting up at 3am to write out the text of his intervention, and Marie explained that her laptop had run low on batteries, so she had had to finish writing her exposé in her hotel bathroom, the only place with an electrical outlet. A hotel bathroom: not the usual image of a place of philosophical contemplation.
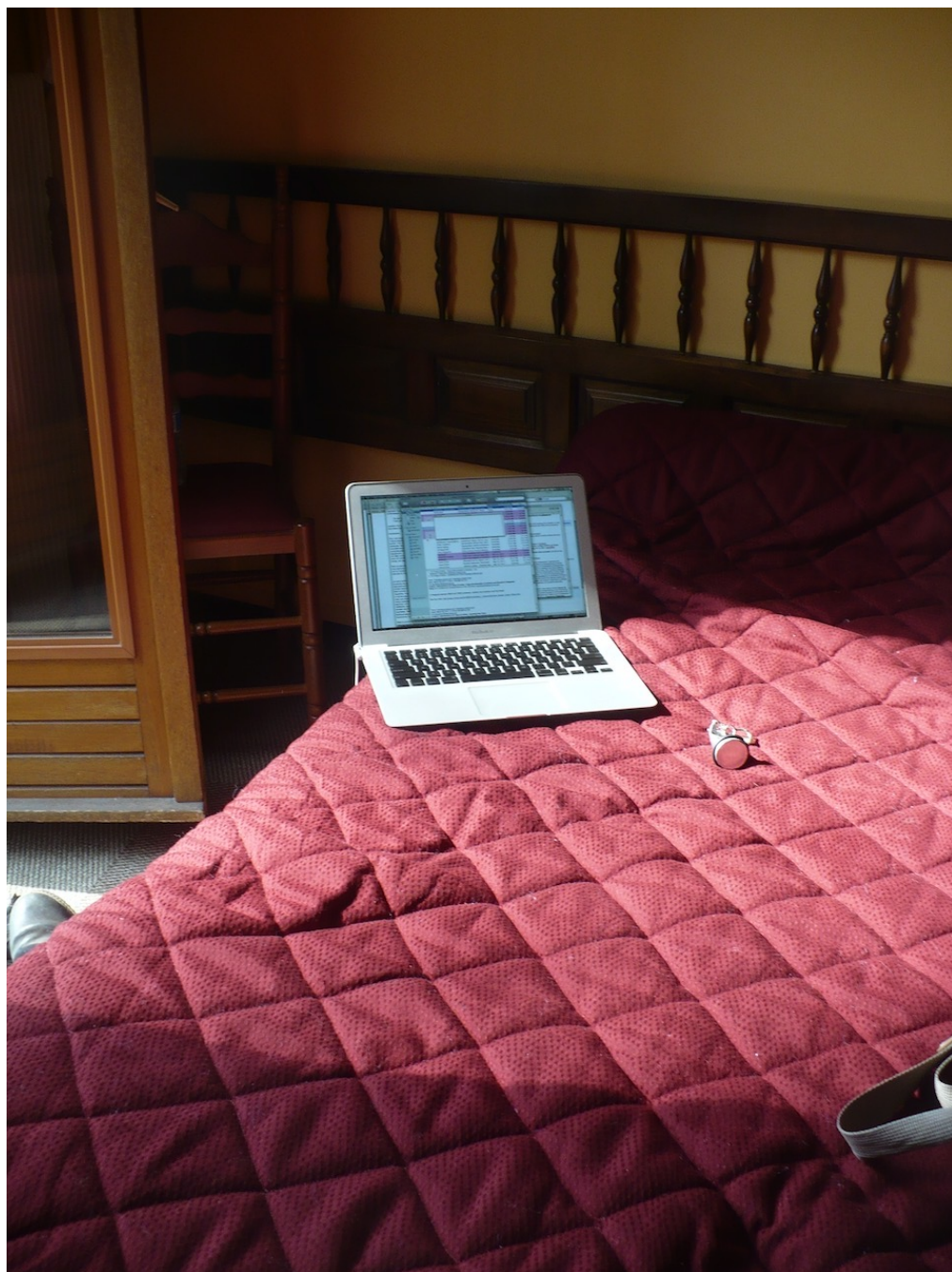
Where I wrote my conference talk.

For some, this temporal compression blurred into the anxieties of ritual performance. On Saturday, a few hours before Marcel and Ishmael were due to give their talks, I found them outside the conference lunch cafe. They were sitting mutely, not even having drinks, just waiting. Even after I sat down beside them, they were barely talking, Ishmael's eyes falling almost closed. "Marcel, you're nervous," I said. "More than nervous, so totally worn out that I'm not even nervous any more," he said. Ishmael said he could barely get to sleep the night before. Our conversation had long silences, the scene was worn out, slack; the sunlight got hotter and hotter. Both of them seemed to be in an odd state of semi-victory: the texts were finished, but not the delivery.

As the afternoon went on and the appointed time grew nearer, the stress intensified. In one pause between presentations, I found both of them pacing around outside the conference building, smoking vigorously, again barely talking. When I asked, Marcel said he smoked "a huge amount in these moments of stress." The stress came out in the smoke, in the corporeal distance that sprang up between us, in the unaccustomed silence. Stress came out in resignation. "It's really not great, but well, *voilà*, it's done," Marcel said of his paper, self-deprecatingly. I tried to comfort him: "You're the only one who will see the flaws." The talks went off without incident. Later, in the evening afterwards, they sat at the hotel bar, drinking whiskey to wind down.

These changing moods were far from being trivial details. They tell us something about philosophical work in a system of mass intellectual production. The philosophers had to churn out legible disciplinary texts. They had to produce them according to a rigid presentation schedule. And they had to move from one world to another, from the solitary moment of writing in hotel rooms in the wee hours to the social moment of presentation, exchange and reception in the conference

room. This structure was genuinely scary for some of its participants. It gave them immense and real anxieties. And then it let the anxieties drain away.

The image of Ishmael quietly alone "in his thoughts" was perhaps the classic image of a modern philosopher. Yet it was radically incomplete. Our official image of a philosopher thinking does not not involve being left sleepless, silent, pacing, self-deprecatingly resigned, or "so totally worn out that I'm not even nervous anymore." Indeed, the moment of escape into the hillside that we saw above, so pastoral, becomes legible as a moment in a structure of feeling. The happy moment of being in motion, walking outside, doing non-instrumental activity, turns out to be a moment of only provisional freedom from the anxiety of rationalized philosophical work.

This anxiety again gets into the body. Anxiety became an embodied form of reflexive knowledge, one which was no less meaningful for its lack of conceptual elaboration. In this case, Marcel and Ishmael's anxiety was, I think, a form of reflexive knowledge about the very borders of philosophy as a field. To write and present a philosophy talk was not just a straightforward, linear production process. It was a stressful rite of passage, especially if you were new to the game. It exposed you to the risk of judgment, maybe even the risk of public failure or humiliation. I was no exception to that structure of feeling: as my own presentation drew closer, I jotted down that "I can barely function, anxious, exhausted, jumpy physically from coffee," and I stopped taking notes.

The defining characteristic of anxiety in psychoanalysis is that it is mobile and sometimes even objectless. In this, it is unlike fear, which has a clear definite object (Salecl 2004:11). What then *were* these anxieties about? I would argue that they were anxieties of recognition and indeterminacy.

Laughter and recognition

The conference proceedings went by in a largely tranquil, orderly fashion. Many of the talks were basically rough drafts, destined to be revised later into publishable texts. The questions from the audience were frequent and, in my view, largely generous. I remember asking someone why they used the word "man" (*homme*) to refer to people in general. I do not remember the answer, except that I don't think I found it entirely satisfactory.

After the conference, our anxiety dwindled. We changed the subject. We relaxed. The ritual was over. On the train back to Paris, I found myself sitting with Ishmael, Marcel, and a female philosophy student, Ariane. I started reading a philosophy paper called "Towards Materialism," which had inaugurated a small neo-Althusserian research group in Paris called the "Materialist Research Group" (Legrand and Sibertin-Blanc 2007). But I soon discovered that the Materialist Research Group represented something that my friends Marcel and Ishmael could not stomach. To my surprise, they seized the document from me and began to read it out loud, erupting every sentence or two into an outpouring of laughter.

The Althusserian text in question began by criticizing the metaphor of a "philosophical toolbox."

Marcel: The toolbox.

Marcel: Faint laughter.

Ishmael: Bad metaphors. Metaphors that wore out their impact. Metaphors that wore out their impact.

Marcel: *Soft giggling, punctuated with high pitched squeals.*

Marcel: They didn't even make a paragraph.

Marcel: *High pitched laughter like the cooing of doves*

[overlapping, confused voices]

Ishmael: "In returning to the 1960s" — it's one of those Althusserian things: you're always going backwards, but at the same time you always justify yourself before the godfather. […]

Marcel: Even if — they won't quarrel, they won't quarrel with any theorists, so they had to mention them in bulk — it's already four lines of this stuff!

Pause, room noise.

Marcel: *Sibilant burst of laughter exploding from mouth like a spray.*

Marcel: Sorry!

Ishmael: Well, they adore — look at how they put together the sentence: you get this far and you forget it's a question and that there'll be a question mark at the end!

Marcel: Soft high-pitched laugh-squeal.

Ishmael (reading the first sentence of the text): "What is at stake for us *[Marcel laughs under breath]*, at this preliminary stage, in returning to this period of the 1960s, to the re-readings of, and stances towards the Marxist corpus that took place then, and to the stance towards it that we in turn have or could have?"

Laughter breaks out like a little accordion, at first in a rapid beat of notes, then slower. Overlapping laughter.

I suspect that the extreme mockery was partly a reaction against the sense of scrutiny that Marcel and Ishmael had faced earlier that weekend. Our philosophical talks had been performances that exposed us to the risk of becoming objects, in the face of the judgmental subjects in the audience, which included senior philosophy professors from the Department. Perhaps when Marcel and Ishmael redirected criticality towards someone else and away from themselves, they were returning to being subjects and not objects.

The laughter was very joyful, but one might also call it harsh, because it was desubjectifying. It made their disciplinary others into sheer types. It stripped away agency, individuality, originality, and intellectual self-determination from the "Althusserians." The "Althusserians," meanwhile, were associated with a much more prestigious institution than Paris 8, the Ecole Normale Supérieure at the center of Paris. In laughing at the Althusserians, Ishmael and Marcel inverted the reigning institutional hierarchy. Meanwhile, as this critical comedy took place, Ariane sat next to us listening. Ishmael and Marcel did not solicit her input; on the contrary, she became a spectator. Of course, I was a spectator too, but as a foreign ethnographer, I was not always expected to have anything to say.

Who gets recognized, and on what terms?

Nomad thought

Jean Borreil, the Catalan philosopher to whom we paid homage, had never been a global theory star.[2] Many of the conference participants were unacquainted with Borreil, who had already been gone for decades. But the older French academics all brought up Borreil. Patrice Vermeren's paper at Céret recycled part of a homage he had written to his friend in 1992. Christine Bouissou, a fellow Calalonian, dedicated her paper to him, "the friend I spent time with for more than twenty years."

The homage at the heart of the conference was thus a masculine homage, like other memorial conferences I saw at the Philosophy Department. While women constituted nearly half of the conference presenters at Céret, the horizon of citation remained predominantly masculine. Meanwhile, the organizing work of the conference was handled by two female students, and the gender disparity in this structure of care and support work went without comment. The two philosophers from the Philosophy Department, Douailler and Vermeren, were clearly at the social and disciplinary heart of the conference. Intriguingly, though, the most institutionally powerful participants were all women. Michèle Gendreau-Massaloux, who spoke about the Mediterranean as a border space, had been a senior figure in the Mitterrand presidential administration from 1984 to 1989, and subsequently held numerous high-level roles in French public administration. Bouissou, one of the only presenters to discuss gender, was a university vice president. And the conference itself was sponsored by Joséphine Matamoros, who directed the Céret Museum of Modern Art. The masculinity of the homage to Borreil was thus not exclusive of women's participation or of women's power.

In spite of its masculinity, the ensuing space of homage was a highly reflexive space. Within the conference, one could reflect on one's relationship to Borreil, on

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[2] He was known in the Paris 8 milieu largely as a participant in the radical history that centered around Jacques Rancière, *Révoltes Logiques*.

one's own relationship to borders, on the relations between Catalonia and philosophy, and on the relations between border spaces and border concepts. The museum director, Joséphine Matamoros, was ill and unable to attend the conference itself, but she expressed her ties to Borreil in a brief preface to the published conference proceedings.

> At the eve of my departure from Céret's Museum of Modern Art, it was important to me to give homage to the one who had labored for the intellectual and historical recognition of this patch of territory that is North Catalonia: without him, and without his support, my trajectory would have been different, without any doubt. As my career reaches its term, a rapid glance backwards reveals — despite the steep and often arid path — the extraordinary illumination [*éclairage*] that Jean Borreil provided, which followed me through every step.

> [Matamoros 2011:13]

Such statements were themselves acts of memory. They often invoked a sense of the body, as if the memory of embodiment provided a sort of reality effect. Matamoros evoked her own sense of biographical motion, of a "trajectory" and a "glance backwards" at the "steep and arid path" of her existence. In her image of things, Borreil himself served less as a moving body himself than as a source of "illumination" for her own motion. (Did this scenario, where a man illuminates the path of a woman, ever occur with the gender roles reversed?)

Other homages showed how Borreil's own motion through the world was inseparable from his relationship to the border. Vermeren lingered on the image of Borreil walking, borrowing the prose from an homage he had coauthored in 1995 with a painter, Maurice Matieu.

He walked quickly. He had in the step something of those who know how to move, and this way of wrapping himself in his raincoat as he advanced. A gift from childhood? A habit garnered on the mountain where he was born? In Paris as in Barcelona, in Tübingen and in Dublin, he paraded his cap and his mustaches with the same determination. He crossed the Spanish border by smugglers' paths. By instinct he knew where to get through. He had a mental geography, drawn from his history and his readings, which he would test on the spot.

[Matieu and Vermeren 1995:5]

Borreil's physical act of walking became inseparable from his Catalonian identity, from an intimate knowledge of the physical landscape, and from a capacity to follow the paths of transgression — that is, the smugglers' paths across the border. The figure of the nomad turned out to be a key image of Borreil's philosophical work. For Borreil, "There is no return… there is only loss," according to his former colleague Alain Badiou (2009:152), who also noted that "the enemy of thought is constantly identified by Borreil as the rightful owner [*le légitime propriétaire*]" (148). Thought was something mobile and nomadic that "follows a wandering and difficult line" (147). In this, it opposed the sedentary territoriality of such "rightful owners" as the capitalist, the state, or the owners of private property.[3]

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[3] Borreil's repudiation of property and propriety also resonated with the Philosophy Department's embrace of exophilia and marginality. He was said to be committed to a "repudiation of the universal" (Badiou 2009:152). "His thought testified… to a solid and insatiable philosophical appetite which got him interested in all that was foreign to him" (Vauday 2006:82). The "art of contraband, of theft, of despecification [was] typical of Jean Borreil's manner" (Douailler 1995:61).

Perhaps there is always tension between utopias as sedentary territories and utopia as a principle of motion. "Utopia can become a margin… it can also become a bitter realism," Borreil wrote once (1978:69). Philosophy at Paris 8 was a vulnerable territory, constantly defended and arduously reproduced. It was also a place that showed you how uncomfortable a home is, how restless it can become, how disappointing, how unsettling. I keep thinking about thought that sets out but never comes home: "There is no return, there is only loss." A far cry from a structuralist vision of knowledge as a largely stable system.

Thought in the Céret sense was an ambiguous form. Its definition was a field of struggle; its practices elicited disagreement. In all its forms it was immanent to a place, to a situation, to a history. It took people on mental journeys to faraway places, only to then bring them back full of anxiety, hastily writing long before dawn, even trembling before they spoke. After Céret, we did go on to publish our conference talks. We listed our essays on our CVs. In that sense, Céret remained a part of academic reproduction in a neoliberal university. But only a very liminal part.

If thought is often an affective form that takes you into a "game of back and forth" with the world, then in this, in its shape, it can also teach us something about the basic ambiguity of a disappointed utopia. Always it remains part of the system it wants to refuse. And this liminality is also what makes it able to continue. I did not necessarily find that there was anything very "utopian" about the form of these philosophers' professional writing. Its existence was mandatory; it satisfied the production imperatives of the neoliberal university. Its content, on the other hand, could be quite heterodox, freed from the strictures of a mainstream academic discipline. Sometimes it was even radical.

Probably no one can be a utopian all the time. Some of these subjects seemed to be utopians in the morning, neoliberal text-producers in the afternoon, ambivalent self-critics in the evening. This sort of dividedness, where the division is often spread out over time, defines what I call a disappointed-utopian subject. Some-

times such a subject keeps its utopian parts outside itself, as if distancing itself from its defining ideals. And then later it might find them again.

Interlude — The end of the day

It's sunset; the light dims across the trees and shrouds them; and in the pits of the streets a woman walks to and fro, cellphone in one hand, dogleash in the other. The dog moving aimlessly, a large dignified creature with pointy nose and a broom tail; the path of the streets traceable from my third-story window by the aisle of white trees that follows the path of what they call a boulevard. But last night when I made fun of small towns, I was rewarded by jokes about how in American towns, at 11 at night, everyone is doing square dancing. Ishmael added further jokes about how French people are afraid of America, because of having seen *Easy Rider*. At dinner yesterday, people said, "Our ethnographer is leaving soon." I said, "Yes, I'm leaving in three weeks: my advisors in Chicago tell me that I have to write my thesis sooner or later, and I'm out of field funding." Marie retorts: "You have your reasons. If you want to leave because you want to be near your mama, that's OK too." I don't say anything, and a professor leans over and asks, "It doesn't bother you that she's teasing you?"

The end of the day in Céret.

Now, down in the street, a large orange ball of a globular streetlight is illuminating the bark of trees and the tarnished asphalt, and the clouds turn lavender and spread out in tendrils against the dying orange and yellow of the daylight, and the twigs and spoons and nuts of the spring are dark detail against the sky, and the light reflects off the skylights, and down in the street a couple is walking and suddenly the girl begins to run and soon disappears around the corner of the winding streets, and a bicycle goes by roaming, and a scooter is parked beside a flashing PHARMACIE sign. The roofs are red but turning grey and the buildings are white but increasingly stained with the artificial colors of nighttime illumination, and up, if you look up, the stubs of the leaves are still and the hills roll down calmly towards the valley. A man walks by with his hands in his pockets and his beard wrapped around his chin, and his sweatshirt wrapped around his arms and around his body, and here in my hotel room it is wretchedly silent.

6. WHOSE UTOPIA IS THIS?

The logics of utopianism

It is only one last irony that one of the most utopian gestures I saw in Saint-Denis was a defense of the non-neoliberal public university. On one account, "after 1968, everyone agreed unanimously that the University was dead. Dead, yes, but like a cancer: it was spreading."[1] Forty years later, my interlocutors wanted the opposite: for the university to keep living. But on what terms?

I suggested at the outset of this book that utopianism is not a *project* but a gambit: a tactical intervention *against* dominant futures as anything else (Rose 2016b). How does a utopian gambit work? And if local utopianism was a utopianism without a subject, how does something get pushed "outside of subjectivity"? This last chapter inspects that process — the process of *making utopianism be nonsubjective* — by exploring the writing of a utopian University Declaration of Independence.

The Paris 8 Philosophy Department produced the Declaration in 2009 during the French university strike of that springtime. Writing this Declaration was far from straightforward. It brought out a whole series of antagonisms and contradictions. Many of these, in turn, were symptoms of their historical moment, which

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[1] Foucault 1994, Vol 2:782.

was a moment of neoliberalization and frustrated resistance in the French public university system.[2] In June 2009, at the moment of my arrival, it remained unclear whether the university protest movement was bound for failure, and campus activists were full of mixed feelings.

Yet the University Declaration of Independence, published on March 12, 2009 at the height of the university movement, opened with an abstract romance of thought that went beyond ambivalence. "There are no constraints more forceful," it began, "than those that the human spirit, which has invented all of them, exerts on itself in the form of thought." A famous theme, this: the creator trapped by her own inventions, which take on a life, or rather a force, of their own. "The most powerful thought is the most demanding," it continued. *Thought* starts to seem like its own thing, something not quite "in a subject" but potentially with a life of its own. The text then waxed poetic: "Truth and creation, beauty and justice, reason and unreason are but some of the names men have given to this demand." So thought *demands* beauty of us, and not vice versa: thought demands justice, thought demands truth, thought demands all sorts of marvelous things… Thought, for these philosophers, thus got imagined as a *repository of unambivalent ideals*: as a container for radical affirmations. (The word *men* was contested, as we will see.)

In this chapter, I read this Declaration of University Independence as an emblematic case of desubjectified utopianism. The analysis begins with two major observations. First, the Declaration revealed a local practice of *voicing* utopianism which mandated that utopian ideals should be presented impersonally, solemnly, purely, and in carefully objectified form. The Declaration itself was written, in short, as if its radical positivity could not appear in the first person, or even via any ordinary human voice, but rather had to get filtered through something outside a subject. Thus instead of saying that *We are committed to truth and justice*, the

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[2] For more comprehensive histories of this political moment, see particularly Beaud et al (2010), Brisset (2009), Rose (2014, 2019).

Declaration states that *thought demands truth and justice*, as if thought acted by itself.

Second, the process by which the Declaration was produced was *a utopian process without a clear social subject*. The project of the Declaration was initially proposed by more marginal actors and then appropriated from them; and the official Declaration then spawned a counter-declaration from other student radicals, who denounced the utopian pretentions of their professors. The authors of this counter-declaration were denounced personally in turn. In sum, I found that the Department's moment of seemingly unambivalent utopianism was actually a moment of social antagonism that ricocheted among differently positioned subjects.

These two points suggest that we are dealing with a utopianism that was not born out by a definite social subject, and that furthermore was artfully engineered to make unambivalent ideals seem to be anchored outside of subjectivity. Let us call *desubjectification* the process of putting something outside subjectivity. I presume that this process is at least conceivable. It is an anthropological common-place that people often like their ideals to seem to come from the beyond. But while some groups would ground their ideals in heroic pasts, divine interventions, or biological essentialisms, these French philosophers anchored their alienated idealism in a romance of "thought." If we can grant that an alienated utopianism seemed to emerge from this Declaration — *alienated* in the sense of *misattributing the products of local praxis to something beyond* — we can then ask how this was produced.

By asking *how* desubjectification happens, we can set aside a version of critical analysis that *begins* with the fact of alienated consciousness and then asks what functions it "serves." Instead we examine the processes by which things get

alienated and desubjectified in the first place.[3] Alienation itself is surely never a stable form; it turns back on itself and shifts with the circumstances. Nor is alienation quite the same thing as desubjectification, but here they are closely linked. In any event, I begin here not from a spirit of ideological critique but from the post-Hegelian thought that all social forms are forms-in-motion, and that all historical motion is in turn genred and patterned. What social form did a Declaration of Independence set in motion? When utopians alienate their ideals in an effort to attain something uncompromised, do the very forms of their utopian estrangement shift?

As always, unambivalence is not primary, but is a furtive reaction to ambivalence. In the same way, utopianism is not primary, but is a political reaction to a world of political blockage and frustration. There were numerous *logics of reaction* which coalesced into something like a utopianism outside subjectivity. These reactive logics were: (1) a logic of making political exceptions to political exceptions; (2) a logic of compensatory universalism; (3) a logic of policing the limits of radicalism; (4) a logic of radical one-upmanship and denunciation; and (5) a logic of narrative closure premised on masculine scorn. The logics that produced utopianism were thus not themselves utopian.

Philosophers on strike

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[3] There is a parallel here to Latour's image of scientific knowledge (1987), in which natural scientific claims begin as claims and get progressively *transformed* into putative objectivity.

Banner: "If they don't learn to hear us, they will learn to fear us. GENERAL STRIKE."

A huge banner hung from the university library when I arrived on June 11, 2009, declaring a GENERAL STRIKE. Beneath the banner was a decrepit entry hall, wallpapered with flyers and graffiti. "Long live the armed struggle." "Universities in struggle." "The fight goes on." "Optimism is the faith of revolutions." "Staff, Students, Teachers: Same Combat!: Abolition of the Law on Ruining Universities." Hand-drawn calendars promised "alternative seminars" and activist meetings. One poster told the campus security guards to quit their jobs; another reprinted Article 35 of the 1793 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, which authorizes popular insurrection. The escalator leading farther into campus was flanked by mountains of piled chairs, one of the only barricades I ever saw in France.

A chair barricade at the entry of the university, 2009.

Yet the barricade lay undefended and the campus was quiet, because the movement had all but given up. "The fight is not over," said one flyer. "June 13 promises unfortunately to be the last big encounter of the year. Yet we're coming out of several months full of all kinds of struggles." The unsigned authors cited not only the university protest movement, which had begun on February 2, 2009, but also a NATO protest in Strasbourg, a general strike in Guadeloupe (Bonilla 2010), a strike against a factory closure in Lagny-le-sec, and several mass street marches. The declaration that the fight "is not over" was debatable, but it showed

how hard it was for the protesters to quit their movement, even though the sense of loss was palpable.

The movement of that year had lasted four months, making it the longest university strike in the history of France. At stake was a university reform put in place by the right-wing Sarkozy administration's Minister of Higher Education and Research, Valérie Pécresse. The Pécresse reforms had begun soon after Sarkozy took office in May 2007, and they constituted one of his major political priorities. They centered above all on implanting business values, corporate structures, and a spirit of "autonomy" within the traditionally statist, centralized French public university system. The usual paradox of authoritarian neoliberalism was on display in the Sarkozy reforms, as critics commonly pointed out. Entrepreneurial and market-oriented logics were not destined to emerge by themselves; tacitly, they had to be instituted from above (Vinokur 2008, Rose 2019). "Modernization," said the avatars of reform, including many university presidents. "Ruin of public services," said its plentiful opponents.

The reforms were rolled out in stages. They elicited an initial wave of protest in Autumn 2007. But these early protests, largely led by students, collapsed when the dominant national student union, UNEF (the National Union of French Students), made a deal with the government. They received assurances that the major student issues — low national tuition and open admissions — would remain, for the time being, untouched by the reforms. Critics of the law were not silenced, however, and unrest continued throughout the next year. The February 2009 strike was led largely by university professors, who were angry, above all, at a proposed reform of their work obligations. Teaching loads had been set (since 1984) at 128 hours of teaching per year, but Pécresse had introduced a provision that could have increased teaching loads for academics with lower research outputs. A second controversial initiative, termed *mastérisation*, aimed to merge teacher training into academic master's degree programs. Behind these specific debates loomed a deeper conflict over the neoliberalization of French public services. Sarkozy's administration aimed to make French universities more

"autonomous," aligning them with a fantasized "American model" of higher education. The traditional structures of civil service employment and centralized governance were reshaped; universities were increasingly asked to find their own resources, own their own real estate, negotiate with the State for contractualized public funds, and compete for prestige in global university rankings (Wright and Orberg 2008).

The Philosophy Department, and Paris 8 in general, was at the forefront of the 2009 protest movement. Its young president, Pascal Binczak, was a vocal opponent of the Ministry, at much political risk to himself and to his university. He was often seen marching at the front of Paris street protests. The Infinite Rounds of the Stubborn, a circular march in central Paris which became one of the best-known symbols of the movement, was organized in the Arts Division, and the philosopher Eric Lecerf was one of its major organizers. In this larger context, the Philosophy Department undertook an initiative to write a utopian Declaration of Independence.

This text, in all its utopian ardor, can only be understood as an exception to an exception, a reaction to a reaction. The strike itself was already a moment of political exception to the everyday academic life. Yet an instrumental rationality often governs French social movements, which focus on pressuring the French state to alter its policies or regulations. French activists typically focus on realpolitik questions about goals, demands, strategies, and the balance of power. Utopian representations such as the University Declaration of Independence, however, break with this practical politics to produce purified wish-images organized around unblemished ideals. The writing of the Declaration thus constituted a utopian exception to the ritualized exception of French protest.

This second exception was an answer to some structural problems with the strike itself. The strike was largely empty time: classes were suspended; entrances to campus were blocked; everyday campus life was halted. This empty time needed, in some way, to be filled. And it turned out that not everyone *liked* doing

the usual, instrumental strike activities. Activists were at ease with political organizing, with its rhythms of pamphlet-writing, strategizing, networking, spreading information, deliberating, and marching. Some of their colleagues, though, preferred simply to stay home during the strike, rather than participating in the strike activities.

Out of frustration with the conventional protest forms, many alternative strike activities were invented, from street theatre to courses taught in the metro. The project of writing a Declaration of Independence was but one of these. It was particularly adapted to philosophers' skills: it was a rare occasion to write in a grand philosophical register, sidestepping the pressure to parse all the intricate policy details of the university reforms themselves. And it took advantage of the rare sense of time that the strike afforded. During regular teaching semesters, everyone was busy, often even overwhelmed. I never saw a regular teaching semester that produced a Declaration.

Thus if the strike was an exception to university time, then the declaration was an exception in the instrumental time of the strike itself. There is a logic here: the logic of making holes in the temporal order. But this was not a logic of *individual agency*: no single actor could change the flow of collective time. To create an exception to the normative flow of time, it took collective energy and investment.

A declaration of university independence

Let us now "turn to the text" — a classic philosophical gesture, obviously — and consider *Pour une déclaration universelle d'indépendance et d'interdépendance des universités* (For a Universal Declaration of University Independence and Interde-

pendence). The final version was released on March 12, 2009; it had been original-ly just called "Declaration of university independence" (*Déclaration d'indépendance des universités*). We saw in Chapter 1 that French philosophy has long invoked a problematic white universalism, and in the Declaration, the universalism was right there in the title. But what did it mean?

Pour une déclaration universelle d'indépendance et d'interdépendance des universités

Préambule :

Il n'y a pas de contrainte supérieure en force à celles que l'esprit humain, qui les a toutes inventées, exerce sur lui-même sous la forme de la pensée. La pensée la plus puissante, c'est la plus exigeante. Vérité et création, beauté et justice, raison et déraison, ne sont que quelques-uns des noms que les hommes ont donnés à cette exigence. Arts et sciences, techniques et métiers : toutes les disciplines appelées à en assurer l'inquiétante existence en sont autant d'expressions. Tout pouvoir, qu'il soit politique, religieux, économique ou autre, qui refuserait de se soumettre à cette exigence est voué à dépérir.

Considérant que cette exigence et les conditions de son exercice n'ont pas à disparaître ni à s'effacer avec les pouvoirs qui s'en servent en prétendant les servir ; considérant que les universités ont à cet égard une responsabilité devant les peuples présents, passés et à venir, nous, qui avons participé d'une façon ou d'une autre à l'exercice de ces droits et devoirs universels de la pensée, avons entrepris d'énoncer les points d'intransigeance auxquels cette exigence nous contraint.

Article 1er. L'indépendance de la pensée consiste à pouvoir expérimenter sous leurs déterminations propres les enchaînements de connaissance producteurs d'œuvres et de savoirs. Ainsi l'exercice de cette indépendance n'a de bornes que celles qui en assurent aux autres la possibilité d'en éprouver, attester, évaluer la validité. Ces bornes ne peuvent être déterminées que par une communauté d'égaux autour de l'indépendance de l'université.

Article II. Tout homme et toute femme possède en toutes circonstances un droit imprescriptible à vérifier l'égalité de son intelligence avec celle de tout autre.

Article III. L'indépendance de la pensée est partagée entre tous ceux qu'elle engage dans une recherche, un enseignement ou des études. Elle doit être la même pour tous, quels que soient leur place dans l'université, leur provenance nationale ou sociale, leur appartenance confessionnelle et ethnique, leur âge et leur identité sexuelle.

Article IV. L'université est faite de la pluralité des langues et des cultures. Elle contribue à leur continuelle créativité.

Article V. L'université favorise et promeut la libre migration des personnes et des pensées.

Article VI. La libre circulation des pensées et des savoirs repose sur un droit inconditionné d'accéder à tous les moyens et sources de la connaissance. Nulle censure ne saurait restreindre les sources mobilisées pour sa mise en œuvre.

Article VII. Quiconque s'engage et contribue à la recherche, l'enseignement ou l'étude doit pouvoir expérimenter une pensée critique sans faire l'objet d'aucune censure, répression, ou inquisition.

Article VIII. L'université n'existe qu'en dehors des espaces contrôlés par les forces de l'ordre ou toute autre force armée. Son espace est là où elle se réunit librement.

Article IX. La valeur d'une pensée ordonnée à la contrainte du vrai repose sur les seules exigences qu'elle doit aux protocoles de sa mise à l'épreuve. Son évaluation dans l'université revient à ceux qui portent cette exigence dans la recherche, l'enseignement et l'étude : elle est publique et sujette à contradiction.

Article X. L'université est riche des espaces et des expériences d'émancipation. Comme telle, elle est publique.

Article XI. La politique scientifique de l'université est commandée par la seule production des œuvres et des outils de la connaissance. Nulle contrainte de retour sur investissement ne peut déterminer le cours de cette activité ni la hauteur des financements qu'elle réclame. Il appartient à la puissance publique d'en garantir l'autonomie.

Article XII. Nulle personne désireuse de poursuivre des études ne doit être contrainte à y renoncer pour des raisons d'organisation financière ou pratique de l'université. *A fortiori* elle ne peut être obligée d'hypothéquer, par l'autofinancement ou l'endettement, tout ou partie de sa vie, ni d'accepter des atteintes à sa dignité. Elle doit au contraire recevoir tout soutien matériel nécessaire.

Article XIII. Toute personne qui travaille à l'université y appartient de plein droit à une communauté qui accorde à tous l'égalité de droit et de respect.

Article XIV. Parmi les centres d'enseignement, de recherche et de création, seuls ceux dont les dispositions ont pour but supérieur de rendre effectifs ces principes prennent le nom d'université.

Article XV. Toute société, tout Etat, qui contrevient à ces principes, est réputé ne pas avoir d'université.

Article XVI. Toute université désireuse d'appliquer ces principes possède un droit à se placer sous la protection élargie d'autres universités et d'organismes internationaux. Toute université signataire de cette déclaration s'engage à apporter son soutien à qui le lui demande, sur la base des principes énoncés.

Ce projet de déclaration vise à formuler les principes sur le fondement desquels se constitue une université. Ils sont autant de points d'intransigeance hors desquels parler d'université revient à abuser du sens des mots.

Le groupe qui les a rédigés est né à Paris VIII à l'occasion de la grève contre le décret Pécresse et la loi LRU ; il a peu à peu grossi au fil des séances de travail. Il ne tient pas sa tâche pour achevée, ni ses formulations pour définitives. D'ores et déjà traduit en créole, en néerlandais, en grec, en portugais, en espagnol, en anglais et en arabe, sur le point de l'être en d'autres langues, le projet est destiné dans un premier temps à circuler en tous lieux du monde, auprès de quiconque est susceptible de s'y intéresser, de réagir par ses critiques et suggestions, de devenir partie prenante.

Une première et encore réduite mise en circulation nationale et internationale a permis de l'améliorer et de compléter la rédaction initiale. Une circulation plus ample permettra d'aboutir à un texte à la fois meilleur et plus complet. Tous ceux qui participent et participeront à son élaboration en deviennent et en deviendront *ipso facto* les sujets porteurs ; leur nombre est en droit illimité.

Initiative XCIII. Le Comité de rédaction (Saint-Denis, le 12.03.09)

I have tried to improve slightly on the published English translation.

For a universal declaration of university independence and interdependence

Preamble

There are no constraints more forceful than those that the human spirit, which has invented them all, exerts on itself in the form of thought. The most powerful thought is the most demanding. Truth and creation, beauty and justice, reason and unreason are but some of the names men have given to this demand. Arts and sciences, crafts and techniques: all those disciplines called to ensure thought's disquieting existence are equally the very expression of its demand. Any power, whether political, religious, economic or otherwise, which refuses to submit to it is doomed to wither away.

Believing that the demand of thought and its conditions of use need not disappear, nor be effaced by powers that use them while pretending to serve them; and believing that universities have in this regard a responsibility towards the present, past and future peoples of the world; we, who one way or another have all participated in these universal rights and obligations of thought, have undertaken to state the commitments that this demand imposes.

Article I: Independence of thought consists in being able to experiment, subject to their own determinations, with those chains of understanding which yield knowledge and its *oeuvres*. The exercise of this independence thus has no bounds besides those which afford others the possibility of proving, attesting and evaluating its validity. These bounds can only be determined by a community of equals in an independent university.

Article II: All men and all women in all circumstances possess an inalienable right to verify the equality of their intelligence with that of anyone else.

Article III: Independence of thought is shared among all those who engage in research, teaching or study. It must be the same for all, regardless of their place in the university, their social or national origins, their religious and ethnic belonging, their age and their sexual identity.

Article IV: The university is made from the plurality of languages and cultures. It contributes to their continuing creativity.

Article V: The university encourages and promotes the free migration of people and of thought.

Article VI: The free circulation of thought and knowledge is based on an unconditional right of access to all the sources and means of understanding. No censor can inhibit these sources of circulation.

Article VII: Whoever engages in and contributes to research, teaching or study should be able to think critically without fear of censure, repression or inquisition.

Article VIII: The university exists outside the space controlled by the police or the force of arms. Its space exists only where it can associate freely.

Article IX: The value of a thought bound by the constraint of truth can be based solely on the protocols by which it is put to the test. Its evaluation within the university is the task of those who enact these protocols in research, teaching, and study; it is public and subject to correction.

Article X: The university is rich in spaces and experiences of emancipation. As such, it is public.

Article XI: The university's academic policy is a function of its production of knowledge and of means of understanding. Questions of return on investment play no part in it, nor in the distribution of academic finances. The university's autonomy must be guaranteed by the public powers.

Article XII: No person wishing to study may be forced to stop on account of the university's financial or practical organization. No one may be obliged to mortgage their life through work or loans, or to accept unjust circumstances. On the contrary, they should receive all necessary material support.

Article XIII: Everyone who works at the university is a full member of a community that guarantees equality of respect and rights to all.

Article XIV: Among the world's centers of teaching, research and creation, only those whose higher purpose is to enact these principles shall deserve the name "university."

Article XV: Any society, any State, that violates these principles shall be said to have no university.

Article XVI: Any university aiming to enact these principles shall have the right to place itself under the protection of other universities and international organizations. Every university that signs this declaration thereby undertakes to give its support to those who request it, on the basis of the principles set out.

You might find this text abstract, given its emphasis on "unconditional" and "inalienable" rights, its rhetoric of universalism and free thought, and its impersonal declaratives. It was a text that tried to speak once for everyone, to *apply*

universally, and to speak on behalf of universal values. Nevertheless, it was a deeply French, deeply philosophical text, shot through with traces of its own context of production. In fact it balanced between two ambivalences: an ambivalence about philosophy and an ambivalence about the state. Its *universalism* was in this context deeply compensatory. Universalism (at least, the language and aspirations of universalism) was deployed hopefully, as if it could give these philosophers a way out of the traps of their own history.

The first ambivalence is that this is a deeply *philosophical* text that nevertheless presented itself as a nondisciplinary document. Philosophy is a paradox in the modern French system of disciplines. Organizationally, it is merely one field among many in the modern system of academic disciplines. Yet ideologically, it has a history of claiming to represent Frenchness and universal knowledge in general, and particularly in the 19th century, it used to lay claim to a special status as "queen of the disciplines" (Fabiani 1988). The Declaration embodied the paradox of a field at once branch and root. It proposed an ambiguous, liminal relationship to universalism. It spoke of a universal "demand" that thought imposed on us, but it envisioned this requirement as a zone of intellectual hetero-geneity. Thus thought was seen as emerging from a multitude of "disciplines," "arts," "sciences," "techniques" and "crafts," all of which seemed to have an equal claim to "express" thought's "demands." In this, the text was true to Paris 8's general valorization of interdisciplinary research. It never even mentioned philoso-phy as such.

But the closet disciplinarity here was only barely hidden. It is scarcely surpris-ing that a group of philosophers brought along their philosophical values, claims and presuppositions. By beginning with "thought," the Declaration enshrined a key philosophical concept at the heart of its image of the university. And the subsequent image of intellectual activity — with its "protocols by which [thought] is put to the test," "chains of understanding" which get traversed, and a commit-ment to staying "open to correction" — was patently based on the ideal conditions of *philosophical* research. This was an image of university inquiry that involved no

laboratories, no archives, no experimental apparatus, no fieldwork and no professional training. It only required a Socratic commitment to public dialogue and to certain rules of intellectual method. The image of "an inalienable right to verify the equality of their intelligence with that of anyone else" came, however, not from Socrates, but from Jacques Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991 [1986]), a deeply anti-academic book which had idealized undisciplined, proletarian intellectual inquiry.

This being said, the Philosophy Department itself was deeply *un*-representative of academic philosophy in France. It was institutionally heterodox and marginal, in spite of its heritage of famous figures. Its current professors' work was often discounted or ignored by many Parisian intellectuals. This Declaration was thus a philosophical project made from the margins of the discipline. It could, in fact, be seen as an attempt to transcend the Department's own disciplinarity marginality, as if saying: we may be marginal within our field, but we can still claim to represent national and even universal values, like thought and emancipation. I never came across a utopian Declaration of Independence written by any other French philosophy department, and the text was not necessarily well received elsewhere. Marcel told me that one philosopher at the elite Ecole Nationale Supérieure had dismissed the text as "extremely pretentious" until they heard that it had been endorsed by "big names" such as Badiou.[4]

Meanwhile the Declaration also radiated a more properly political ambivalence, which emerged from the postcolonial French left's uneasy compromise between nationalism and internationalism. On one hand, the Declaration was a beautifully multicultural, internationalist text. It contained neither explicit Eurocentrism nor any explicit critique of Eurocentrism. Instead it valorized a horizontal image of "the plurality of languages and cultures" (Art. IV), freedoms of migration (Art. V), and open access to knowledge (VI). It even announced a

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[4] Badiou had taught at Paris 8 throughout most of his career, but had been elevated late in life to a position at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, thus transcending the banlieue marginality.

utopian aspiration to form a global network of "universities and international organizations" that would offer each other mutual aid (Art. XVI). Instead of advocating overt conflict with the powers that be, the text advocated building utopian institutions in the present, announcing an ambitious vision of a university that would be autonomous from the state, "outside the space controlled by the police or the force of arms" (Art. VIII).[5] It was even signed "Initiative XCIII," a nod to "Department 93" where the university was located, as if insisting that universal thought could emerge even from the banlieue.

But even as the Declaration pictured a world of universities outside of state power, it went on to demand a great deal from the state apparatus, in exchange for which it offered the state nothing in particular. Implicitly, it laid claim to a large share of the state budget, since it advocated that anyone wanting to be a student should be fully supported by unspecified public funds (Art. XII). It hinted at an expensive abolition of precarious university labor, arguing that all campus workers should be "full members of a community that guarantees equality of respect and rights" (Art. XIII). And the Declaration's theory of campus finances was ultimately based on a deeply French form of statist idealization, since it presumed a centralized, powerful state apparatus that would fund academic institutions while remaining sufficiently virtuous to avoid meddling or police intervention on campus. The Declaration thus embodied a French left-utopian account of the state as guarantor of national justice. Not incidentally, it was just this sort of non-capitalist left statism that was under attack by the Sarkozy reforms.

Inasmuch as it presupposed a system of national states, the Declaration's internationalism remained radically limited. Far from picturing a post- or transnational system of social institutions, it enshrined the nation-state as the underlying socioeconomic unit that would somehow choose to underwrite the infrastructure

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[5] This claim drew on a French tradition that dates back to the medieval period, according to which universities were set apart from the usual police regimes. I believe that this derived from the fact that universities were established via special arrangements with Church or King, and thus were exempt from local municipal regulation.

of a global system of emancipatory institutions. Its political horizon was arguably what we could call a utopian, purified vision of social democracy.[6] It was utopian inasmuch as its values were pure, but it had no theory of how to realize them.

Still, it was a beautiful image: a university outside the market, open to all without debt or precarity, without censorship or hierarchy, without symbolic violence. It was at once the inversion of the Sarkozy government's own policy proposals and, in a sense, of Paris 8 as it actually existed. It was no doubt a contradictory product of post-sixties intellectual utopians trying to theorize their place within a postcolonial state apparatus, and within a discipline that had long been denounced as an organ of bourgeois ideology. Thus while the text's universalism certainly resonated with a long heritage of Eurocentric universalisms, it was also a critique of some of these. Stéphane Douailler compared it to the 1988 *Magna Charta Universitatum*, a similarly universalist declaration which had been signed by a group of European university rectors in Bologna. The Magna Charta had proclaimed optimistically that "A university is the trustee of the European humanist tradition." But the *Magna Charta* had failed to prevent neoliberalization, while Douailler hoped that the Philosophy Department's declaration would mobilize a fight against it.

It had no large-scale impact, in the end. The text hung in the Department hallway among other aging posters and was taken down after a few years. I am not sure anyone ever expected much more than that. In this light, the Declaration has to be read as a discourse by Paris 8's philosophers for themselves, an effort to compensate, at least symbolically, for their own longstanding contradictions. Its

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[6] I think here of "social democracy" in a generally Gaullist vein as designating a political system dominated by the state, which mediates powerfully between capital and society, ensuring the likely antagonistic coexistence of public (nonmarket) and private (capitalist-market) sectors. On this model, the state thus has to mediate the ensuing social tensions and contradictions, incorporating repressive forces (the police and military) as well as progressive ideals (liberty, solidarity, and so on). I would submit that, while the term "social democrat" was a dirty word on the French Left, a generally social democratic imaginary came to dominate French left-wing expectations after the 1970s.

image of beautiful, polished radicality and unambivalence deployed universalist rhetoric to conceal its own localism.

A citation from Socrates

The utopian social-democratic politics of the Declaration take on a quite different light when we consider that they were not its *original* politics. It turns out that that the idea for a Declaration was not originally proposed by the Philosophy Department itself. It had emerged from a more subaltern project called UFR0, the subaltern seminar that we saw in Chapter 4. UFR0 had emerged during the strike against the Sarkozy government's university reforms. It was led by a charismatic young man, Eric-Olivier, and in theory, it was a critique of the very idea of a discipline. It called itself "a collective project for an experimental, transdisciplinary, critical university, open to all." The name was a play on the jargon of French university organization. Academic departments in French universities were grouped together into bureaucratic clusters called *UFR*, Unités de Formation et de Recherche (Teaching and Research Units). These Teaching and Research Units were typically numbered: at Paris 8, for instance, UFR1 was Arts and Philosophy. So "UFR0" was a sort of limit case: a research unit that refused the very system of disciplines. In practice, the work of UFR0 consisted of a series of student-run seminars. Its reach always exceeded its grasp; we saw earlier how it became a space dominated by the male gaze.

The hallway "seminar room" where UFR0 met in 2009–10.

Marcel explained to me that the project of a Declaration of Independence had originally been proposed by UFR0:

Marcel: At this point, it's kind of impossible to know whose head this came from. But if I go back a ways, the first person who I heard say the word "declaration," it was people from UFR0. One time they came to the Philosophy Department's general assembly, and after the presentation of the agenda, Eric-Olivier spoke up to say several things, including that, in their view, politically, at that point in time, the crucial thing was to [regenerate] the university. Meaning that they had to be able to simultaneously propose a concept of the university, and possibly even write or edit something on the order of its principles. With which one could identify, be recognized, affirm oneself, be transmitted.

Eli: But what's funny, is that I saw their own Declaration, and it's a blank page.

Marcel (laughs): Yeah, as Eric-Olivier's splendid phrase says, it's a citation from Socrates.

Eli (laughs): OK... But what is the concrete reference to Socrates, in fact?

Marcel: Well it's a blank page, right? And Socrates never wrote a single word.

Eli: Oh, yeah, yeah. OK.

Marcel: And so, *voilà*. Eric-Olivier must have talked about a text that they were going to write. And it was Douailler, who was at the assembly, who

would take it up, and who said: That's a great idea. Let's do that together. That was in December 2008, as I recall. And so, throughout the winter, in December and January, there were one or two meetings at the Department, at which UFR0 showed up, with Eric-Olivier, and regularly put on the table the idea of a text that would be something like a declaration. And each time, Douailler said, great idea, and Eric-Olivier said, yeah yeah yeah, this has to be done. And Douailler said, no no, it's not that this has to be done, we are *going* to do this. So in fact, seeing that UFR0 wasn't putting any work into it, Douailler took their idea. And they started to write this text, with Eric Lecerf and Marie [Cuillerai], all three of them.

The writing process itself, according to Marcel, had mainly involved long debates about what to put in the articles. The Preamble had been written largely by doctoral students, spearheaded by Ishmael. Meanwhile, the professors had written much of the body of the text. Once a draft was written, the authors circulated it for feedback and had the text translated into Arabic, English, Haitian Creole, Greek, Spanish and Portuguese. This process apparently felt fairly successful; its participants seemed proud of their work. No one was surprised, as far as I could tell, that this utopian project was much too radical to have any real-world impact on French policy debates. I suspect that its aesthetic attraction derived precisely from its practical infeasibility. That, indeed, was precisely what made it utopian.

But what is analytically interesting, nevertheless, is that one marginal utopian project turns out to have been premised on a certain disciplining of an even more marginal utopian project: the UFR0 proposal to declare independence through a blank page. I gathered that Eric-Olivier's proposal to present the blank page as a Declaration of Independence had also involved some sort of Derridean argument about the signification of blankness and margins. But it seemed clear that this proposal had been deemed too cryptic — too unseriousness in its fringe utopianism, perhaps — to merit official support from the Philosophy Department.

It seems, then, that there was some practical and rhetorical calibration implicit even within this seemingly totally impractical text: as if the implicit maxim were, *demand the impossible, but demand it appropriately*. The accompanying practices of utopian etiquette, discipline and respectability, however, seem less paradoxical when we remind ourselves that the aim of this Declaration was less to oppose normativity tout court than to renegotiate its terms, aiming to constitute a set of counter-norms and an alternative, but habitable world. Radicalism was permissible, but its bounds were policed.

Male students against hierarchy

Given the Department's susceptibility to logics of provocation and riposte, it should not surprise us that its proclamation of intellectual liberation rapidly provoked a counter-declaration from within the department. The counter-text, also released in March 2009, was called "Conditions for the equality of egos," though the French title, *Conditions pour l'égalité des égos*, was actually a pun, since "egos" (*égos*) and "equals" (*égaux*) rhyme in French. At any rate, it raised a sweeping and grandiloquent critique of the department's emancipatory fantasies, basing its critique on the fact that the department was nonetheless structured by an obvious hierarchy between students and teachers. It was signed by two students, Peg and Max, and began with a long quote from the anarchist philosopher Max Stirner, followed by these propositions:

Conditions for the equality of egos:

Considering that this strike [of spring 2009] has called for a movement within the "university community,"

Considering that a community, especially a university community, must have an egalitarian base, that is a community of equals,

Considering that equality in principle is not enough, and that we must also posit its conditions of its realization,

Considering that the mechanisms of separation, selection and hierarchization, resulting from the university's workings as a social institution, are constraints on the creation of this community of equals,

Considering that for the student, the daily agent of these mechanisms is, among other things, the professor,

Considering that this community is never a fact to preserve, but rather an ideal to pursue, one requiring the admission of faults within a community in order to wrest equality free,

Considering that the experience of Vincennes reminds us that the current state of relations in the university is not the only one possible, that there is neither fate nor necessity in these relations of power, and that they emerge primarily from a lack of will,

Considering finally that this is not about the conditions of an ideal university, but about the minimal basis for our pure and simple presence here as equals. These propositions may seem banal, even already applied de facto. But just as a declaration of independence must be written, these principles only exist insofar as everyone can read and invoke them as it becomes necessary.

We thus appoint ourselves as specialists on our own circumstances, those of undergraduate students [*étudiantes et étudiants*] in philo. Thus, each one of us, beginning with what he [*il*] knows, could participate in elaborating

these egalitarian principles, across all levels and sites. We begin by proposing the following:

From now on, the student's decision on his or her own course of study will be preeminent, and the professor's task will be to accompany him or her in his or her course of research. In other words, it will be impossible for the professor to give up on, abandon or limit access to whatever the student judges pertinent to her intellectual trajectory. We are not subject to any principle of efficiency; we are engaged in research that need not be limited by arbitrary temporal or administrative frameworks.

This implies the following: No age or time limits to finish one's studies; abolition of required courses; the chance to take courses outside the department as the student sees fit; and no mandatory attendance policies in class.

Abolition of grades. Professorial judgment will limit itself to a simple pass or fail, supplemented by constructive comments and an unlimited chance to revise one's work until it meets the professor's criteria. The 20-point grading scale being totally arbitrary and inevitably creating a hierarchy of students, it can only establish a relation of power with the prof and relations of competition between the students. The grade on the 20-point scale often ends up being a summary judgement on the person and her formal academic skills, particularly when it is given out without further explanation. The pass/no pass will be accompanied with comments, suggestions, and whatever can help the student in her thought processes.

Only the student can judge her belonging in a discipline or her way of practicing this discipline. It will no longer be acceptable to impose a single method or a closed definition of a monolithic means of disciplinary practice. Intellectual experimentation transcends a priori bounds.

The relation between student and professor is purely didactic and constructive. Neither arbitrary power nor hierarchy of principle should be proposed.

The professors and administrations have an ethical obligation, as bearers of legal power, to give all possible assistance to students without legal immigration papers.

There will also be a search for equality among students. No hierarchy, whether tacit, by seniority, merit, courseload, fellowship, etc.

[A series of propositions on departmental administration followed.]

Compare the department's Declaration of University Independence with this co-authored text (call it the Counter-Declaration). The Counter-Declaration reappropriated the language of the Declaration, while mocking it, and adding in a new layer of status consciousness about the professor-student relationship. The Declaration had posited a "plurality" and an "equality" among different participants in the university community, and implicitly cast the Philosophy Department as a virtuous space. It had been short on practical details, demanding merely that the state should fund universities, that the police should stay off campus, and that education should be free.

Meanwhile, the Counter-Declaration had a vivid sense of students being dominated by professors and administrative requirements. It made drastically more concrete demands to abolish grades, attendance, time limits, course requirements, and institutional hierarchies. At the same time, the Counter-Declaration was based on the same moral values that had animated the Declaration, values like freedom, equality and emancipation. It was as if the student authors were claiming to be more true to their department's values than the professors, and more empirical in their denunciation of existing inequality and domination.

An assembly of the Arts and Philosophy Division (UFR) where I saw Peg speak.

No one gave these student authors much credit for what I would call their realistic observations about institutional hierarchy. Instead, they were suspected of having non-emancipatory motives of their own. Some of the authors' friends proposed a meeting "in order to pursue, reconsider, (perhaps) radicalize, and comment on this notion of collectivity that has emerged this morning." But three other students wrote a more skeptical email saying that they needed more time to "untangle the affects, and the individual motivations or resentments involved in the praiseworthy effort to establish a 'community of equals.'" They accused the authors of misreading Rancière as proposing not a "encounter between a logic of

policing and a logic of equality," but an effort to "replace one police by another police." The critique was seconded by a philosophy professor who accused Max and Peg of just wanting to become "the boss in the boss's place."

In the end, the Counter-Declaration was no less deeply utopian than the Declaration it critiqued. If the initial Declaration had conjured up a profoundly idealized vision of a just state, one which was manifestly impossible to realize on its own terms, then the Counter-Declaration conjured up an equally unrealizable vision of a profoundly idealized future Philosophy Department, as if it were possible to create a university department without inequality. The texts opposed each other in human terms, fueling a largely male political drama. But they shared a powerful irrealism and a set of utopian values. These "emancipatory" values again seemed not to emerge from individual consciousness, but to be borrowed by individuals from the Philosophy Department's collective culture. It was almost as if, the less these values were ever realized in practice, the more they remained available for collective aspiration.

This cycle of critiques and counter-critiques suggests that the utopian gambit of a Declaration of Independence was itself a moment in a cycle of radical one-upmanship. There was no *single* utopian subject position here: there were a series of local logics that *produced* utopian gestures and discourses as part of an antago-nistic field of subjectivities. Utopianism almost became a spectacle. In this spectacle, one tiny utopian gambit would negate the next, only to be in turn opposed by a third. The same anti-institutional gestures got repeated, replicated at new scales, translated into new contexts, redirected from one contradiction to the next. We sense here the contours of an emergent cultural system. Perhaps any specific utopian gambit was an unstable affair. But a metastability became appar-ent from the sheer pattern of repetition of these gambits. Maybe metastability was the only way that the Philosophy Department could make its contradictions into something durable.

Ultra-masculinist attitudes everywhere

Taken on its own terms, the ritual spectacle of utopianism seemed agonistic but open-ended. Yet agonism and rupture are themselves overdetermined, and importantly, gendered forms. Perhaps we should read utopianism, too, as a scene of the exchange of masculine ambivalence. Of course, it was not only male philosophers who participated in the local logic of aggressive riposte. Political agonism and vigorous debate are French customs not to be read solely in gendered terms. And yet in the Philosophy Department, the actors of local conflicts were mostly men, and open aggression remained male-coded.

Masculinist agonism was at once an enabling and limiting form. It enabled certain passions of critique and disagreement to come out. Yet it also served, rather like the "hermeneutics of suspicion" in Eve Sedgwick's theory of paranoid reading (2003), to prevent bad surprises and to protect local narratives. One possible bad surprise, in this context, would have been the surprise of feminist politics, which threatened the traditional male aesthetics of French political writing. As we have seen, feminist students were openly critical of masculinist culture; and in my interview with Jocelyn, the Declaration became a case in point.

We were talking about the Philosophy Department.

Jocelyn: There are ultra-masculinist attitudes, and you find them everywhere, actually… It's aberrant. You know, it's aberrant. It's really aberrant. I remember, when they were writing their Declaration of Rights, their whatsit thing on the field, that I got involved. And I told them, no, you have to feminize the language; [I pointed out] there's the word "man." And

you know — I got laughed at. It made them laugh out loud, actually laugh out loud. Right away they said: putting *human* [instead of man], *human* is ugly. I mean, seriously, for profs — I find this unacceptable.

In spite of this critique, the word "man" did remain in the final version of the Declaration, an index of the historical force of left patriarchy in French philosophy. It is revealing that the reaction to feminist critique was immediate and devastating. Laughter sought to put this woman in her place: a place of silence. I suspect that in the end, the masculine laughter also was a laughter of recognition. It was a tacit admission that the feminist critique of "man" was, in truth, unanswerable. And then it was as if the visceral energy of laughing out loud could fill the gap that had appeared in the comfortable historical masculinism of this utopian project. Afterwards, of course, the rationalizations came out in full force. "Human" — the nongendered alternative — was ruled out on aesthetic grounds, called "ugly."

There were women who had participated in the writing of the Declaration, and it sought to be inclusive. It mentioned "All men and all women" in Article II, and insisted in Article III that the university was open to all regardless of "their social or national origins, their religious and ethnic belonging, their age and their sexual identity." This was a universalism that recognized difference in the process of seeking to include it institutionally. But the point is not just whether the text itself was maximally inclusive. The question of feminism was above all a question about who could have input into the writing of the Declaration, and within which codes.

Perhaps the heart of this masculinism was not the stubborn investment in "man" as a beautiful word for the universal subject. It was rather the all-too-familiar power to *be able to determine the codes within which universality could be written*. Ultimately, patriarchy is always power. Patriarchy in this Philosophy Department was not just a code, it was a right to *choose* the code, to *police* the code, and to *laugh at outsiders* seeking to change the code. Patriarchy was scorn plus

power — the power to not change and to keep the narrative in place.[7] In Jocelyn's encounter with male laughter, masculine scorn was a strategy for not needing to reopen the narratives that philosophers told about themselves. This narrative defensiveness was suggestive of a threatened masculinity whose underlying vulnerability could turn to aggression.

Scornful masculinity is not in itself a utopian form, even if it may defend utopian ideals. The masculinist scorn that defended the Declaration of Independence was not only directed towards feminists. It also took aim at the male students who wrote the Counter-Declaration. Peg, one of the Counter-Declaration's authors, was denounced by Marcel, who had in turn been involved in writing the Declaration.

Eli: What I understand about Peg is that he's there to apply the Department's own principles to itself.

Marcel: Most of the time he's facile. Because in fact he's not doing the work [*il bosse pas*]. Not just because he's authoritarian, but because he doesn't read, or doesn't read much. And he doesn't do the work because he doesn't read. It's unclear, but that's my sense. And he never puts his own positions in question. He makes the most facile critique, the simplest, the least effective one. And he's dumber for it…

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[7] The feminist critique of the Department also had its own scorn. From a feminist perspective, it was the Department itself that was "aberrant," "shocking," and "out of bounds." It was as if, by this point in history, in a French public institution, one should have been able to expect better, above all from the authority figures. In this sense, the scorn directed at feminists was soon directed back at the Department itself. But the meaning of scorn depends primarily on the power and position of those who deploy it, and in this sense, subaltern feminist scorn had nothing in common with institutional scorn of feminists.

> And that's before adding that he produces nothing — which I could also say for myself. In the end, from a certain perspective, he's unable to say anything whatsoever. He's incapable of saying yes or no, he has to go see what someone else says… He thinks he has to outdo everyone else's follies [*il faut aller plus loin dans le délire de l'autre*]… It's utterly pointless.

It is telling that, in his criticism of Peg, Marcel himself became ambivalent: he had to acknowledge that some of his complaints about Peg also applied to himself. Just as Peg "produced nothing," so too did Marcel reproach himself for not writing enough, not publishing enough. This was, in the end, a barely autonomous zone within academic capitalism, and these philosophers, too, had their imperatives to produce. The Philosophy Department's voluminous textual production kept it alive in a neoliberal, heavily audited university system. But not everything counted as "production": apparently Peg's Counter-Declaration was considered a mere pamphlet, not a serious exercise in philosophy. I confess I still do not really know how to tell the difference. It remains clear nevertheless that the moment of the Declaration of Independence was a moment where disappointment and scornful agonism crept into the scenes of utopian speech.

The logics of disappointment

Perhaps you have begun to feel that everything here is disappointed, that nothing is utopian about this Declaration of Independence. That is because I have told you too much about its processes of production. If all you knew was the surface of the text, you might well think that it had certain political limits, but you would not know the particular antagonisms and erasures lying beneath its surface.

Nevertheless, it *is* a utopian gesture to call for a university free of debt and precarity, a university supported by the state but beyond nationalism, a university based on international solidarity and an emancipatory image of public spaces. This whole image is radically unrealistic. Again, utopianism is a radically unrealistic politics longing for something unambivalent, for something radically positive to attach to.

I still insist that this was a utopianism that floated outside of individual subjectivity. This utopianism was not the romantic brainchild of a lone utopian thinker. Nor did it express a straightforward collective stance, a determinate *perspective*, whether political, institutional or sociological. It was a utopianism *without an author*, in Foucault's sense (1977 [1970]): it was produced by collective logics of encounter and reaction. I do not think this lack of subjectivity was merely a *textual* effect: it was not merely the Declaration's impersonal voicing that made it a utopian text without a subject. No, it was its very process of production: the text was produced not quite through an act of authorship but through a conflictual encounter between diverse social subjects. The text emerged from a series of *reactions* that produced in one document an accretion of disparate thoughts. And farther back still, behind the printed Declaration lay Eric-Olivier's blank page. That blankness could be a metaphor for the *lack* of subjectivity in this text.

There is something brutally dialectical here. One of the uncanny moments in dialectical social theory is that it remains unclear whether the dialectical logic is really "in us" or whether we are caught up in the grip of a process that is outside us. Of course, if one believes that all life is a collective process, the very distinction between inside and outside breaks down. Still, these actors were often invested in distinguishing themselves from local structures and institutions, and I found repeatedly that these actors actively *sought* to dissociate themselves from their own utopian ventures. Perhaps one should call it a self-alienating utopianism, and not merely an alienated utopianism. In a contradictory world, such self-alienation, such agentive disappointment, almost starts to seem like self-care.

AFTERWARD

Utopia is possible

The problem of self-care brings us to the conclusion of the inquiry. Yet having gotten so far into this project, I have to say that I find it hard to end it. Ambivalence binds us to our objects, as does the fantasy of finding something unambivalent there. And in this project, the Other is ambivalent too. But at times ambivalence can be an impasse. Especially when it binds us to broken and violent institutions. It is no accident that some of the most utopian research today, like Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's Black radicalism, is written under the banner of fugitivity. In the preface to Harney and Moten's *The Undercommons*, Jack Halberstam nicely formulates this sense of blockage: "If we do not seek to fix what has been broken, then what?" (Harney and Moten 2013:5).

"Knowledge is not a commodity." Activist slogan, 2009.

It is a question as urgent as it is all but unanswerable. And it raises a further question about narration. Halberstam speaks on behalf of a *we*. Yet what does "we" mean in a shattered world? Who are *we*, the counterpublic who has traversed this inquiry into a disappointed utopia? Perhaps *we* is what is broken; can it be fixed? Or is *we* just always a failure, a performative misfire or an act of symbolic violence? In any event, to inquire into the politics of we is to raise a question about political belonging in our space of inquiry. And in this space, I fear there are no unimpeachable narrators. Consider Halberstam: long admired as a queer theorist, he has recently argued, with Tavia Nyong'o, that "it is time to rewild theory" (2018:454). And yet he has also become notorious for defending a fellow critical theorist, Avital Ronell, who by many accounts has abused her graduate students for decades.[1] What kind of claim can Halberstam now make on utopian belonging?

Halberstam may have become a figure of a deeply disappointing queer utopianism, but in spite of the all-or-nothing approach that sometimes leads us to a left moralism, I would not necessarily repudiate Halberstam, just because he has started acting, paradoxically, like a queer patriarch of sorts. To repudiate would be to invoke the melodramas of aggressive out-radicalization whose limits we have been exploring. We might say instead that Halberstams are symptoms of a world where there are few safe distinctions between (good) self and (bad) Other, between critical righteousness and epic failure. We could thus end this book with the thought that we are rarely here *just as ourselves*. We are all multiple. We are all in the Other, indeed in many Others, in the precarious Other, in the patriarchal Other. That which we reject usually remains part of us.

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[1] See for example Andrea Long Chu, "I worked with Avitall Ronnell. I believe her accuser," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 30, 2018. https://www.chronicle.com/article/i-worked-with-avital-ronell-i-believe-her-accuser/.

This has been a book about how the patriarchal Other is hard to avoid, even in the lineage of "us." It is about how erstwhile anticapitalists try to make a living in a globalized, and notably a postcolonial market. It is about how utopian values get advanced by a fraught dance of appropriation and forfeit. It is about how thoughtful intellectuals can be integrated uneasily into global systems of accumulation. If there is a "we" who emerges from the course of this inquiry, it is no longer an unproblematic term, but an ongoing problem space. If *we* still has any meaning, this can only emerge from confronting contemporary spaces of precarious experience, with all their inner shattering, vertigo and cruel optimism. It can only emerge from exploring the genealogies that have brought us to the present.

In any event, this inquiry leaves me with three concluding thoughts about how we might still work with theory in a precarious world.

Reading theory, reading the university

If we hope to raise consciousness about our present crises, it seems to me that theory still matters and history still matters.[2] As this book suggests, these two things are not even really separable. Our theories and categories have a decisive role in our efforts to make sense of the world, even as they emerge themselves from that world. The history of "theory" is still fraught terrain, and it is worth trying to get it right. This book thus becomes a sort of anti-manual for "reading French Theory," and even, perhaps, an anti-manual for reading "theory" in general. In its very form, this book is a protracted critique of any *scholastic* form of reading that centers on "the texts." Can anyone really understand a text without under-

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[2] For one South African formulation of this claim, see Gillespie **and** Dubbeld 2007.

standing the relations of its production and the social being of its authors? My reading of Michel Foucault shifts decisively when I learn that he was a founding figure of an institution of toxic sexism and women's exclusion. My sympathy for Jacques Rancière's "emancipatory" pedagogy (1991) dwindles when I learn about his dubious stances towards precarious teachers. Meanwhile, as we have seen, the very distinction between intellectual work and life is only a sort of ritual performance (these philosophers may work in bed, but they then present their work in public as if it were quite separate from their lives). We must give up the fantasy that we can distinguish an author's personal issues from their "work." For *the issues always come out in the work*. They point towards that which remained unthought.

At the same time, and here the methodology cuts both ways, that which seems to be a general theory is often a very *conscious* reflection on local institutional circumstances. Jean-François Lyotard's famous *Postmodern Condition*, for instance, was originally published in the late 1970s, at a moment when the survival of the University of Paris 8 and its Philosophy Department was far from clear; and Lyotard's account of knowledge getting newly absorbed into capitalist "performativity" was a reflection of his own experience at the University of Vincennes. Thus theory is never fully deterritorialized; even when it circulates transnationally, it remains rooted in a more local political unconscious, in a local history of struggle.

"Merry Crisis" and other activist art at Paris 8.

Since "theory" is largely produced in academic and university spaces, it matters how we read "the university." This has been an odd venture in ethnographies of the university; and it reminds us again that the university is never a stable, monolithic, or fully autonomous space. There are little utopias within the university; there are spaces that get appropriated and then reappropriated. Academic spaces are permeated by their own social geography, by their sites in the banlieue, or by their historical locations in a postimperial metropole. It bears saying that after the conclusion of my fieldwork, the Philosophy Department began to have a more marked postcolonial turn, hiring younger specialists in postcolonial questions. And

it began to shift its own relations of social reproduction in a way that may continue to decenter its own historically dominant subjects. A Congolese philosopher was recently hired, Nadia Yala Kisukidi, and she has spoken publicly about the experience of being a Black woman in French philosophy. A mere five years earlier, such a gesture from a philosophy professor at Paris 8 was unheard of. Fieldsites change after we leave them. French cultures are not timeless. Ethnography becomes historical ethnography, whether we like it or not.

In the face of this looming historicity, this has nevertheless been an effort to develop a reflexive method adequate to its reflexive object, a method which seeks to dereify theory by exploring its sociohistorical circumstances. The method I have developed has been one of impressionist collage; I have tried to bring together gender, race, social class, the academic culture of the humanities, status, power struggles, postcolonial geography, urban abandonment, mystification, precarious work, hope, ambivalence, the ritual production of knowledge, the struggles to live on campus or be evicted from it, male violence, denunciation, fire, unrealized theories of emancipation, neoliberal politics and protests, and the hovering of many histories one above the next… None of these are covered comprehensively, but the juxtaposition may prove fruitful.

I don't think of my method as any kind of *template* or *methodology* for studying theory or the university. It would be lame to say that only ethnography can understand theory, say by reducing it to its relations of production; ethnography is not a better genre of *realism* or some kind of empiricist *deus ex machina*. This is a materialist book, but I don't think of it as making great claims to epistemic superiority. On the contrary, I think that ethnography can be a powerful form of *theatre* for the brain. Its very theatricality, its weirdness and its impressionism can help us push past some of our bad attachments and bad narratives. Theatre is in turn not mere spectacle or distraction from the world; it is a way of working through historical problems, of co-generating life and concepts. A mode of thought. Thus the utopian, sometimes speculative or dreamy quality of this book is inspired by its object, with which it has, I still think, a certain mimetic resonance.

The reflexivity of the Other

As I finish this book, I am struck by my sense of having been caught up in my French interlocutors' desires. It was not just that they were largely ambivalent about their site; I believe that in several cases, they also hoped that I would reflect their ambivalence, their uneasy mix of idealization and resignation, back to them. If I am useful to them a spokesperson, it is not as a substitute for their own academic expertise, but as a conduit for that which has no place in their standard genres of self-presentation. I have not tried to write a better social or intellectual history of French philosophy. I have tried to let their reflexivity grab me, even "by the throat," and then to see where it takes me.

Faced with precarity and destabilization, this project has been a test of the viability of an ever more deeply displaced and ethnographically projected form of reflexivity. Call it *reflexivity by proxy*, because rather than fixating on the autobiographical or personal reflexivity of the ethnographer (Marcus 2007) or insisting like ethnomethodologists that everyone is always reflexive anyway (Lynch 2000), it is interested in the reflexivity of the Other while construing this as a historically particular, rather than generic, form of consciousness. Maybe this reflexivity by proxy does, in the last analysis, teach us something about ourselves, or maybe it teaches you something about me, but it does this less through personal revelation than by trying to give itself over as deeply as possible to its object. Reflexivity by proxy is both very distant and incredibly close to home. In this, it seeks both to problematize "us" while also trying to rebuild collectivity within a disappointed utopian public.

I suppose that some readers will still be disappointed by the style of the analysis. Card-carrying critical theorists, if they are committed to a fastidious engagement with the conceptual rubrics of "French Theory," may well see this book as a work of sloppy vandalism. Disciplinary philosophers may not recognize much of what they think is their disciplinary activity. And I regret that it has not been possible to write in more detail about the details of the philosophical texts: when I tried, in earlier drafts, I found that textual analysis fit poorly into the ethnographic genre. But I also think we have to break the chains of lineage, legibility, mutual recognition, and disciplinarity that have long dictated how we should approach philosophical sites. This is not a matter of disrespect for its own sake, a gesture which would again only reproduce the conventions of philosophical melodrama and rebellion. Rather, it is about leaving aside conventions when they become traps.

Mourning and momentum

It is this desire to avoid being trapped by the normal genres of critical thought that have led me to explore the blurred lines between a disappointed utopianism that endures, and a merely failed utopia that crumbles in its contradictions. Elizabeth Grosz has suggested that "Critique always affirms the primacy of what is being critiqued, ironically producing exactly the thing it wants to problematize" (Kontturi and Tiainen 2007:255). The problem she describes is real — the frame of critique can overwhelm the substance — and that is part of why I have tried to frame this study in an off-centered style, while trying to avoid both pure affirmation and pure repudiation. There are social forms, and people, that I love in Paris 8, and I have tried to be true to that. But there is also much to mourn and condemn about this institution: above all, its structural coloniality, its left patriarchy, and its

uncomfortable dependency on precarious work. If this book is still a critique, then it is a critique that is also a work of mourning and of displacement: it tries to reckon with history *so that we can move on*. It works through the past, but as a source of new momentum. I find as I write that I am done with the stuckness of left melancholia, and I am finished with melancholic investments in what French Theory could have been. We might be done reading about Paris as a colonial "capital of modernity"; but that does not mean there is nothing to learn from its banlieues.

As a work of mourning, the book has been a labor of self-care for me. It has helped me leave the academy, leave the university. Writing it was a good distraction from the precarity and structural heartbreak of academic labor. The writing helped transfer some optimism from the Other into an analysis of the Other. It has helped me find grounds for a more durable utopian practice, not through sheer optimism, but by incorporating ambivalence, and disappointment, into the emotional project of utopia. Here I would insist again that it is less about creating new *identities* than about generating new relationships. Disappointed utopianism does not show us a new universal subject or a new "class-in-the-making" (Standing 2011). Instead it grounds a desire to build better institutions, ones with more intersectional "categories of connection" (Collins 1993), with stronger capacities to hold utopian desires without trying to be perfectionist about them. Utopian forms are localized and precarious forms of life, clinging to existence in the crevices between historical forces. As our historical moments shift, our utopian options do too. They are bound to be contradictory, but most contradictions are not fatal.

The view as I was leaving.

The book has been written from a precarious place. By the time I was revising this manuscript, I was writing it from an adjunct office in Cleveland. It was an underpaid, depressing and unstable existence. And yet it also seems to me that precarity can inform a research method, energize utopian desires, and organize new collective spaces. Recall how a group of student radicals announced their occupation of a café at Paris 8:

Since Tuesday April 6th, a space abandoned at the entry of the St. Denis campus territory has been recuperated. This reappropriation is a necessity. Today, the campus is doing nothing to allow us to meet, exchange, organize or struggle. The university cannot be a simple point of passage and of consumption of coursework. Opening this place up is taking things into our own hands, ceasing to be passive, transcending the standard academic framework, bringing the city to life within the university. It belongs to no one; anyone can live there and bring it alive.

We are reappropriating this space to make it into a place of solidarities, of sharing, of struggles. We want to organize ourselves outside the logics of representation and the frameworks imposed by the university: schedules, institutional policy, occupation of space. We are experimenting with a place for debates, a place for sharing knowledge and practices.

There are times when critical theory seems like an equally abandoned, dusty entryway. Perhaps it too can be recuperated, made into a border space "outside the logics of representation and the frameworks imposed by the university." Maybe it can be reoccupied somehow. Maybe we should just move on. Clearly, better utopias will demand better theories, better desires, better relationships. But whatever we do, let's not try to make these utopias into coherent, enclosed spaces. It isn't utopian to keep people out: it's utopian to let them in. It isn't utopian to find unmitigated optimism: it's utopian to live with disappointment and incoherence. It's utopian to think through what makes us awkward, broken and impossible.

If disappointment is possible, then maybe utopia is too. Maybe disappointment is what makes utopia possible in the first place.

* * *

I'm still not sure this book is completely finished, but this is as far I can get right now. So I'm going to leave it here.

MISCELLANY

What is this miscellany?

Again, yes, the book is over. This is the end.

But I found while I was editing that I had written quite a bit that did not fit into the larger narrative.

Fortunately, since this is a digital publication, there are no limits on what kinds of extra materials you can append. So I decided to append a few miscellaneous things that seemed interesting.

The *Works Cited* is in here too.

Ten Disclaimers

A few necessary disclaimers that did not seem to fit within the body of the text.

1) This book is not a *comprehensive* study of its French research site. If it were, no one would want to read it. Still, it does leave a lot out. I'm sorry about that.

2) I am not a native speaker of the French language and was never deeply integrated into Parisian culture. Many local (and translocal) cultural dynamics remained beyond my understanding, and the book is merely about those things that I do understand. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from French sources are my own.

3) I have imagined my readers as having some academic background, and having a passing acquaintance with modern philosophy as a field.

4) The site is changing and this book focuses only on one moment in time.

5) I talked to teachers considerably more than I talked to students.

6) I talked to French nationals more than to the large population of international students. In hindsight, I regret that methodological choice, but it cannot be changed now.

7) This book probably will not teach much, if anything, to the insiders.

8) I focused on interactions more than on social actors, on utterances more than on discourses, on events more than structures. Thus, this is not a series of biographies; it is not a structural sociology; it is not a history of ideas; it is not a genealogy. It is an ethnography.

9) My academic training was in ethnography of higher education. I would have framed the argument very differently if I had come to it through feminist studies or postcolonial studies.

10) Research, like life, is not a neutral activity. At times, I had to pick sides.

Brief chronology of the Philosophy Department

1968-9 The Experimental University Center at Vincennes is founded. Michel Foucault is the first department chair. Instant infighting among Maoists, Trotskyists, and the Communist Party.

1970 January: The French state withdraws the department's accreditation to grant degrees.

1970 April: Foucault gets a more prestigious job (at the Collège de France). François Châtelet becomes department chair. Student enrollments plummet by almost 50% (but recover by the late 1970s).

1974 Mass firing of precarious teachers prompts a short-lived strike within the department and internal conflicts.

1978 A "Polytechnic Institute of Philosophy" was founded.

1979 Jean-François Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition* published, partly to defend the department against a hostile government.

1980 The university was forced to relocate to Saint-Denis.

1982 The Department requests re-accreditation to grant degrees.

1983 The avant-garde Collège international de philosophie is founded in central Paris, with government funding and with significant participation from the Paris 8's philosophers.

1985 Châtelet dies. The gay anarchist philosopher René Schérer "takes over the department" for a few years.

1985-1986 National accreditation to grant degrees is gradually returned.

1987 Deleuze retires.

1988 Jacques Poulain starts a 22-year term as department chair.

1994 Deleuze dies.

1995 Antonia Soulez recruited as the first woman full professor.

1998 Lyotard dies.

1999 Alain Badiou leaves to teach in a more prestigious institution.

2003 Campus protests against the Bologna reforms in France.

2006 Jacques Rancière retires.

2007 Sarkozy administration passes university autonomy law (LRU).

2008 Student protest movement against LRU.

2009 4-month student and academic protest against LRU.

2010 Patrice Vermeren becomes department chair.

2011 Joint program founded with the embattled British radical philosophy department at Kingston/Middlesex.

2012 Paris 8 becomes a partially "autonomous" campus via the LRU.

Sociological sketch of the Philosophy Department

In the 2010-11 academic year, the department had 30 teaching staff, of whom 18 were tenured professors (*titulaires*, tenured), 3 emeritus, and 9 temporary (doctoral students and part-time contract teachers). A sizeable majority were male (19 or 63%), and the vast majority were French by nationality. Other teachers' nationalities included Haitian, Brazilian, and Croatian. Following the usual academic hierarchy in French public universities, they were divided by rank: 9 were senior *Professeurs d'Université*, 9 were junior *Maîtres de Conférences* (who were also tenured professors; there is no French equivalent of a tenure-track professorship), and the rest (emeriti aside) were various classes of temporary, visiting and doctoral-candidate teachers.[1] The Department did make some unusual efforts to level its hierarchies — everyone was invited to department meetings, even the students; and doctoral students sometimes taught master's classes — but higher ranks still correlated with institutional power and better salaries.

Meanwhile, the Department's own teaching staff came largely from Parisian philosophical radical circles, which were largely white, though also including some Middle Eastern, North African, and South American professors.[2] The minority of women professors were predominantly white French women. The more institutionally prominent professors held mainstream philosophical credentials (perhaps

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[1] In local institutional nomenclature, the senior academics were titled *Professeurs des Universités*; the junior academics *Maîtres de Conférences*; teaching staff reassigned from the secondary education system were *Professeurs Agrégés* (PRAG); doctoral student teachers were hired as *Attachés temporaires d'enseignement et de recherche* (ATER: a higher-paying post) or *Moniteurs d'initiation à l'enseignement supérieur* (lower-paying), although the moniteurs were replaced in Autumn 2011 by the new status of *doctorant contractuel enseignant*. Finally, the equivalent of adjunct teachers (who were generally required to hold outside employment as well, in a policy designed to preclude the formation of a large adjunct workforce) were designated *Chargés de cours*.

[2] Plínio Walter Prado was from Brazil; Mohamed Fashahi was Iranian-born; Zouzi Chebbi was from Tunisia.

having graduated from the prestigious *Ecole Normale Supérieure,* or passed the traditional philosophy teaching exam, the *agrégation*). A secondary group of professors were basically "internal hires" who had been trained at Paris 8, former clients of Paris 8's mandarins (notably Deleuze and Lyotard). Some of these internal hires traced back their past to the 1970s Vincennes campus, and most of these were palpably more marginal figures, lacking the habits of intellectual domination inculcated by traditional French philosophical training, and having especially non-canonical research interests. New professorial recruitment seemed to draw generally from a larger pool of Parisian philosophical radicals, such that most new professors were longstanding acquaintances (if not friends or former students) of the existing senior professors.[3]

The professors were nevertheless relatively homogeneous compared to the hundreds of students enrolled in the department's numerous degree programs, which included a three-year *License* (undergraduate) program; a two-year *Master* program with several subtracks; a doctoral program; and at least ten collaborative programs with other institutions in France and abroad. Institutionally, the Philosophy Department was part of the University's Arts Division (called a UFR, *Unité de Formation et de Recherche*), though its doctoral program and research funds were attached to a separate institutional entity called a "Laboratory" (LLCP, *Laboratoire d'études et de recherches sur les Logiques Contemporaines de la Philosophie*). The 3-year undergraduate program had 110 students (28% foreign, 46% women), and the doctoral program had around 250 students. (This was a major reversal from the Vincennes days: in 1977, undergraduate enrollment was 376, while the doctoral program had only 77.)[4]

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[3] Not all teachers were, however, equally involved in the internal life of the Department, many withdrawing into their own research and teaching work. One graduate student divided the professors into four types: "the ones who do the work; the ones on Mars [*sur la lune*]; the assholes, and the ones who stopped having anything to do with the place."

[4] "Contribution du Département de Philosophie à l'établissement du plan quinquennal de l'Université de Paris VIII," June 1980, p.2. Personal archives of Charles Soulié.

While I do not have department-specific data on national identity, in the doctoral school that the department belonged to (ED 31), some 72% of doctoral students were foreign students, including 22% North African, 8% sub-Saharan Africans, 13.5% Latin American, and 7.8% Asian. The foreign majority was not, however, institutionally privileged. Only 6% of all doctoral students got financial support, and of this 6%, almost all fellowships went to French citizens, with only 7 of 48 fellowships going to foreign students over a three-year period (14.6%). Within the Philosophy Department in particular, 59.6% of all philosophy degrees during the past decade (2003-2011) went to foreign students — a stark contrast with the overwhelming Frenchness of the professors.

We might attempt to schematize the distinct publics and circuits of social exchange that kept the department in motion. In addition to the French art and politics scenes and the foreign student flows we have discussed, the Department's professorial energies flowed largely into Paris-area collaborating institutions, like the low-fi, left-wing Harmattan Press, where the Department maintained its own book series, or the Maison d'Amérique Latine (Latin America House), where teachers like Patrice Vermeren were active in a longstanding "Philosophical Dialogues" seminar.

UNESCO *Chaire de Philosophie*
de la Culture et des Institutions

Maison de l'Amérique Latine,
séminaire "Dialogues philosophiques"

Revue Télémaque
(Philosophie et Education)

Maison des Sciences de
l'Homme (Paris-Nord)

Badiou's seminar,
Ecole Normale Sup

Editions Harmattan,
collection"Philosophie
en commun"

NICHE/LEFT
PRESSES

RADICAL PHILOSOPHY
SCENE IN FRANCE

Collège International
de Philosophie

FOREIGN ACADEMIC
PUBLICS

Publishing

In-group
hiring

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITY OF PARIS 8

Haiti

Colombia   *Chile*

Far-left activists

Argentina

Algeria   *Paris-region*
art scene

POOL OF
FOREIGN STUDENTS

Morocco

POOL OF
FRENCH STUDENTS

Germany

Japan   *UK*   *Tunisia*

Egypt

Paris-region
non-elite
undergraduates

Doctoral students
from other French
public institutions

Taiwan   *USA*

etc.

Major social exchange circuits around the Paris 8 Philosophy Department.

It was a diverse and highly differentiated space, and it was highly stratified and precarious as well.

In the courtyard

The courtyard of the original campus building in Saint-Denis, Bâtiment A, was a place of decay. Some kinds of birds were warbling, the streets rumbled, and the light shone down over your shoulders and down the stairs where you sit. In the gutters of the stairs and along their edges, there's a nest of waste, with hazy crumbs of trickling cement, small hives of cigarette butts, packed white fluff like escaped pillow stuffing, caked dirt, damaged pebbles. Upon this desolate subsoil there are larger, more animate objects: a folded napkin, a burnt-out match, the snapped tip of a plastic coffee stirrer, a stripe of yellow reflective tape, an empty paper sugar-packet trying to flutter. The cement itself is starting to flake and shatter and is divided into triangular scales, and its surface has crumbled and what's left is grimy and seems never to have been cleaned. I've been here a while and it starts to feel historical to me. Across the courtyard is the pavillion of the lunch truck where I met H. and M. for the first time, beside which I interviewed M. the other day, near which I remember once eating with E. while making fun of M. who was sitting with other friends across the courtyard. But today I'm alone, wanting some last dose of phenomenological exposure to the space before leaving, and this solitude, I notice, is relatively socially abnormal, since most people here are sitting in same-sex pairs of (seeming) friends; there's only one other solitary person, bearded and curly, standing alone at one of the stand-up tables. I avoid his gaze. I also avoid the gaze of the painted faces on the wall beside me, with large eyeballs, somewhere between murals and graffiti, the paint chipped so that part of one eye is missing, and part of a nose, and a faint hint of a cartoony Eiffel Tower.

My very first visit to the Bâtiment A courtyard, June 2009. With Charles Soulié from the Paris 8 Sociology Department.

A working class philosopher

One of the philosophers I came to know best, Georges Navet, had intimidated me considerably when I first met him, as he sat at a desk facing his classroom at the start of the year. Approaching retirement, he generally appeared in an elegantly wrapped scarf and dark coat, and maintained a certain reserve of formality, which set him apart in his largely informal departmental climate.[1] If class origin is class identity, then he was a working-class philosopher.[2] Yet you could not necessarily have ever known that from looking at him. His most visible characteristic as a teacher was his remarkable historical knowledge, which always framed his comments on philosophical texts. He was always very modest about his career, and austere in his self-descriptions. Born in a proletarian family, he had done well with the French academic system: when I met him, he was a senior professor nearing retirement. He listed "emancipation" as one of his research specialties and for our second interview, he sent me an essay commenting on Marx's relationship to an obscure French scholar, Nicolas Henri Simon Linguet. Linguet, wrote Navet, held that the class struggle was untranscendable.

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[1] Informal address (*tu* instead of *vous*) had become common in the early years of Paris 8, as a means of rejecting the formality of the traditional academic establishment.

[2] I would not in fact maintain that class origin necessarily confers class identity. In studying locations in class, one has to study the whole class trajectory across the lifecourse.

Georges Navet in the Latin Quarter, 2012.

I was curious about the meaning of Marx in this post-Marxian milieu, and I wrote to him eventually to ask how he would situate himself. Navet wrote back with a summary autobiography.

Let's say it brutally: with all due reverence for Marx's theoretical and critical genius, I've never really been able to be Marxist. Two things I believe were at play. 1) Paradoxically, the fact of being born in a workers' milieu (in the massive proletarian *banlieue* of Lyon): How could one

believe even for an instant in the messianic mission of the proletariat, when one has known the workers' universe up close, from a human perspective, or a family perspective? It's already saying too much to use the word "universe," given how much it's ruled by individualism, by getting out of scrapes, by the desire to escape one's condition, and, at the same time, by a spirit that I can only call "*populo*"…

A whole world emerged unexpectedly from Navet's past, and the very weight of this world ruled out any Marxist "messianism." The *populo* spirit designated the vivacity of the French plebs, which was organized, I gathered, by a spirit of masculine riposte. But this world had a doxic force of its own, and Navet escaped into his books. Literature became Reason #2 why he was not Marxist:

2) The preponderance that literature has always had for me: it happens that very early (thanks to *Livres de Poche*) I was able to read people like Balzac, Stendhal, Hugo […] Zola too […] It's a formidable school, I was saying, that one does not leave unscathed, above all perhaps with Stendhal, who teaches you to do the sidestep — irony or humor — that allows you at once to set aside your burdens [*pesanteurs*] (institutions, prejudices) and to comprehend the radical contingency (and thereby the arbitrariness and injustice) of the established order (which does not signify that this order would be easy to undermine — quite the contrary).

Philosophy had later given Navet the tools for expressing this "sidestep of irony," but it was not the source of his initial intuition that the social world was radically contingent. In fact, the radical contingency of the academic world had been obvious in Navet's early years as a teacher. I learned this from a radical journal, *The Doctrinal of Sapience*, which he published in the 1970s along with Vermeren, Douailler, and other young philosophy teachers. In the journal's fourth issue, in 1978, Navet had proposed a remarkably anthropological theory of philosophy as a system of exchange. As a young male philosopher from a working-

class family, Navet came to picture philosophy as an unstable system of exchange that traps you and permanently instrumentalizes your desires for rupture.

At first, the master and the disciple are locked in a homosocial recognition struggle:

> The philosopher has a marvelousness [*une superbe*] that is not linked to the individual but to his quality. This marvelousness (or this theoretical narcissism), by its play of seduction, hypnosis and fascination, creates the disciple through whom it prolongs itself, builds itself up and gets off on itself. The superior couldn't be superior without an inferior who proves his superiority by aspiring to become superior in his turn. The philosopher elicits the disciple, or rather the relationship between master and disciple, without which his prestige falls apart, along with his marvelousness. The disciple must be proud to be the disciple of such a master. Nevertheless, the relationship does not cease to be ambivalent. On one hand, the master, who stands for the Masters and for the tradition, which he interprets, is devoted to a perpetual one-upmanship which preserves his superiority (and his monopoly) on the disciple. On the other hand, in his very allegiance, the disciple desires to supplant the master, or in any case to get beyond him.

[Navet 1978:2]

The ironic tone that Navet had learned from Stendhal shone through, as he worked to denaturalize the "marvelousness" or "superb quality" of the philosophers. He invoked structuralist and psychoanalytic idioms, then still current, to make sense of what he saw as an unstable system that produced a perpetual debt cycle.

The relationship is even more trapped than one thinks, or rather, more than the disciple thinks. In the end, the master gives more than the disciple can give back… Or rather: there is an inadequation, an irreversibility, between what the master brings (an interpretation, a model, an initiation) and what the disciple gices back (an admiration, an obedience). He hampers his future and becomes the eternal debtor, not just of the master, but of philosophy. The circle of reproduction (or of succession) closes: devoid of the master, master in his turn, the disciple can only try to get himself out of debt by inscribing it in new disciples.

[1978:2]

So there is no escape from this circle, which was radically gendered. Navet's language and grammar was masculine, and inasmuch as the circular time of reproduction is also generically associated with women's realms, his anxiety about reproduction was haunted by the shadow of women. Navet noted himself that the philosophical system of ambivalence was profoundly masculine. In a footnote — everything always comes out in the footnotes — he remarked that the "feudal" aspect of philosophical exchange, with its exchanges of fealty between lord and vassal, "invites us to think that the philosophical relationship is essentially masculine" (1978:3n4). He added: "Which is no doubt true. Question: What are women and what do they do in a feudal system?" In a feudal system, presumably everyone is trapped. Thus Navet noted that the very act of trying to get out of the system is still part of it.

A furtive gesture of sharing, a false dialectic between master and disciple, which prolongs itself when the philosopher is strategically at war with other philosophers and with philosophy. Let us add that the latter attitude

in no way gets you out of the circle: a supreme ruse, which subordinates by the promise of an always receding liberation.

[1978:2]

This was surely the most full-fledged theory of philosophical ambivalence that I ever encountered in France. The relationship between masters and disciples was ambivalent and "trapped"; the bitter moments of rejecting the whole philosophical enterprise were themselves part of its mode of reproduction. And by the time I met Navet, he had become the master in due course. His students (my friends Ishmael and Marcel among them) were generally so impressed by his superb qualities that they rarely dreamed of outdoing him.

Navet shows us that the local system of ambivalence was based on masculine homosociality, which organized philosophers' investments and incited them to melodramatic rebellions. This system was premised on a basic mode of gender and class exclusion.[3] Its was not the only possible ambivalence, of course: Navet was ambivalent about his own class of origin too, crediting its pleb spirit while fully participating in its escapist impulses. But the difference, perhaps, was that you could escape the proletariat, while the philosophical petty-bourgeoisie had learned to prevent any escape. I enjoyed Navet's masculine reflexivity, to be honest. But I was never sure where it led politically. He was one of those professors who would come to protests, but did not organize them.

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[3] Navet was particularly conscious of the class dimensions of philosophical belonging. He noted that philosophical debate was reminiscent of "the quarrels over heritage, contract and descent in bourgeois law" (1978:2). And the teacher, he wrote (Navet 1977:3), was "on one hand a petty bourgeois without great power; on the other hand the holder of a function, bearer of coercive means."

Letter from Georges Navet

I got the following letter from Georges Navet in 2016, which I cited in the previous section. I would have liked for him to have seen this book in its finished state; his premature disappearance in May 2020 has made this impossible. But I always felt very touched by this letter, and I feel that it captures something about him that would be lost; I hope that he would not have been sad to see it presented here.

I had asked him about where his research interest in emancipation came from, and how it related to Marxian emancipation. He responded.

Cher Eli Thorkelson,

Vos questions ne manquent pas de pertinence, mais, je le crains, ne comportent pas de réponses simples...

Disons-le brutalement: toute révérence gardée au génie critique et théorique de Marx, je n'ai jamais pu être vraiment marxiste. Deux éléments je crois ont joué: 1/paradoxalement, le fait d'être né dans un milieu ouvrier (dans la grande banlieue prolétarienne de Lyon): comment croire une seule seconde à la vocation messianique du prolétariat quand on a connu de près, familialement et humainement, l'univers ouvrier? Encore est-ce déjà trop dire que de parler d'univers à ce propos, tant l'individualisme y règne, la débrouillardise, le désir d'échapper à sa condition, en

même temps qu'un esprit que je ne puis qualifier autrement que de "popu-lo" (pardon d'user d'un terme si spécifiquement français et si peu aisé à définir; si vous voulez en avoir une idée, regardez - il est gratuit sur Inter-net- le beau film de Julien Duvivier intitulé *La Belle équipe*, qui doit dater de 1937 ou 38, avec Jean Gabin, Charles Vanel, Viviane Romance et quelques autres, et qui a réussi à en capter quelque chose: en dépit de la distance, cet esprit-là existait encore dans les années 50-60). 2/la prépondérance qu'a toujours eu pour moi la littérature: il s'est trouvé que j'ai pu lire très tôt (merci le livre de poche) des gens comme Balzac, Stendhal, Hugo (celui de *L'homme qui rit* ou des *Misérables*), Zola aussi (quoique comparé à Balzac ou à Stendhal, ce soit quasiment un écrivain secondaire), etc. C'est une redoutable école, et je peux le dire maintenant sans lyrisme ou naïveté; pour ne donner qu'un exemple: s'il y a une époque que j'ai été amené à bien connaître, c'est celle de 1830-1848 en France. Lisez ou relisez le *Lucien Leuwen* de Stendhal:le tableau de l'époque est complet (sans aucun didactisme), et vous économiserez des années de travail - alors même que l'auteur est mort en 1842 (il a eu la prudence de ne pas publier son roman de son vivant). Redoutable école, disais-je, dont on ne sort pas indemne, surtout peut-être avec Stendhal,qui vous apprend à faire le pas de côté - ironie ou humour - qui permet à la fois de se dégager des pesanteurs (institutions, préjugés...) et de comprendre la radicale contingence (et du coup l'arbitraire et l'injustice) de l'ordre établi (ce qui ne signifie pas que cet ordre soit aisé à ébranler - bien au contraire).

Maintenant, s'il y a radicale contingence, quelque chose d'autre demeure toujours possible, et même si Balzac s'est voulu plutôt un réactionnaire et Hugo un progressiste parfois "cucul la praline", l'un et l'autre auraient pu cosigner ce qu'affirme René Char dans ses *Feuillets d'Hypnos* (écrits entre 1940 et 1944, dans les maquis de Haute Provence): "je n'écrirai pas de poème d'acquiescement." Reste à donner un visage au possible, et c'est ce visage, ou l'un de ces visages possibles qui s'esquisse parfois - dans les mouvements émancipatoires, après justement que l'acquiescement, toujours

forcément là dans la pesanteur des choses et des logiques socio-politiques, a été quelque peu ébranlé.

En somme, si vous cherchez une origine à ce que j'ai pu commettre sur l'émancipation, elle est plutôt à trouver là que dans la philosophie - qui n'est venue qu'après (même si c'est elle qui m'a permis de comprendre et à exprimer ce que je devais à la littérature). Et plus que dans Marx, il faudrait chercher du côté d'un auteur dont je n'ai pas encore parlé ici, Jules Vallès, journaliste et communard, qui publia sur le tard sa trilogie largement autobiographique: *L'enfant*; *Le bachelier*; *L'insurgé* - à mon sens une des plus grandes oeuvres - littérairement aussi bien que politiquement parlant - du XIX° siècle.

Voilà ce qu'un peu caricaturalement (il ne s'agissait tout de même pas d'écrire une autobiographie détaillée!), je puis répondre à votre question.

En souhaitant ne pas vous avoir trop ennuyé, et en espérant que tout marche pour le mieux pour vous (en route pour la gloire universitaire?),

Le Doctrinal de Sapience

The Doctrinal of Sapience was a politically radical philosophy journal published in the 1970s by some of the figures who would eventually become professors at Paris 8. Patrice Vermeren, Stéphane Douailler, and Georges Navet, young philosophy teachers at the time, were among its editors. Between 1975 and 1979, six issues came out, full of critical takes on French education, psychoanalytic takes on the student-teacher relationship, a groundbreaking article by Michèle Le Doeuff on the history of women in philosophy, a critique of colonial philosophy in Africa by Abdoulaye Elimane Kane, a wide range of letters and interviews about the philosophical profession in France, and occasional comedy, such as a satirical illustrated history of "philosophy occidentalis." The same community of authors went on to publish several anthologies in the 1980s on the politics and history of French philosophy teaching, notably *Les crimes de la philosophie* (1983), *La grève des philosophes* (1986), and *La philosophie saisie par l'état* (1988).

Thanks to Patrice Vermeren, who has kept the full run of the whole publication, I can include here the full texts of the journal.

They can be downloaded at: https://disappointed-utopia.decasia.org/misc/le-doctrinal-de-sapience.html.

A subaltern seminar on the university

I originally knew the subaltern research group called UFR0 (see Chapter 6) from its seminar on "the university." We met in autumn 2009 on Monday nights, in a group of mostly subaltern young men, largely from working-class, Maghrébin origins. Our seminar had a leader, Eric-Olivier, whose eloquence, intelligence, and capacity to improvise and free-associate gave him a genuine charismatic authority. Each week, Eric-Olivier led us through a series of Derridean verbal improvisations on the question of the university. He generally began with some textual point of departure, which he called a "roll of the dice" (as if gesturing towards avant-garde literary formalism). These included the linguistic theory of a "zero determinant"; the curious story of a 19th-century Norwegian polar explorer, F. Nandsen; the "start of a science fiction: the University-Airport and the waiting room for a flight without a destination." Some fragments from our discussion of the University-Airport give us a sense of the style, with its dreamy free association.

> An airport has no outside.
>
> In Louvain la Neuve, a town in Belgium, it's impossible to leave — like in an airport — the only way out is by expressway — everyone there just spends their time drinking. There's an absence of outside.
>
> In an airport, there are para-places. There are spaces of transit. There are non-places. Is it an absence of outside? Or a door leading elsewhere? There's jetlag.
>
> A university, too, has no doors, no outside...

With our imaginations, we'll explore this university-airport. A university still to come, not the actual university. A university where we can let our imaginations run loose. Me, I stand up in the hall, I see imaginary people. Fictional people.

We could have airport-style announcements for UFR0. There's too much luggage at UFR0. Too much baggage at the university. It's too heavy. Too many suitcases. It holds you back but also lets you go farther. Lost luggage will be destroyed. Deleuze's last manuscript was in a lost suitcase that got blown up in the metro.

Every department/UFR could be an airline. Offering flights. — Towards what destination? It's a transdimensional airport — there are figures from the past, pasts to visit.

A childlike simplicity.

Marvellous...

For many, the university is a nightmare. For us, it is a dream. A phantasm that, perhaps, starts to take place when the university's on strike.

I dunno, there are paths. Rolls of the dice. There's a random side. The side of connections. Everyone could write texts. We have a sort of faith in the university. It's a deconstruction of the profession.

A prophet is someone who intervenes at a given moment, looks over a situation, leaves. But a priest: has a post, a job.

There's so much to do, to write, we can't stop, as long as we're still here...

In this discourse, the university was reimagined as a scene of possibility and claustrophobia, a "waiting room for a flight without destination." It seemed to have "no outside." Yet it still retained metaphorical potential. The university's excessive baggage could be destroyed or abandoned. We were not limited by the constraints of academic reason. Only by the play of imagination and the sense of an audience.

In a sense, this discourse took itself more seriously than a normal classroom conversation. Eric-Olivier always insisted that we were genuinely doing collective research through our conversations. Some of the youngest, most marginal men, such as my graffiti-artist acquaintance Etienne, seemed happy to have a degree of respect.

Later, I was struck above all by a little formula that emerged from that night's discourse. *For many, the university is a nightmare. For us, it is a dream.*

As the formula points out, the disappointment, frustration and rage with the university that haunt so many critics are themselves a socially specific perspective. I have suggested elsewhere that disappointment with the university is at its peak among disappointed *elites*, who had been led to see the university as a scene of promises (Rose 2016a). But for those who were never supposed to feel at home in the university, those on the wrong side of class or racial lines, the "dream" of doing something with the university could itself become a form of subaltern freedom. It became a dream to play at reimagining a university that had always been a hostile space, full of nonproletarian class codes.

The debates at UFR0 seemed to *feel* free to their participants. The codes of academic debate were transformed into a space of subaltern charisma and improvisation. The participants often sat transfixed as Eric-Olivier spoke, or they reacted freely to his words. There was a sort of engaged listening in this seminar that I rarely saw in a philosophy classroom, where a quiet hierarchy tended to reign. Eric-Olivier was reviving a radical premise: that knowledge could take you someplace new, and not just to the inside of an existing scholarly discipline.

This, in turn, was not genuinely novel. It was but an odd realization of the ostensible premises of the Philosophy Department itself. Just as the Philosophy Department had advocated "adventures in thought" as a way of departing from traditional disciplinary codes, so too did UFR0 attempt free improvisation as a way of departing from Paris 8's standard institutional hierarchies. It felt like freedom; it was also a form of unconscious repetition.

I would go so far as to say that *it was emancipatory if you were there*, in the trance of the free association. It was emancipatory if you were able to belong to the tiny in-group, to stomach the toxic gender imbalance and the deliberate indifference to academic rigor. It was emancipatory if you were able to suspend your disbelief. It was emancipatory for men.

It was also an unstable experiment. UFR0 stopped meeting later in 2010, a victim of its own drift towards insular sexist masculinism, of the changing political mood, and of its incompatibility even with Paris 8's lax standards of academic inquiry. It became the laughingstock of the Philosophy Department, no longer taken seriously at all. I did not stay in touch with the participants. We were from such different worlds. But its participants showed me, at least, that new utopian experiments could be generated from within disappointed-utopian institutions. This is how you recognize a disappointed-utopian institution: it spawns new utopian projects on its own margins.

Marxism and the death of philosophy

One cannot draw a strict separation between French philosophy and French politics; the two have been entangled since the time of Descartes. At Vincennes, the Philosophy Department descended from a branch of French philosophy that had developed a radical self-critique of the discipline. This branch of philosophy had developed a set of stock radical rhetorics that Paris 8 then inherited.

These are a few reading notes on where those "stock radical rhetorics" came from. No doubt a professional philosopher would write a very different intellectual history.

The lodestone of this critical tradition was *The Watchdogs*, a polemic published in 1932 by Paul Nizan, a Communist who died young in the Second World War. Nizan took aim at "bourgeois" philosophy, and its ability to legitimate the status quo through "the illusion of Olympian detachment" (1971:43). He instead advocated a Communist model of "the professional revolutionary," who does not try to deduce *a priori* "values for the society of the future," but instead joins the Communist Party and "identifies completely" with the proletariat (138). This philosopher's task was thenceforth to "[expose] the myriad illusions and false ideas which prevent men from realizing how they have been enslaved."[1]

Forty years later at Vincennes, Nizan's book became a touchstone of revolutionary philosophy. As the Trotskyist professor Alain Brossat explained:

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[1] Affectively speaking, Nizan's project also entailed getting beyond the class shame that prevailed among "petty-bourgeois" philosophers — the class shame that Foucault later parodied in insisting that he was "not a comrade." Nizan concluded: "Our most distinguished philosophers are still too ashamed to admit that they have betrayed mankind for the sake of the bourgeosie. If we betray the bourgeoisie for the sake of mankind, let us not be ashamed to admit that we are traitors" (1970:140).

For me, and no doubt for others like Bensaïd as well, it was about taking over from academic philosophy [*la philosophie universitaire*]. It was this idea that something was philosophical in the sense of using concepts, but which was philosophical after the collapse [*effondrement*] of academic philosophy. If you like, we fit completely into the type of discourse that someone like Nizan had created in the 1930s in *The Watchdogs*, that's what it was. In any case, *The Watchdogs*, no one read it when it came out, but everyone had read it in 68 and in the years afterwards. We were the protagonists of that kind of lineage [*relève*] — of a politicized philosophy, a philosophy that would produce itself and endure only under conditions of revolutionary action.

[Dormoy-Rajramanan 2004:97-98]

Yet there was an inner tension between *contesting philosophy as such* and elaborating an *alternative version* of philosophy which merely wanted space of its own within the academy. Such a tension was already latent in Nizan, who had opened his book with a declaration of pluralism. "Philosophy-in-itself does not exist any more than the Horse-in-itself exists: there exist only different philosophies, just as there exist Arabs and Percherons, Léonais and Anglo-Normans" (Nizan 1971:7). This loosely anthropological image of "many philosophies" reappeared regularly in subsequent decades, and it initially took the form of a denunciation of philosophy "as such." For instance, Jean-Paul Sartre declared that "In our view Philosophy does not exist. In whatever form we consider it, this shadow of science, this Gray Eminence of humanity, is only a hypostatized abstraction. Actually, there are philosophies" (1968 [1963]:3).

When Michel Foucault denounced Vincennes in 1970 as "a trap," he echoed that thought.

I am not sure, you know, that philosophy exists. What exists is "philosophers," that is a certain category of people whose activities and discourses have varied greatly from one age to the next. What distinguishes them, like

their neighbors the poets and the madmen, is the common lot that isolates them [*le partage qui les isole*], and not the unity of a genre or the consistency of a sickness.[2]

Alongside the wish to pluralize philosophy was a more aggressive desire to negate the discipline altogether. Marxists aspired to overthrow bourgeois philosophy in order to establish a theoretical monopoly of their own.[3] Henri Lefebvre had written in 1947 that "The only real critique was and remains the *critique of the left*. Why? Because it alone is based on *knowledge*" (1991:130). Sartre, who turned towards Marxism, came to privilege social class as the motor of intellectual life: "You would never at the same time find more than one living philosophy... A philosophy is first of all a particular way in which the 'rising' class becomes conscious of itself" (1968 [1963]:3-4).

This class critique of philosophy was only one facet of a larger disciplinary crisis, as philosophy's intellectual position was contested by new disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, semiotics, and psychoanalysis, as the universities were opened to minoritized subjects and mass media developed. Sartre personally embodied this critique of academic philosophy: he lived as an "engaged intellectual," resolutely refusing titles and credentials, and making a living outside the university by selling his writing. "Sartre was our Outside," recalled Gilles Deleuze, "he was really the breath of fresh air from the backyard... Among all the Sorbonne's probabilities, it was his unique combination which gave us the strength to tolerate the new restoration of order" (Deleuze and Parnet 2002 [1987]:12).[4]

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[2] "Le piège de Vincennes," *Le Nouvel Observateur* 274, 9-15 February 1970, pp. 33–35. See also http://www.ipt.univ-paris8.fr/hist/documents/vincennes/Foucaut-Vadrot/Foucault_70.htm.

[3] From my perspective, it seems that the locus classicus of this move was really Lukacs' *History and Class Consciousness* (1968) with its famous argument that the proletarian standpoint had a special epistemic privilege.

[4] This was a form of misrecognition, as Jean-Louis Fabiani points out, since Sartre was himself a standard product of the French philosophy system, a brilliant normalien agrégé in a world that churned out brilliant normaliens agrégés and sent them to teach in provincial lycées, as Sartre had

Sartre's philosophical work was soon enough attacked by younger male challengers, in classic masculine-combat fashion. But the project of contesting academic philosophy continued, as philosophy "itself" was attacked, reinvented, and even declared dead.

The 1960s discourse that "philosophy was dead" was a prime strategy for renegotiating the political boundaries of the discipline. It has to be read as a form of collective bargaining. "It's not about saving philosophy," wrote Châtelet, Foucault's successor at Vincennes, "It is dead and there's no room for bringing museum pieces back to life" (1970:26). The rhetoric of a "crisis" or "end" of philosophy became so commonplace that it was widely made fun of. Deleuze deplored the 1960s' eclectic radical philosophy, writing mockingly that "We see Marx and the Pre-Socratics, Hegel and Nietzsche, holding hands in a dance celebrating the transcendence of metaphysics and even the death of philosophy as such."[5] Meanwhile, political criteria of evaluation were widely applied to philosophy. "In France the whole of intellectual life is affected by the existence of an organized and long-standing Communist Party, and by the presence of a sizable group of Marxist intellectuals" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1967:175). Or more succinctly: "Philosophy lives on politics" (Althusser 1971b:30). Another observer sounded resigned: "In France, the development of a political position remains the decisive test [of philosophy], disclosing as it does the definitive meaning of a mode of thought" (Descombes 1980:7).

The Althusserian moment deserves a word here. Althusser himself — born in Algiers, a prisoner of war in Germany, and a lifelong depressive — was naturally a walking contradiction, as a civil servant paid to (re)produce state intellectual

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done in the 1930s (Fabiani 2010). Sartre himself thus illustrated the familiar dynamic by which an establishment structurally produces its own outside, only to experience it as a form of rupture.

[5] I have amended Hugh Tomlinson's translation of *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. See Deleuze 2006a:95.

elites.[6] One non-Marxist remarked that "He was, humanly speaking, extremely warm and not at all dogmatic… The dogmatism that's so characteristic of his disciples, that wasn't him."[7] But his erstwhile student Jacques Rancière, who later became one of Paris 8's global stars, remained quite ambivalent. Althusser "was like the priest of a religion of Marxist rigour… there was an adventurous side and a dogmatic side to it all."[8] In Althusser's published writing, the dogmatism came out. In 1968, he declared dramatically that "The fusion of Marxist theory and the Workers' Movement is the most important event in the whole history of the class struggle, i.e. in practically the whole of human history" (1971:15). Yet his movement splintered in May 1968, and the fixation with theory was attacked. "Althusser is useless!" read one slogan. "Althusser not the people!" said another.[9]

Jacques Rancière soon dedicated himself to attacking his former teacher's theoretical elitism. His disciple's attack on the master was decidedly in keeping with the homosocial antagonisms which, we saw earlier, organized French philosophers' relationships. In 1974, Rancière published a brutal attack on Althusser's view of theoretical work as "class struggle in the field of theory." Above all, Rancière argued that Althusser's effort to politicize the academic field had only reinscribed traditional forms of academic power.

> Althusser speaks to the clever, to those who can see further than obtuse
> bureaucrats and know how to decipher his discourse. It is in this, precisely,
> that his discourse is akin to that of bureaucrats, that his 'leftist' discourse

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[6] Even by Althusser's own account, his own professional position was ambiguous. "A professional philosopher who joins the Party remains, ideologically, a petty bourgeois. He must revolutionize his thought in order to occupy a proletarian class position in philosophy" (1971:13). See also Balibar (2009).

[7] Interview with Jacques Bouveresse, http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk/interviews/bouveresse.html

[8] See Rancière and Hallward (2003:195).

[9] Dosse 1997:119-120.

serves as a conduit for the power of specialists. 'Class struggle in theory', the power to decree, from the height of his armchair, that these utterances are bourgeois and those proletarian – but also to speak between the lines to 'crafty readers', that is, to Marxist mandarins – is also, like salary hierarchies, a form of 'class struggle'... The professor's 'Maoism' says the same thing as the cadre's economism or the manager's humanism: it defends the privilege of competent people, of the people who know which demands, which forms of action and which words are proletarian, and which bourgeois. It is a discourse in which specialists of the class struggle defend their power.

[Rancière 2011:109]

For Rancière, Althusser suffered basically from a failure of reflexivity: he had not taken account of his own specific position as a university professor. But the irony is that Rancière ultimately faced the same reflexive dilemmas he had diagnosed in his former master. The 1960s crisis discourse in French philosophy faded away, along with the Marxist critiques of the field.[10] But it left behind a question. How would radical philosophers such as Rancière *recover* from their own critiques of the discipline? As Marxist attacks on bourgeois philosophy fell by the wayside, the pluralist image of "many philosophies" stuck around, and became a useful rationale for the philosophical multiculturalism that gradually emerged at Paris 8.

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[10] There were, however, subsequent disciplinary crises in philosophy, e.g. around 2009's university movement, or around relationships to Anglophone academic philosophy.

How philosophers made a living

It was not necessarily easy for French philosophers to make a living. There were clearly a handful of famous, "mediatized" philosophers in France who were successful as public intellectuals, selling books or, since the 1950s, speaking on television (Godechot 1999, Matheson 2005). Such figures could make their living partly by producing artisanally crafted intellectual goods for a mass market. Many philosophers also entered other career paths, retaining to a greater or lesser degree their disciplinary identity while being, for instance, journalists or government officials, though this was a population that to my knowledge had no definite census. But the major labor market for philosophers in France lay in the public education system, which in 2000 employed some 4148 secondary school philosophy teachers and some 335 university philosophers (Pinto 2007:109, 111). This meant that academic philosophers generally had the legal status of state functionaries (*fonctionnaires d'état*) or, in more familiar English terms, civil servants. Philosophy's partial integration into the French state apparatus constituted, nonetheless, a fragile compromise with the state. The official rationale for philosophy teaching, especially in secondary schools, was that intellectual freedom was a prerequisite of enlightened citizenship and even a symbol of the French nation itself (Sherringham 2006). But the French government has at times tried to cut costs by reducing the number of philosophy jobs, while philosophers often remained quite critical of the French state.

This meant that the discipline's material basis — the philosophers' wage relationship to the state, their public-sector jobs — could itself become a source of political trouble, or conversely, of political mobilization. The long university strike of Spring 2009 was controversial because striking professors were paid throughout its duration, but it may also have been easier to strike because of the lack of economic penalty to the strikers. If we turn to consider the material basis for Paris 8's Philosophy Department, it is safe to say that professorial salaries comprised the

bulk of the cost of running the department. There were in 2012 around 25 permanent full-time teacher-researchers, paid on a national salary scale that runs from about 24,000€/year to about 60,000€/year; if we estimate conservatively that the mean salary was around 40,000€/year, the department's teaching salaries would have added up to at least 1 million euros yearly.[1] The Department did not handle its own staff budget, which had formerly been handled by the Ministry of Higher Education, and was subsequently administered by the local university administration. The Department was instead allocated a number of "posts" ("lines" in American university jargon), abstracting over the actual salary costs (as often happens elsewhere). It is nevertheless interesting to compare the general costs of salaries with the departmental research budget, which supported approximately 300 doctoral students along with the professoriat. The total research budget was only 30,000€ in 2011 — which suggests comparatively that salaries may have cost as much as 97% of the total cost of the enterprise. We can thus conclude that the costs of academic philosophy were *almost exclusively* the costs of reproducing the philosophical workforce.[2]

The social composition of the philosophical workforce was deeply structured and segmented, even as its work processes remained relatively unregimented. At the time of my research, the Paris 8 Philosophy Department had roughly 2/3 male teachers. While its initial staff in 1968 came largely from the elite Ecole Normale Supérieure, subsequent hires often came from the margins of the traditional French academy. It hired many of its own alumni, and granting mid-career doctoral degrees to its friends.

A comparison of academic CVs suggests that one could divide its professors into those with more traditional academic careers and those who were

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[1] The total cost of employment for a single staff person was about twice the direct salary costs, given taxes, the costs of state-supported benefits and social security, bonuses, overtime, and so on.

[2] I have not tried to estimate the costs of the Department's small administrative workforce, which typically included 0-2 full time staff; I heard that the direct administrative budget was also very small.

hired through what we could call alternative institutional routes. Even the more conventional senior professors had not necessarily been university professors their whole careers. The historical pattern in France was for philosophy professors to have started out teaching high school (lycée) philosophy classes, to get doctorates after a decade or more of this work, and then finally to obtain university posts in mid-career. "Alternative" career paths could be more varied still. One professor, among the most activist of his peers, began as a telephone technician in the 70s, taught grade school, eventually started to study social sciences, and finally got a philosophy doctorate and a philosophy job. A number of others came to the campus in the 70s when it was at the height of its radical effervescence and never left, getting degrees in-house and getting professorial jobs often after long periods of part-time campus work. Such professors had a visibly different relationship to the academy, often lacking the air of academic comfort and intellectual mastery that derives from French elite education.

Professorial work itself could be divided into several segments, all of which were largely self-managed. Legally, the only fixed requirement was to provide 192 hours of classroom instruction per year. At Paris 8, the year was divided into two semesters, and philosophy professors taught two courses per semester, each class meeting 3 hours once a week. Such a schedule made it easier for professors to squeeze their teaching into one or two weekdays. Most professors lived in central Paris, or in other suburbs even further away, and their commutes were often long; the majority seemed to commute by metro.[3] Many of the students worked, as well, and it was said to facilitate their schedules to have a fewer number of long classes.

Teaching was perceived as the most "obligatory" part of the job. There was relatively little statutory pressure to publish, since all teaching jobs technically had lifetime tenure from the moment of hiring. The technical term for professorial jobs was "teacher-researcher" (*enseignant-chercheur*), but while the Humboldtian

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[3] Across the university as a whole, in 2012, 52% of teaching staff lived in Paris, 12% in Seine-Saint-Denis, and the rest elsewhere (including 12% outside the Paris region).

ideal was for these two tasks to be integrated, philosophers often distinguished them quite strongly. They tended to call research "my work," as if it were something done for themselves, often in private or at home. Work largely had to be done at home, because there were no offices for academics on the campus, which was cramped and underfinanced. This lack of workspace was considered an indignity.

There were also two major kinds of "intermediate" work activities, falling between the social, obligatory sphere of teaching and the private, optional sphere of research. First were numerous kinds of scholarly communication—conferences, editorial work, dissertation defenses, and the like. These did not seem to be perceived as "obligatory" in quite the same way as teaching, but were nonetheless much more collective, convivial affairs than the solitude of writing.

Alongside this was a second realm of administrative activity. The Department had a very small administrative staff, and the professors did a good deal of work to administer the undergraduate and graduate programs. Administrative work did not seem to be a statutory job obligation; it was more a moral expectation that went along with French universities' increasingly threatened forms of collective governance. In the Philosophy Department, this means that a minority of professors wound up "voluntarily" undertaking most of the administrative work, while some of their peers consistently refused such work (or did it so badly that they were soon replaced by someone else). Some professors said they preferred "their own" work to administrative tasks. Predictably, some of the teaching and administrative labor was also done by doctoral students, employed on precarious contracts lasting at most 3 years.

Philosophers on their workspaces

Philosophers' workspaces were most commonly at their homes, typing on a laptop on a cluttered table near their large book collections. It is interesting to briefly consider how philosophers described their workspaces.

Here is the former professor Jacques Rancière describing his daily work habits:

> I prefer to write in the morning, and possibly until the middle of the afternoon. I like the daylight, a table facing the window, with a view towards the sky and the trees, if possible. There are books I've written large parts of outside, but that was before the computer. That said, writing is always linked to research work. At a certain point in my life I got into the habit of going to the library or to the archives every day they were open. I'd go every day, including when I didn't really have any goal, somewhat like the filmmaker Pedro Costa says: "every day I'd go to Fontainhas with my little DV camera, like you go to your job." Actually, at a certain point, I got the habit of going to work every day, for a long time I went daily to the library or the archives, and I continue to work every day.

> [Rancière 2012:50]

This, it must be said, is more an official synthetic self-image than a concrete ethnographic description; it comes from a book of interviews with Rancière and was, presumably, crafted to appear in print. But even so, we can discern that the everyday life of philosophical labor is less a tale of permanent rupture than of routinized, corporeal self-discipline: philosophical work, for Rancière, was a sort of

daily grind. Clearly, this is not a scene of normal wage slavery, since Rancière is able to regulate the aesthetics of his work environment, seemingly focusing on controlling the light, the atmosphere, the view, the outdoors. In short, all the symbols of non-work, natural beauty, and escape are folded into his work process.

In an interview, a senior professor described having a particularly tranquil work rhythm when he taught abroad (as many of these professors did).

> I work here [at home in Paris] or I work at the Bibliothèque nationale [National Library]… The corpus is never complete but at the same time— [*he gestured to his vast book collection*].

> I love working abroad too. As soon as my wife is away, I have a sort of routine: I teach for three hours, I prepare my subsequent courses, but since I'm usually redoing the courses I've taught in Paris, it's already well under-way. And then I can write. I really like that aspect of being in the middle of nowhere [abroad] where you're not bothered with lots of meetings, you just teach your classes and that's it… It takes me time to write, and I think that for people like me, we also spend a lot of time working on the profession and dealing with students.

We can contrast this love of traveling with the inverse love of staying home described by the Department's longtime chair in the 1970s and 80s, François Châtelet.

> Aside from the two long afternoons when I teach — at Vincennes, at the Sorbonne, and at the Polytechnic (when springtime comes) — I stay at home. I do my best not to go out much. The idea of traveling — especially when it's not planned — is really unpleasant to me. Instead of "doing office hours," I prefer to have the students see me at home. I lose lots of time on it, but I gain in peace of mind…

I spend the largest part of my time at home. In the daytime, I do my correspondence, I run through the administrative work for Vincennes, I answer the telephone — I'm not invested in this horrible torture machine, on the atrocious constant aggression that it creates — just write, for the love of God — I try to have a bit of a siesta, I see students, I work with friends, I flip through books that come out, I listen to music, I play with my kid (playing or helping with his homework), I walk in the neighborhood for the pleasure of picking up a few things for dinner.

[Châtelet and Akoun 1977]

None of these short descriptions are particularly decisive as ethnographies of the work process. But I was unable to do significant observations of philosophers working from home, and this kind of data is at least suggestive. (One can contrast these stories of men working with the exploration of a female professor's workspace that I gave in Chapter 2.)

At a philosophy conference

I cut from Chapter 5 a description of the philosophy conference I attended at Céret.

Philosophy conference audience before my talk.

The conference room was on the upper floor of the Céret Museum of Modern Art. It had cherry paneling, gray carpets, and seven rows of poorly padded chairs.

The presenters faced the audience from a low platform. The audience sprawled out across the chairs, their bodies unruly and undisciplined. Their clothes tended to be presentably decorous. They faced the speakers in a normative show of attention, heads inclined, tilted or bent, and showed respect by only occasionally whispering during the talks. It was ritual behavior, in a ritualized space.

The conference entailed a specific protocol of interaction, set apart from other social rhythms. The conference room was a space apart; the time of the conference was a time apart. In Céret, the fluid, occasionally drowsy, quietly attentive time of the conference moved rhythmically through its published schedule with only minor deviations. The motionless space could have been any conference space anywhere, bereft of overt signs of locality. The room cut us off from the nearby art galleries, from the rest of the town, from natural light and the landscape, and from the everyday life of our home universities. The room enclosed us within a space of respect, of form, of recognition and obligations.

Yet even within the conference ritual, with its set schedule and formal rhythm of introductions, presentations, and questions, there was still a great deal of indeterminacy. No one could be sure what a given presentation would be like, how the conversation would go, whether anyone would pay attention. Sometimes there was a low-grade form of verbal aggression, a historically masculine practice of testing others and being tested. The speakers' performances were subject to immediate judgment from others. This was largely what gave the conference its anxiety-making potential.

We heard presentations about the novelist Roberto Bolaño, about the philosophical implications of John Cage, about the expression "…or death" (as in "liberty or death"), about "nature-artifice" in Rousseau. The speech would begin, we would listen. At odd moments there would be a shifting in the room, as if people were bored, confused or sleepy. As if they felt inclined to whisper to each other during a speaker's momentary pause. Each conference talk was followed by time for questions to the speaker, but the questions seldom amounted to full

syntheses of what had been said in the presentations. The dialogue, on the contrary, was often fragmentary. It felt to me that the scenes of discussion traveled like a dream. People came and went; the audience shrank sometimes when the doctoral students spoke.

Here are a few questions and comments that struck me as I listened to the talks. "What does one gain by introducing "artifice" in lieu of "technique?" "I would have been more critical with the conception of the border as a line protecting an entity." "A logical question: when you speak of liberty or death, do you mean the exclusive 'or' or the inclusive 'or'?" (The saucy response: "I'm not going to respond to that, of course.") "What exactly is a smoking mirror?" "Is Leroux marginal or anti-institutional, or are there [instead] competing institutional projects for philosophy at that [19th-century] moment?" After Marcel's talk, someone asked him about "the writer as shadow," but he declined to answer, saying only that the question was "exciting." At another moment, a presenter's effort to sum up "the meaning of Hegel's Phenomenology" elicited laughter among the crowd, since the topic seemed so vast. Douailler laughed loudest, as if he were the agent of the crowd's affects.

It became clear to me that the conference was not an ideally rational public space where every claim was reliably received and systematically debated by the group. I wrote as much in my notes the first afternoon.

One realizes that it's impossible for anyone to retain all this knowledge, and one has to have an analyze of waste-knowledge and excess of epistemic form and content. As if the epistemic content of the colloque was an unmasterable form, a form of untranscendable excess. It's knowledge made to be mostly lost, made to be redundant, to offer many points of entry — and of exit.

[Fieldnotes, March 25, 2011]

When I asked a female professor what she made of the conference, she described it less as a scene of learning than as a scene of networking. "I need to re-read my notes to make sense of it all," she said, "since each talk erases the last one in my head. I'm happy to present, to get to connect with the director of the Museum. I'll come back here at some point…" As the scattered remarks mentioned above show, I did no better than her at retaining the sum content of what was said. I strongly suspect that no one else did, either. The conference was a banquet of words, an exercise of deliberate indulgence and splendor. It seemed to be centered around the production of *waste knowledge*, knowledge that was so broad in scope and so intricate in form that it became unmasterable, a non-integrable excess. No one could take in all this knowledge. But in the end, the conference was less about transmitting knowledge than about making sparks of thought and giving each other glimmers of recognition.

An aging professor's narrative

At one point I interviewed one of the longest serving professors, Alain Brossat, a Trotskyist philosopher who had arrived during the early days of Vincennes as a doctoral student. He chose to recount the Department's history to me in some detail. Brossat arranged to meet me off-campus in November 2010, at the *Maison des Sciences Humaines-Paris Nord*, where he had a secondary affiliation. I showed up a little early and watched him arrive precisely at 2pm, in a small car that might have been a Passat, and we climbed up into the curious premises of the MSH, with its rubberized staircase, its painted glass and metal doors, its rooftop terrace, its sense of calm. The neighborhood disappeared from sight; it was a Friday; the premises were deserted. We sat in a classroom with big windows, with a tall telecommunications tower rising up to the east. "It's a military base," Brossat said, and he twiddled a pen as he told his story.

The project of Paris 8, initially called an Experimental University Institute, was political from its inception, he said, and teaching at Vincennes was a "profession of faith." For some new disciplines, like psychoanalysis, the experiment made it possible to insert themselves into the French academy; for others, like geography, it helped to politicize existing academic fields. But from the start, it was always a deeply "litigious" space, an "ungovernable site," he called it, with huge amounts of time spent in internal quarrels between far-left groups and in "psychodramas." "You're not nostalgic?" I eventually ventured. "No," he said.

For some teachers, the university's 1980 forced relocation from Vincennes to Saint-Denis was "lived as a tragedy," and this attachment to the university's original site was still visible thirty years later in my fieldwork. For Brossat, though, Vincennes was only ever a "provisional camp," and never the "site of enchantment" that some made it out to be. "One cannot say that it was a marvelous heterotopia. It was much more complicated than that. It *had to change* to stay a university; it's

evident that a university site can't be a site of 100% subversion and experimentation… Teaching presupposes certain conditions of stability. We were living on another planet… but there are forms of normalization that are pretty much inevitable."

The internal problems of the original experiment were both physical and political, it seemed. The university was long run by "Stalinists," he explained, meaning traditional members of the French Communist Party. But the Philosophy Department was composed of very few traditional Communists, and full instead of internal debates between Trotskyists and Maoists. So there were frequent clashes with the administration and with the public authorities. On a physical level, there were often no chairs in the rooms, since they had been taken for street protests — "To throw at the cops?" I asked. "No, to make into clubs [*matraques*]." And the university's scarce funds meant that most of the teaching staff were precarious *chargés de cours* (part-time contract teachers).

The department was always a space of conflict, Brossat concluded, and it never had a common identity. In its early years, it only shared a certain number of presuppositions (*des implicites*), like an attack on traditional philosophy, and a teaching of revolutionary doctrine, generally Marxist. But as the department aged, this project of teaching revolutionary philosophy was gradually given up, and the department became a place where particular philosophers — especially the big names of Deleuze and Lyotard — would "elaborate *their own* thought." In short, for Brossat, over time there had been a privatization or individualization of the departmental project, and an evaporation of its politics.

During the years of stigmatization in the 1970s, the department was directed by François Châtelet, a traditional historian of philosophy who "kept the department alive." But slowly, Brossat explained, "the *names* associated with the department became well-known abroad," and it became "no longer possible to see the department as a bunch of jokers [*rigolos*]." In this slow rise into higher status, Brossat nevertheless saw a paradox: that the department came to be treated as the

inheritor of this philosophical tradition *after* its key figures had already departed. The department became well-known after the death of Lyotard and Deleuze; and Rancière and Badiou would retire from the department as they became increasingly successful. Moreover, Brossat added, "the best specialists in Foucault, Deleuze, etc., are not necessarily at Paris 8," even if the department was their "objective" or institutional heir. "It's a sort of miracle," he concluded, "that made it possible for us to survive."

This survival came with a price that he considered inevitable: the department had gradually become *normalized*. "It's a department like any other. The quality of its teaching is variable. Its reputation doesn't correspond to any particular excellence. And in two or three years, when all the people left from the 1960s, like me, will be gone, *nothing* will set it apart. We're just at the very ending of the story. And the current crowd who run the department have only accelerated the process of normalization… What will become of it afterwards? I really don't know."

For that matter, he emphasized again, the department had never constituted a collectivity in the first place. "There has never been a *life* of the department. There are friends, groups, etc, but never a philosophy *policy*. It's always been a matter of conflicts, psychodramas, cliques; some people in power, others ostracized; it's always been *empty*. With a sort of latent violence. It's never had a *collective de pensée*; one does absolutely what one wants. I don't know how they manage to make a degree program out of it; we have a liberty that's absolutely anarchic, and always an absence of internal life, of shared life; it's the regime of cliques, of clans. This works for those who love power and those who don't — after all, some people just don't want to get bogged down in it. For everything that people said about the old department chair — his authoritarian side, his slightly bovine attitude — he kept things going." As for himself, I asked? "Exercising these little powers — it's never excited me."

In the meantime, the department faced a surplus of internal problems. "The profs are like everyone else — conformist, conservative. Sure, they're on the left,

but what does that even mean, being on the left today? And in the department, some of the teachers are phantoms, there are bogus courses, a considerable absenteeism… it's scandalous! They don't do the minimum." Brossat's view of the larger philosophical field was equally harsh: bereft of its former mission of transmitting "Republican ideology and humanist knowledge," philosophy logically should disappear, he argued. But for the powers that be, he suggested, it hadn't been worth the bother of killing off, leaving French university philosophers in a state of unexpected freedom. The problem, he concluded, was that "we don't do anything much with this autonomy."

More than his colleagues at the time, Brossat was ready to historicize and objectify the department's project, and he paid a particular attention to his department's tacit accommodations to academic market norms. For it was, on his account, the very success of the department's famous philosophical stars — like Deleuze and Lyotard — that had helped evacuate the department's commitment to (loosely) revolutionary politics and, indirectly, contributed to a new era of individualization and name recognition. Of course, the Department had been organized by name recognition from the very beginning. Foucault was already famous when he became the first department chair. But one can imagine the force of name recognition intensifying in the void left as the post-68 conjuncture faded.

The status of undocumented students

Undocumented students (*sans-papiers*, students without papers) faced particular struggles to stay in France. It is worth dwelling on the way that these undocumented students were represented in local discourse, as that discourse said something about the limits of institutional recognition. The undocumented student was understood as suffering subjects in need of care (Ticktin 2011). Yet discourses around these students also had a certain ambiguity.

The statistics generally showed that foreign students, including ones from postcolonial societies, had higher class statuses than did French citizens from the nearby banlieue. Yet in the face of these statistics, the Department also enrolled a certain number of undocumented students.

"Neither homeland nor borders: Freedom of movement!"

This put the professors in an awkward situation, as we can see from a passage in Alain Brossat's "Banlieue University" text.

What strikes me, with our undocumented students — there are always a few of them who manage to slip through the net — is the way in which,

standing before us, they take all the shame and the fault upon themselves. They approach us — we, their teachers whom they hear speaking another language than that of the police and the State — as the guilty parties. They avoid having to talk to us about their "problem," and when they do do it, it's furtive and apologetic, and only when they can't do otherwise. You can clearly feel that they can't manage to persuade themselves that we could be on their side, against their persecutors — the academic administration and the security apparatus. After all, are we not also state functionaries, paid by the State, right by their side?[1]

(Brossat 2003)

Brossat had a certain lucidity about the ambiguities of being a state functionary. How could anyone not perceive the professors as representatives of the state institutions that paid their salaries? And yet at the same time, Brossat underestimated the extent of political support for the undocumented. There were many professors and students, in philosophy and elsewhere, who actively defended students in danger of deportation. Typical here would be a text forwarded to the departmental listserve in defense of a Haitian lycée student.

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[1] Ce qui me frappe, avec nos étudiants sans papiers – il y en a toujours quelques-uns qui parviennent à passer à travers les mailles du filet –, c'est la façon dont ils prennent, face à nous, toute la honte et la faute sur eux. Ils nous abordent, nous, leurs enseignants qu'ils entendent pourtant parler une autre langue que celle de la police et de l'Etat, en coupables. Ils évitent d'avoir à nous parler de leur « problème » et, quand ils le font, c'est furtivement, en s'excusant et quand ils ne peuvent faire autrement. On sent bien qu'ils ne parviennent pas à se persuader de ce que nous puissions, nous, être avec eux, contre leurs persécuteurs – l'administration universitaire et les préfectures. Après tout, ne sommes-nous pas, nous aussi, des fonctionnaires, payés par l'Etat, du côté du manche ?

In France since 2009, Eden F. was still there when Haiti was ravaged by the earthquake. Holder of a Haitian secondary certificate, he successfully passed the tests to be able to continue his studies and to begin qualifications training. Now he is in the last year at the Mozart technical lycée, in Blanc-Mesnil. A well-known and serious student, this young man is nevertheless victim of an administrative decision by the Prefecture of Seine-Saint-Denis, inspired solely by accounting logics, to refuse him residence papers; they want to make him go back to Haiti.

The tropes here were those typical of the larger movement of support for undocumented immigrants in France. The framing is one of French left-statist politics: of the convergence of struggles, of the injustices and arbitrariness of the state apparatus in the face of Haitian catastrophe. Such cases came up frequently. When a recent graduate of the Paris 8 Anthropology Department was threatened with expulsion, several philosophy students joined the protests, and ultimately prevented his deportation. The department made no effort to pretend that it could right all wrongs; but the undocumented students, at least, were framed publicly as a virtuous cause.

Yet there were limits that the Department would not cross in its support of foreign students. It turns out that the Department, which generally had very open enrollment policies, did reject applications to study from certain students. I asked a university administrator how many rejected philosophy applications they had.

Administrator: *Oh la la*, not many.

Ethnographer: But when you do reject them, what for?

Administrator: Because the student has no philosophical background, has nothing to do with the philosophy discipline.

Ethnographer: Why sign up then?

Administrator: There are those who just want to enroll to enroll, to get their immigration papers [*carte de séjour*].

Ethnographer: Yeah. And it's just a handful who do that?

Administrator: Uh, it's not many.

One can certainly understand the rationale for not accepting students who had no actual interest in philosophy. But that policy did have a certain consequence. It showed that philosophy's disciplinary borders may have been greatly pushed back, but that they were not thereby abolished. The administrative staff were thus required to filter out those who had no interest in philosophy except instrumentally, to get immigration papers. Whatever the motive, it is telling that even this Department could not accept *everyone*.

On the archival sources

I am not a professional historian. However, I did consult a number of archival sources in the course of working on this project.

    1. The Paris 8 University Library holds a substantial archive, including a collection of course catalogs that are very helpful for tracing the history of teaching and of the staff directory.

    2. An interesting collection of photographs and political art is available (as of 2022) in Paris 8's online collections at https://octaviana.fr/.

    3. At the curiously named archive La Contemporaine (formerly the BDIC, Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine) on the campus of Paris Nanterre, there is an an extremely useful collection by Assia Melamed that contains many documents and historical interviews pertinent to philosophy at Vincennes in the 1970s.

    4. The sociologist Charles Soulié has a substantial personal archive of interviews, photographs and documents about the Vincennes period, which I was able to consult.

    5. I learned too late that the Philosophy Department maintained its own departmental archives, which I heard were badly damaged in a flood in the basement. I never consulted these documents, but if they still exist, they would surely be interesting.

    For the more well-known figures involved in this site, the public record is already very large, and I took advantage of what I could, particularly the biogra-

phies, autobiographies and collected texts. I have made no pretense of exhaustiveness.

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Is ending possible?

"Of all Discourse, governed by desire of Knowledge, there is at last an End, either by attaining, or by giving over. And in the chain of Discourse, wheresoever it be interrupted, there is an End for that time."

Leviathan (chapter vii)

This is it for the project; I'm all out of things to say.

"End of the University, P8 on strike." The blockaded entrance to campus, 2018.

…Except for one last thing.

As the original University of Vincennes was closed and the institution moved to Saint-Denis, there were some who argued that it was the end of the institution. And yet certain philosophers would also deny that there was such a thing as endings, as in this 1980 newspaper article by Guy Hocquenghem, a gay philosopher who taught at Vincennes and died of AIDS in 1988.

« Il n'y a pas de fin de Vincennes ; en général, il n'y a pas de fin. Celui qui dit : « C'est la fin », ne dit rien, puisqu'on ne le saura que par la phrase suivante… »

"There is no end of Vincennes; in general, there are no endings. Saying "this is the end" is absolutely meaningless, because the only way you could is with the sentence that comes after."

From "La Chute de Paris VIII," *Libération*, 6 June 1980.