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Chapter 10

Critical Travels, Discursive Practices

Foucault in Tunis

Ilka Kressner

In the extensive research on the oeuvre and life of Michel Foucault, the years he spent in Tunisia do not occupy a prominent role. More precisely, they have been mentioned only in passing. David Macey's six-hundred-page English biography, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, discusses the time in Tunisia only briefly.¹ In his biography in French, Didier Eribon dedicates some scarce seven pages to the time Foucault worked as visiting professor of philosophy at Tunis University. Eribon introduces his account as follows: "Why Tunis? This was, once again, a strange set of co-occurrences."² The concurring circumstances Eribon refers to were a faculty opening at the Department of Social Sciences at the newly founded university in Tunis and the fact that Foucault's partner, Daniel Defert, was about to travel to the same city to fulfill his volunteer service.³ In a comparable way, voices from the other side of the Mediterranean describe Foucault's time in Tunis as an "interlude" before he would return to Paris and become Chair at the Collège de France. In *Foucault in Tunisia (Foucault en Tunisie)*, a special issue of *The Tunisian Journal (Les cahiers de Tunisie)*, Ben Dana-Mechri gives the following account: "The interlude in Tunis, where Michel Foucault taught from September 1966 to August 1968 shows a philosopher already well respected, almost famous; his teaching influenced a generation of students here, just as it would soon influence [students at] the University at Vincennes and the new department of philosophy he would be in charge of."⁴ The university in Tunis was indeed the last of several places where Foucault held visiting appointments before returning to France. He had taught, albeit for shorter periods of time, at the universities in Uppsala (Sweden), Warsaw (Poland), and Hamburg (Germany) prior to his lectureship in Tunisia. Yet his stay at a public university in the Maghreb, which was founded only six years before his arrival and four years

after the Tunisian independence (1956), might have been more meaningful than the simple result of a concurrence of circumstances or mere interlude.

Given Foucault's lifelong interest in the roles of institutions of education and comparative studies of the production of knowledge in different spatial and temporal contexts, the years in Tunis were likely a critical time of proving his own practices of thinking, a period that allowed him to revisit the limits of disciplinary thought and reflect "on the outer limits of philosophy, very close to it, up against it, at its expense, in the direction of a future philosophy and in lieu, perhaps, of all possible philosophy."⁵ I interpret the two years Foucault spent in Tunisia to be crucial for his continued practice of an engaged philosophy. In this chapter, I propose to reassess the significance of the Tunisian experience in the broader context of his critical thinking and writing. Foucault's encounters with alternative realities and discourses – those of the Tunisian student revolts of the late 1960s – were decisive moments that helped reshape his conception of a research that draws inspiration from a variety of disciplines, cultures, and socio-historical approaches.

The humanities have an affinity for the other. They are engaged, in diverse ways, in the thinking of the other, be it another human being, social context, or language. Michel Foucault has been one of the most perspicacious and passionate humanists of the twentieth century.⁶ As a traveler between and beyond disciplines and lover of words and arguments (according to the etymology of the terms "philology" and "philosophy"), he was acutely aware that communication, and at best understanding, can take place only in a fragile space of interaction. Tunisia in the late 1960s was such an exemplary and delicate space of in-between-ness for Foucault. In an interview with Duccio Trombadori, he described his time in Tunis as "a true political experience."⁷ The word "experience" is of particular significance; it reappears numerous times in writings and interviews related to the years spent in the Maghreb. For Foucault, an experience is a rare and precious moment, a watershed, "something you come out of changed."⁸ The student revolts and upheavals of 1968 that influenced him the most took place two months prior to and about 1,100 miles south of those in Paris. He recounted in the interview cited above: "I remember that Marcuse said reproachfully one day, where was Foucault at the time of the May barricades? Well, I was in Tunisia, on account of my work. And I must add that this experience was a decisive one for me.... Tunisia, for me, represented in some ways the chance to reinsert myself in the political debate. It wasn't May of '68 in France that changed me; it was March of '68, in a third-world country."⁹ Foucault returned to France as an even more committed activist-philosopher or, as he called it, diagnostician.¹⁰

My focus on a particular historical situation that, I hope to show, can help provide insight into underlying epistemes and the formation of a discursive practice, which is itself Foucauldian. I argue that the historical situation of

the late 1960s in Tunisia can be interpreted as a paradigmatic moment of a confluence of discourses of power that lead to an experience of what “we are today, of what is not only our past but also our present.”¹¹ Foucault’s critical analysis from that time was marked by an emphasis on power and mobility and the study of strategies of embodiment in discourse.

Initially, Tunis provided for him a lesson in self-examination and reassessment of his own, rather orientalizing, expectations. It rendered possible to immerse himself into a highly politicized present. In a statement, published in 1967 in *The Tunisian Press* (*La Presse de Tunisie*) Foucault openly admits that he

came attracted by those myths that all Europeans have about Tunisia nowadays: sun, sea, the African charitableness, in short, I came in search of a Thebaid [Thebes] without ascetics. And when I met the Tunisian students, it was really an awakening.¹² It was probably only in Brazil and Tunisia that I met students as serious and as passionate, with such serious passions, and, what fascinates me even more, an absolute avidity for learning.¹³

In such an environment of curiosity and thirst for knowledge, Foucault’s teaching topics were highly diverse. He gave lectures on Nietzsche, Descartes, and Husserl and on anthropocentrism in Western philosophy. For instance, one of his lectures was titled “Man in Western Thought” (“L’homme dans la pensée occidentale”).¹⁴ He worked and taught on psychoanalysis, in particular the process of projection. Furthermore, he lectured on painting and the problem of representation, with a focus on the works of Édouard Manet and René Magritte. The essay “This Is Not a Pipe” (“Ceci n’est pas une pipe”), from 1968, is based on the Tunisian lectures.¹⁵ He joined his students’ philosophical clubs and gave talks at different cultural centers of the city. Among others, he gave three lectures at the Club Tahar Haddad on “Structuralism and Literary Analysis” (“Structuralisme et analyse littéraire”), “Madness and Civilization” (“Folie et civilisation”), and “Manet’s Painting” (“La peinture de Manet”).¹⁶

In April 1967, *The Tunisian Press* described his weekly Friday lectures at the university as significant public events: “Every Friday afternoon, the biggest lecture hall of the University at Tunis is not large enough to hold the hundreds of students and other interested members of the community who have come to attend the lectures given by Michel Foucault.”¹⁷ Students admired his erudition and progressive teaching style, but were initially reserved as to his political position. This was likely a result of Foucault’s open distrust of revolutionary idealism, normative universalism, and outright critique of Marxism as an obsolete orthodoxy of the nineteenth century, while many of his students were committed Marxists.¹⁸ Yet their reservation toward their professor

changed once they became aware of his commitment and active support of their cause. Unlike some of the protesters, who had suggested copying strategies of civil disobedience from other cultural contexts, Foucault insisted on the necessity of insurgency as a specific form of struggle appropriate to the technologies of control in place in Tunisia at that time. He warned against an implicit eurocentrism and maintained that the choice of any successful strategy could develop only out of a concrete situation.¹⁹

December 1966 saw the outbreak of a revolt on campus. The reason had been the severe beating of a student by police forces for not having paid his bus ticket.²⁰ The uprising increased in the first months of 1967 and culminated in massive protests after the Six-Day War or Arab-Israeli War from June 5 to 10, 1967. Unlike Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, Tunisia was not at war with Israel, but it had supported the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) since its creation in 1964. The Tunisian uprisings from 1967, this first large-scale call for democratic freedom that took place in the young independent country, linked national with pan-Arabic demands for justice.²¹ Protesters denounced the repressive course of action by the Tunisian government around President Habib Bourguiba and, in broader terms, the impingement of political rights established by the constitution.²² They opposed the Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip, the Sinai, West Bank (including Jerusalem), and Golan Heights. Not all protests were peaceful, as some pro-Palestine demonstrations degenerated into anti-Semitic acts of vandalism of Jewish shops in the capital. In a letter, Foucault remarked however that some of those acts had been committed by sections of the Tunisian police in order to have an alibi to arrest the demonstrators.²³

The response by the police forces was of extreme brutality. After a demonstration in mid-July 1967, about three hundred protesters were imprisoned; among those were several of Foucault's students. Many were held without trial until September 1968. According to Burleigh Hendrickson, reports of torture "included acid burns on the feet, ripping off fingernails, leaving infectious wounds by burning the skin with ether, electroshock and cigarette burns."²⁴ March 1968 saw a new massive uprising that demanded the liberation of the students who had been imprisoned. Most of the demonstrations were held at the University of Tunis's School of Humanities and Social Sciences (Faculté des Sciences Humaines et Sociales). Students also held assemblies at other faculties, neighboring colleges, and high schools.²⁵ The School of Humanities and Social Sciences, which was Foucault's home institution at that moment, was taken by assault by the Tunisian police in late March 1968.

Readers of *Discipline and Punish (Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison)* from 1975 might recognize similarities between Foucault's descriptions of the Panopticon, the Benthamite prison building that exemplifies surveillance technologies and the architecture of the School of Humanities and

Social Sciences at the University of Tunis (figure 10.1). All buildings of the school surround a single large inner courtyard called the Red Square (Place Rouge). During the demonstrations, police forces were positioned strategically on the flat roofs of the buildings, from where a relatively small number of officers were able to control the more than two thousand students gathered at the Red Square.²⁶ Police forces trapped the protesters by simply blocking the entrance doors to the buildings from the inside. They spoke to the students via loudspeakers from the top of the roofs of the buildings.

Foucault lived and taught in the midst of this unrest. He showed great respect for the protesters who faced severe government repression for taking part in the movement.²⁷ He hid the students' printing press in his garden for several months and provided logistic and financial support for their cause.²⁸ He gave sanctuary to one of the student leaders, Ahmed Othmani, while authorities sought his arrest.²⁹ He met with President Bourguiba, but his attempts to mediate between protesters and government remained fruitless.³⁰ On several occasions, he approached the French ambassador, Jean Sauvagnargues, and urged him to intervene on behalf of the protesters, yet to no avail. Furthermore, he attempted to give testimony during the accused students' processes in September 1968, but did not receive authorization to speak. During those



Figure 10.1 Inner Courtyard of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Tunis. *Source:* Photo: Lotfi Sayahi.

trials, 134 students were convicted. Othmani was sentenced to fourteen years in prison; he served the entire sentence.³¹ After returning to France in 1970 to assume the Chair of the History of the Systems of Thought (*Histoire des systèmes de pensée*) at the Collège de France, and after having formed GIP, the Group of Information about Prisons (*Groupe d'information sur les prisons*) in 1971, Foucault returned to Tunis on the occasion of several trials of former protesters in May 1971, to speak again on their behalf. Yet again, he was denied.³²

The Tunisian civil rights movements Foucault witnessed and was involved in were attacked with extreme violence and repression. Bourguiba's ruthless reactions to the demonstrations instilled a shift in the nature of the protesters' claims.³³ What had its beginnings in international solidarity with anti-imperialist movements, most significantly the support of the Palestinian liberation and the opposition to the Vietnam War, "led to calls for democratic reform" on the national level "that were not present at the outset."³⁴ The repression by the government during this early moment of Tunisian nation building fueled large-scale human rights activism and a straight articulation of opposition to the country's single-party state.³⁵

Foucault voiced his admiration for the protesters on several occasions, in writing and conversations. In an interview with Duccio Trombadori, he recounts:

The police entered the university and attacked many students, injuring them and throwing them into jail.... During those upheavals I was profoundly struck and amazed by those young men and women who exposed themselves to serious risks for the simple fact of having written or distributed a leaflet, or for having incited others to go on strike. Such actions were enough to place at risk one's life, one's freedom, and one's body.³⁶

In his interpretations of the events, published in *The Tunisian Press*, Foucault maintained that the response to the power system in place at that moment had to be mobile and local, and not adapt foreign practices of insurgency. The element of mobility assumed novel prominence in his writings from the late 1960s, which conceived power as intrinsically relational and mobile. Therefore, any successful resistance to such a mobile power in the form of people's own participation needed to be even more adaptable and mobile.

Given the fact that for Foucault, as a committed philologist, writing and reading were forms of activism alongside direct political action, I propose to contextualize some of his essays and readings from the Tunisian years in order to elucidate connections between his political thinking and activism. My aim is not to read his texts in a confessional mode, or worse, to find an underlying psychological interpretation.³⁷ Yet given the fact that for Foucault, experience was often an inspiration and first impulse for his critical

and theoretical analyses, a parallel reading of his experience and thought proves to be mutually illuminating. Life was a source and impulse for him to “diagnose a current state of affairs of a culture.”³⁸ He conceived the task of the philosopher to be that of an observer and speaker, not only of realities and facts but moreover of “what is happening today.”³⁹ Such a philosophy of contemporaneity he proposed can only be mobile: it is conscious of the present, situated once in the midst of things happening, and taking active part in events; and once at a certain critical distance, which allows for reflection and the drawing of theoretical and historical connections.

Two lines of inquiry assume particular prominence during the years in Tunis: those are the vindication of the physical, material reality in relation to critical thought – the body, the materiality of, for instance, language and painting – and the examination of the semantic field of movement, oscillation, play, and change of perspective. In Foucault’s writings from the late 1960s, the analyses of materiality and movement have become central to understanding how systems of power function, how they limit us, and how we might liberate ourselves. In that context, the Foucault of the late 1960s and observer of the Tunisian students’ protests, who related the demise of colonialism to the crisis of traditional episteme of Western philosophy and philology, is certainly less controversial than the partly orientalizing supporter of the Iranian Revolution some ten years later.⁴⁰

Among the most significant ideas that Foucault further develops during his time at the University of Tunis are those of discourses of mobility and, more specifically, strategies of a mobile challenging of established systems of power. Mobility is for him not a given; instead, it is embodied as well as practiced. In addition to the traditional notion of power as the result of a regulation of mobility, Foucault proposes to conceive power as the regulation *through* mobility.⁴¹ If power can be conceived as multiple, multiplied, and moving, a “thin, inescapable film that covers all human interactions, whether inside institutions or out,”⁴² volatility and changes of perspectives become crucial concepts and liberating practices of establishing an alternative sovereignty. Any subversive strategy less versatile than a specific mobile power in place, Foucault argues, would be fruitless; it might even be absorbed by and ultimately fortify a hegemonic system in place. In an interview with Pietro Caruso, published in September 1967 in the Italian *The Literary Fair* (*La fiera letteraria*), Foucault gives a provocative example of a discourse he calls “limp humanism” (“humanisme mou”). This kind of perverted humanism, which he detects in later writings by Camus and in Sartre’s existentialism, “served as justification of Stalinism and of the hegemony of the Christian democracy in 1948.... At the end, that humanism was a sort of little prostitute of thought, culture, morals and of politics during the last twenty years.”⁴³ Foucault excoriated what he described as a co-opted position that was based on stasis and

intellectual passivity. He emphasized that a critique of hegemony had to be mobile to maintain its critical distance toward it.

Alongside the focus on mobility and power, Foucault studied the physical reality of speech acts. He underscored the materiality of encounters and moments of exchange between humans, things, and discourses. Within this line of inquiry, he conceived discourse as a construct, hence an entity that was made, and could thus be unmade or modified. The heightened emphasis on discourse as a physical entity is noticeable if one compares its conception in *The Order of Things* (*Les mots et les choses*) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (*L'archéologie du savoir*), the books published prior to and after Foucault's stay in Tunisia, respectively. While in *The Order of Things*, the description of the materiality of discourse is still tentative, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault portrays discourse as a thing or space (at times, he uses the metaphor of discourse as a labyrinth or underground passage), object, or entity that emerges in "its materiality, appears with a status, enters various networks and fields of use, is subjected to transferences or modifications, is integrated into operations and strategies in which its identity is maintained or effaced."⁴⁴ In an interview with Claude Bonnefoy from 1968, Foucault summarizes his conception of a material discourse as follows: "Speech has its own consistency. Its own thickness and density, its way of functioning. The laws of speech exist the way economic laws exist. Speech exists the way a monument does, the way a technique does, the way a system of social relationship does. It's this density characteristic of speech that I'm trying to interrogate."⁴⁵ The conception of speech as thing has far-reaching consequences: instead of being weightless and intangible, such a discourse as body has become a phenomenon that can be observed, analyzed, weighted, touched, even dissected, and reassembled, to be understood.⁴⁶ On several occasions, Foucault, the son and grandson of medical doctors, described his work as that of a surgeon of language, a careful observer or diagnostician of its physiognomy, laws, and techniques.⁴⁷

The often-quoted description of the stimulus of *The Order of Things* is a compelling initial case in point of Foucault's critical travels between heterogeneous systems of thought and drawing of connections between thought and the physical body. He described that the book rose out of a reader's experience of a passage of a short story on the excesses of taxonomy. A passage from Jorge Luis Borges's "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins," combined with the reader's spontaneous bodily reaction – laughter – lies thus at the beginning of a rigorous, original examination of Western ways of thinking and making sense. Foucault portrays as one of the aims of his study to unearth the material fundamentals of language, "destroy syntax, shatter tyrannical modes of speech [so as] to perceive all facets of that which is being said."⁴⁸ What he describes in partially tentative and abstract terms in 1966 is stated in a more explicit way in his writings from Tunis, most prominently in *The*

Archaeology of Knowledge, which now conceives speech as being “endowed with a certain modifiable heaviness, a weight relative to the field in which it is placed.... [It] emerges in its materiality, appears with a status, enters various networks and various fields of use ... is integrated into operations and strategies in which its identity is maintained or effaced.”⁴⁹ Literature and modern art have become paradigms of such a transgressive critical discourse.

Foucault had been an avid reader and keen observer of art prior to traveling to Tunisia. He had included literary examples and analyses of visual arts as powerful stimuli into his earlier writings (such as the study of Borges’s short fiction mentioned above, Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, and Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* in the preface and the first and third chapters of *The Order of Things*, respectively). But it is during his time in Tunis that he described art and literature not only as punctual exempla, but, moreover, as continuous influences and parallel discourses to his own critical thought. In 1968, he openly discussed his practice and described that for *The Order of Things*, “I used material I had gathered in the preceding years almost at random, without knowing what I would do with it, with no certainty about the possibility of ever writing an essay.”⁵⁰ During the act of writing, “a certain coloration of language, a certain rhythm, a certain form of analysis ... gave me the impression ... – false, perhaps – that I had found exactly the right language by which the distance between ourselves and the classical philosophy of representation ... could come into focus and be evaluated.”⁵¹ Art not only inspired his critical thinking; it furthermore helped measure and maintain the right distance to, for instance, an existing discourse to be analyzed. Moreover, it had a meta-critical role and provided the opportunity to evaluate the process of creating knowledge. The practice of writing itself became an interstice that allowed for the assembling and assessing of material from a great variety of contexts.

In Tunis, Foucault continued his studies of the archaeology of subjectivity in Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. He read Trotsky’s *Permanent Revolution* and Panofsky’s *Studies in Iconology* (the essay “The Words and the Images” [“Les mots et les images”] published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in October 1967 is his critical response to Panofsky’s work). He reread Blanchot, Klossowski, and Bataille, three authors whose thoughts and works, with their transgressive impetus, became paradigmatic for him during the late 1960s. The ludic quality and irreverence toward established disciplinary boundaries in the three authors’ literary works served as models for Foucault’s own search for a new philosophical thought and language. In an interview with Roger-Pol Droit, he elaborated: “In Bataille’s violence, in Blanchot’s insidious, disturbing sweetness, in Klossowski’s spirals, there was something that, while setting out from philosophy, brought it into play and into question.”⁵² For Foucault, these authors’ literary discourses emerged out of philosophical inquiry, escaped from it, then traveled back to it, and again back to the

outside. They fathomed the space between established systems of knowledge and even ventured beyond.

Foucault had already approached this potential of the literary discourse to travel the interstices between abstract thought and body in his essay “Behind the Fable” (“L’arrière-fable”) on the motif of travel in Jules Verne’s writings from May 1966 and “Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside” (“La pensée du dehors”), the long essay dedicated to the writings of revered author Maurice Blanchot from June 1966, both written shortly prior to Foucault’s journey to Tunisia. The second text, which I read as an inter-discursive aperture for his later writings on discourses of mobility, positions literature as an event and experience that takes place in the gap between disciplinary discourses and stable subject positions:

The event that gave rise to what we call “literature” in the strict sense is only superficially an interiorisation; it is far more a question of a passage to the “outside”: language escapes the mode of being of discourse.... Literature is not language approaching itself until it reaches the point of its fiery manifestation, it is rather language getting as far away from itself as possible. And if, in this “setting outside itself,” it unveils its own being, the sudden clarity reveals not a folding back but a gap, not a turning back of signs upon themselves but a dispersion.⁵³

Foucault emphasized the importance of notions of play and movement toward an exteriority for philosophical inquiry. He described thought as a shared encounter in an in-between space that is not limited to a subjective conscience but may well include a collective consciousness. Thus, “The Thought from Outside” prefigures the notion of the heterotopos, conceptualized in “Of Other Spaces” (“Des espaces autres”), an essay Foucault wrote in Tunis that would be published only after his death in 1984.⁵⁴

Foucault’s writing was not only inspired and paralleled by literary discourse. It became itself in part literary. His review of Gilles Deleuze’s book *Difference and Repetition* (*Différence et répétition*), published in the *Nouvel Observateur* in March–April 1969, adopted the form of a folk tale starring mythological figures such as Ariane and the young warrior Theseus.⁵⁵ He invited the readers of his review to “open Deleuze’s book like you would push open the doors to a theatre, when the lights are being turned on and when the curtain is about to be raised. The characters of [the performance] are invited authors and nameless references alike.... They appear, but never at one same place, and never with the same identity.”⁵⁶ In this truly exceptional review of a philosophical book, Foucault underscores what he describes as Deleuze’s venture to “think intensity.”⁵⁷ Modern art is a paradigm for the philosophical approach to such a transgressive intensity, which would allow one to

free oneself in order to think and love that which ... clangs since Nietzsche, those insurgent differences and repetitions without origins which have enlightened literature since Mallarmé, fissured and multiplied space in painting (graduations in Rothko, furrows in Noland, modified repetitions in Warhol), categorically shattered the continuous line in music since Webern, and announced a myriad of ruptures of our worlds. We can finally think the differences of today, think of today as a difference of differences.⁵⁸

Foucault bases his radical thought of contemporaneity on the value of rupture (in the Nietzschean sense) and speaks from a fragile and mobile position. Such a position allows for the analysis of representation that undertakes to represent itself. In the lecture "Manet's Painting," which Foucault wrote in Tunis in 1967, the cornerstone of a material discourse of mobility reappears in a different fashion. For Foucault, Manet reintroduced the materiality of the painting on the painting itself, and thus mobilized the perspective of the observer: "Manet reinvents, or maybe he invents, the painting-as-object, as a materiality, as a coloured thing that is illuminated by an exterior light.... The observer looks at it and walks around it."⁵⁹ In a comparable way to his examination of literature as a physical entity, Manet's paintings do not vanish behind that which they represent but elucidate or perform the process of representation. It is through our physical reaction to art (or any discourse) as object that we, observers, change perspectives and experience this new reality.

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault had conjured a philology that would be able to "turn words around in order to perceive all that is being said through them and despite them."⁶⁰ The encounter with the alternative discourses and political realities in Tunis became a test case for such a devised philological close reading. Furthermore, it was a time of forging new "words" (discourses) in relation to "things" (experiences). According to Foucault, "What was about to happen" in the late 1960s "did not have its *own* proper theory, its *own* vocabulary."⁶¹ His writings from that time attest to his arduous attempts to formulate a language and theory that render the exceptional experience in an appropriate way, without integrating rupture or otherness into a hegemonic discourse. Foucault's focus on the material reality, with its particular physical configuration that requires the readers, observers, and diagnosticians to change perspectives, and the thinking of mobility as a subversive practice, became keystones for his future examinations of the formation of "discourse-objects," this "ponderous, awesome materiality"⁶² that we inhabit and shape.⁶³

NOTES

1. David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon, 1993), 203–5.

2. Didier Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*, trans. Michael Lucey (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 199. (My trans.)

3. The chair of the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Tunis had invited the philosopher Jean Wahl, a friend and mentor of Foucault, to teach in Tunis for a period of two years, but he had to decline and suggested to extend the invitation to Foucault in his stead.

4. Ben Dana-Mechri, "L'impossible biographic?" *Foucault en Tunisie*, special issue of *Les cahiers de la Tunisie* 39, no. 149–50 (1989): 5. (My trans.)

5. Michel Foucault, "What Is Critique?," in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), 42.

6. I am aware that Foucault himself was suspicious of the denomination, particularly during the 1960s at the height of structuralism, when his position was decidedly anti-humanist. The humanism I am referring to here is that of a firm belief in the human faculty of learning and understanding combined with an intellectual intrepidity, in line with the Kantian *sapere aude*, which echoes the discourse of the early Enlightenment.

7. Michel Foucault, *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*, trans. R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), 134.

8. Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*, 27.

9. Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*, 132, 136. The demonstrations that led to an occupation of the Sorbonne took place during the first weeks of May 1968: they began on May 3 and culminated in a general strike and demonstration on May 14. Foucault traveled to Paris on May 27, where he stayed for a week. He returned to France to participate in the last demonstrations at the end of June. "Chronologic," in *Dits et écrits I: 1954–1988*, ed. Daniel Defert and Francois Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 43.

10. In an interview with Claude Bonnefoy, Foucault describes his scholarly approach as akin to that of a medical diagnosis and elucidates his terminological wavering as follows: "When I write, I couldn't tell you if I'm doing history or philosophy. I've often been asked what it meant to me to write what I wrote.... If I was a philosopher or a historian or a sociologist, and so on. I had a hard time answering. Had I been given as much latitude in responding as you're giving me today, I think I would have simply answered, quite frankly: I'm neither one nor the other, I'm a doctor, let's say I'm a diagnostician." Michel Foucault, *Speech Begins After Death*, interview with Claude Bonnefoy, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 43–44.

11. Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*, 33. A paradigmatic historical situation that became of singular importance in Foucault's earlier research was the end of the eighteenth century, which saw the birth of institutional medicine.

12. The French *coup de foudre*, which I translate as "awakening," is polyvalent. Its significance ranges from "thunderclap" to "love at first sight."

13. Foucault, "La philosophie structuraliste permet de diagnostiquer ce qu'est 'aujourd'hui'," in *Dits et écrits I*, 612. (My trans.)

14. For a list of the titles of all of Foucault's lectures at the university in Tunis, see Dana-Mechri, *Foucault en Tunisie*, 3–18.

15. Foucault, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe," in *Dits et écrits I*, 663–78. René Magritte died in August 1967.

16. These three lectures are compiled in Michel Foucault, *Foucault en Tunisie*, special issue of *Les cahiers de la Tunisie*, 39, no. 149–50 (1989): 20–87.

17. Foucault, *Dits et écrits I*, 40. (My trans.)

18. Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), 201–2. Foucault himself had been a Marxist and member of the communist student union while a doctoral student working with Louis Althusser. His commitment, however, lasted only a couple of months; he soon began to criticize the system's orthodoxy and universalist claims.

19. Lawrence D. Kritzman, "Introduction: Foucault and the Politics of Experience," in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977–1984*, ed. and introd. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Routledge, 1990), xvi.

20. Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, 204.

21. Burleigh Hendrickson, "March 1968: Practicing Transnational Activism from Tunis to Paris," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 44 (November 2012): 755. The political agenda of the uprisings of the late 1960s is similar to that of the protests that led to the Arab Spring movements in 2011. In 1967–1968, the two forces behind the uprising were Tunisian nationalists and pan-Arabic human rights groups. Thirty-four years later, these two were joined by progressive Islamist groups.

22. Habib Bourguiba had been the leader of the Tunisian independence movement. He had deposed the monarch Muhammed VIII al-Hamin and proclaimed the Tunisian republic in 1956. He won the presidential elections three times before he did away with democratic elections and proclaimed himself president for life. Bourguiba was in power from 1957 until 1987. James L. Gelvin, *The Arab Spring: What Everybody Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 37.

23. Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, 207. Foucault refers to the context as follows: "The pogroms against Jewish businesses were most likely instigated by the police with the intention to find a pretext to arrest the opponents." Foucault, *Dits et écrits I*, 41 (my translation).

24. Hendrickson, "March 1968," 761.

25. Hendrickson, "March 1968," 761.

26. Hendrickson, "March 1968," 761.

27. Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 140.

28. Transpontine, "Foucault on Tunisia," *History Is Made at Night: The Politics of Dancing and Musicking* (blog), March 6, 2011; Foucault, *Dits et écrits I*, 43.

29. Hendrickson, "March 1968," 764.

30. Foucault, *Dits et écrits I*, 41. The chronology that is included in *Dits et écrits I* describes rather ambiguously that in June 1967 the Tunisian authorities "brusquely" installed a phone line at Foucault's apartment as the result of President Bourguiba's "immense solicitude [for his] well-being" (40, My trans.). It is likely that this "solicitude" might also have been a sign of partially veiled surveillance tactics

by the authorities of the prominent intellectual living in the Tunisian capital, who had close connections to French academia and political organizations.

31. Foucault, *Dits et écrits I*, 44.

32. Foucault, *Dits et écrits I*, 50. Foucault would later reflect on this experience during his series of lectures on the Greek notion of *parrhēsia* (frankness in speaking the truth), entitled “Discourse and Truth” at the University of California at Berkeley in 1983 and that are published as *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001), 19–25.

33. Hendrickson, “March 1968,” 757.

34. Hendrickson, “March 1968,” 761.

35. Burleigh Hendrickson argues that the 1968 protesters played an instrumental long-term role in the “creation of the Tunisian League for Human Rights (Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l’Homme) in 1976 and the establishment of the first Amnesty International section in Tunisia in 1981.” Hendrickson, “March 1968,” 757.

36. Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*, 133–34.

37. Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*, 264. Such a proceeding would indeed be a performative contradiction, as Foucault himself targeted these two discourses all throughout his career as modern forms of repression and mystification.

38. Foucault, “Les Mots et les Images,” in *Dits et écrits I*, 648. (My trans.)

39. Foucault, “La Philosophie structuraliste,” *Dits et écrits I*, 609. (My trans.)

40. To this day, the controversy over Foucault’s writing on Iran continues to undercut his legacy in France.

41. Anne Jensen, “Mobility, Space and Power: On the Multiplicities of Seeing Mobility,” *Mobilities* 6, no. 2 (2011): 255–76.

42. John Caputo and Mark Yount, introduction to *Foucault and the Critique of Institutions*, ed. John Caputo and Mark Yount (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 4.

43. Foucault, “Qui êtes-vous, professeur Foucault?” in *Dits et écrits I*, 643–44. (My trans.)

44. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 105.

45. Foucault, *Speech Begins After Death*, 37.

46. Readers of J. L. Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words* will likely see parallels between Austin’s and Foucault’s descriptions.

47. In the interview with Bonnefoy, Foucault refers to the work of a physician as follows: “The physician – and especially the surgeon, I’m the son of a surgeon – isn’t someone who speaks, he’s someone who listens. He listens to other people’s words, not because he takes them seriously, not to understand what they say, but to track down through them the sign of a serious disease.... The physician listens, but does so to cut through the speech of the other and reach the silent truth of the body.” Foucault, *Speech Begins After Death*, 35.

48. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (New York: Pantheon, 1970), 298.

49. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 105. In *Lectures on the Will to Know: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1970–1971 (Leçons sur la volonté de*

savoir: *Cours au Collège de France, 1970–1971* [Paris: Gallimard, 2011]), this “material reality of discourse” (48, my translation), which Foucault had analyzed the previous years, has become a cornerstone of his thought.

50. Foucault, *Speech Begins After Death*, 80.

51. Foucault, *Speech Begins After Death*, 80.

52. Michel Foucault, “The Functions of Literature,” in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977–1984*, ed. and introd. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Routledge, 1990), 312.

53. Michel Foucault, “Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside,” in *Foucault/Blanchot*, trans. Brian Massumi (New York: Zone, 1987), 23–24.

54. Foucault defines the heterotopos as a real space of contestation, which may consist in several overlapping spaces of different temporal contexts, or sites, that simultaneously include diverse perspectives. “Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias,” *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5 (October 1984): 46–49.

55. Theseus (Thésée) is the protagonist of the homonymous baroque opera by Jean-Baptiste Lully.

56. Foucault, “Ariane s’est perdue,” in *Dits et écrits I*, 796. (My trans.)

57. Foucault, “Ariane s’est perdue,” in *Dits et écrits I*, 796. (My trans.)

58. Foucault, “Ariane s’est perdue,” in *Dits et écrits I*, 796. (My trans.)

59. Dana-Mechri, “L’impossible biographie?,” 62–64. (My trans.)

60. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 298.

61. Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*, 109.

62. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 140, 216.

63. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault elucidates this embracing discursivity as follows: “One is not seeking ... to pass from the text to thought, from talk to silence, from the exterior to the interior, from spatial dispersion to the pure recollection of the moment, from superficial multiplicity to profound unity. One remains within the dimension of discourse” (76).

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