

MAY, 1968, AND THE POLITICS OF INTELLECTUALS

by

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In France, during May, 1968, there was a radical student and worker uprising against various forms of authority. Despite their very different positions, Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault redefined the role of the intellectual after the May revolt. They both concluded--though in different ways--that intellectuals should take a more active role in society.

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Introduction

In France, during May, 1968, students and workers questioned nearly every manifestation of authority in society. The demands for individual autonomy were so powerful that even some French intellectuals, the traditional guardians of freedom, felt a need to redefine their positions in society and the nature of their labor. Despite their very different theoretical positions, two of these social thinkers arrived at similar conclusions. Jean-Paul Sartre, perhaps more than any other contemporary philosopher, wrote in detail on the position of the intellectual and the nature of his work, and his views were powerfully influenced by May, 1968. Another theoretician who was similarly affected was Michel Foucault; he was also prompted to reconsider his view of the position of the intellectual after May, 1968.

In a review essay of Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow's Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, Peter Kemp goes so far as to argue that Sartre's and Foucault's disagreement on methodological issues and political strategies was actually in the interest of the same goal--individual autonomy. Sartre and Foucault's new definition of the intellectual arose precisely from an interest in the freedom of the individual. Thus, even though Foucault argued against Sartre's definition of freedom, he was, as Kemp argues, just as interested in the condition of humanity as was Sartre. Both argued that if intellectuals are to be taken seriously,

they must supplement the *content* of their speech by changing the *form* of the institutions. In other words, they must supplement their revolutionary theory with a concrete attempt to transform society accordingly. Yet, in the late twentieth century, most intellectuals have failed to review their own actions in society, and thus they have not learned the lessons of May that so dramatically influenced Sartre and Foucault.

I will present my argument in three stages. First, I will discuss the issues raised by the protesting students and how they hoped to attain their goals. The events of May began simply as a revolt against the centralized nature of the university, but then developed into an upheaval against authority in all areas of society. Hoping to bring more autonomy and power to the individual, students and many workers searched for new ways to organize social institutions without traditional hierarchical structures.

In the second part of this thesis, I will focus on Sartre and begin by tracing the evolution of Sartre's existentialism prior to 1968. During this period he argued that the political role of intellectuals was to define freedom for everyone. Their position, however, was quite separate from the majority of the people. The events of 1968 and the issues raised about authority forced Sartre to reconsider the nature of the role of intellectuals. He gradually realized that this essentially isolated and privileged role inhibited the ability of individuals to

implement their views, and he subsequently took the position that intellectuals should be more politically active by working with the people.

In the third part of the thesis, I will analyze the effect of the events of 1968 on Foucault's thought. Before 1968, Foucault was silent about the role of intellectuals in society because he was primarily concerned with the limits placed on the human mind by theoretical discourse. Foucault marveled at the diversity of the revolts and eventually concluded, like Sartre, that it was time for intellectuals to be attentive to social and political institutions.

Part I: May, 1968

The rebellion's most unique attribute was the concern of its participants for the autonomy of the individual. While not denying the importance of the satisfaction of material needs, the rebels argued that freedom could not be reduced to purely economic issues. Herbert Marcuse's analysis of 1968 points out how capitalism has been able to satisfy the material needs of the majority of the working class: "The capitalist production relations are responsible not only for the servitude and toil but also for the greater happiness and fun available to the majority of the population--and they deliver more goods than before."¹ In other words, some people--though definitely not Marcuse--thought that the production of more material goods justified the lack of individual autonomy in the workplace. During May, the students took the opposite position and demonstrated that capitalism still falters when dealing with questions of authority and power. A passage from a pamphlet printed by a Student-Worker Action Committee showed that the authors' reason for seeking social change was not impoverishment, but rather a lack of decision-making power:

factories [must] function by and for themselves and, consequently, [do] away with the hierarchy of salaries as well as with the idea of employees and employers.... We must in fact avoid the re-creation of a bureaucracy which would tend to set

¹ Herbert Marcuse, An Essay on Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) 13.

up a leadership and thus re-create a repressive power.²

The students and workers, then, with their material needs satisfied, were interested in the freedom of consciousness, especially in relation to power and authority in society. Rather than revolting because of a shortage of bread, the students rebelled because of a lack of control over their own lives. Although certain groups did demand wage increases, the underlying theme of all the movements was an interest in making life more meaningful by transferring decision-making to the people.

The students began to take direct action at the University of Paris--Nanterre in March, 1968. On March 22, one hundred forty-two students occupied the Council hall because they wanted more power in deciding the content of their examinations. Demonstrations similar to the one in Nanterre then began to appear with increasing frequency throughout France. It was not until May 3, however, that the police repressed the demonstrations. Students gathered at the Sorbonne in order to protest the summoning of a few of their numbers before the university's disciplinary council. Student activity increased rapidly until May 10, the "Night of the Barricades." On this evening, police used violence because the students erected barricades in the streets. These acts of police repression quickly came to symbolize the lack of individual freedom in France, just as

² Alain Schnapp and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, The French Student Uprising, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971) 427.

the student occupation of the Sorbonne after May 11 came to represent the possibility of organizing a group without bureaucratic chains of command. On May 14, workers also protested against authoritarian power and started a wave of strikes through France that involved an estimated nine to ten million people. The country was in such turmoil that President de Gaulle fled to Germany for twenty-four hours, where he allegedly was contracting military assistance--if needed. When he returned, he delivered a speech and argued, no doubt in part due to the upcoming national elections, for "participation" by the people in the government's decision-making process. He also accused the Communist Party of conspiracy. After the speech, the government began to negotiate with the workers, and many workers returned to work in early June. When election time arrived in late June, de Gaulle won the presidency, in part because the numerous revolutionary organizations could not settle on one candidate. Even though the political left failed to capture the power of the state, the rebellion nevertheless was fruitful because it leveled valuable criticisms at French society that could not be dismissed by the government or the people.

Cries against the bureaucracy and excessive discipline rang loudest in the realm of the university. The students at Nanterre argued that the university was merely a training ground for jobs that had no place for individual creativity. Under an highly centralized university structure, student

decision-making simply did not exist. There were many aspects of excessive centralization. First, for all universities, most decisions came from Paris. Second, strict rules existed in the dormitories, such as curfews and separate male/female living quarters. Third, there was little contact between the professors and the students; the students had virtually no voice in their education. The professors lectured to crowds without engaging in any form of discussion. Wanting to change these conditions, the students refused to do as administrators wanted. The students did not want to have their lives formed and structured for them by authorities whose main function was to preserve the oppressive status quo. A statement by Mouvement du 22 mars revealed the ideals of the students:

We refuse the 'watchdog' future; we refuse the courses that teach us to be these things; we refuse examinations and degrees which reward those who have accepted to become [sic] a part of the system.³

Anything that even apparently limited one's decisions about the future was rejected. Slogans were uttered throughout the campus because the students wanted control over matters that affected their lives. For example, they chanted "Professors, you are too old" in order to express their opinion that old professors could not understand young student dreams. By interrupting classes in order to make announcements of protests, they hoped to show the absurdity of the system. Instead of asking how they could improve the

³ Ibid 173.

efficiency of the university, the students were asking how they might radically transform the bureaucratic and hierarchical structure of the university.

The argument against authority in the university quickly turned into a demand for individual autonomy in decision-making. The students wanted more power in choosing the activities that made up their day-to-day lives. In Strausburg, for example, students wanted

recognition of our existence as a STUDENT COUNCIL, with all THE POWERS THAT ARE HEREAFTER OURS. The present government will have to treat with us [sic] in all matters that concern our future and the future of the University.⁴

These councils were to be modeled after the workers' councils that had developed in the Soviet Union in the early twentieth century. The purpose of these organizations was to give the people more political power. Students wanted a direct voice in the decisions made about their own lives. They desired a radical change in the examination techniques and the restrictions on university entrance. In each instance, the student councils attempted to create a system of participatory democracy rather than of representative democracy.

The revolts were not simply against the formal exercise of power, whether by central government or university administrators. Rather, the events demonstrated a radical criticism of the manifestations of authority in the everyday life of individuals. Henri Lefebvre, a contemporary French

⁴ Ibid 177.

Marxist, argued that the critique of everyday life was the most significant aspect of May, 1968. The students "challenged not only paternalist authority and the authority of employers, but also the aim and finality of these authorities--the condition of everyday existence."⁵ In routine daily activities, whether in the office or the classroom, the students would criticize authority and power.

A wall text from Paris summarized this interest in everyday life:

People who talk about revolution and clean struggle without any explicit reference to daily life, without understanding what is subversive about love or what is positive about refusing coercion, have corpses in their mouths.⁶

This statement was powerful in two respects. First, the students reexamined their lives and recognized the various ways authority and power make a significant imprint on individuals. Not only the university suffered harsh review, but also cultural issues, such as love and the family. Second, the students challenged those who "talk about revolution" to analyze the uses of authority in all aspects of their daily activities. I shall argue more fully in the next chapter that this criticism became the primary influence on Sartre's evolving ideas about the political intellectual.

Thus, the revolt was aimed against authoritarian uses of power, not only in student life, but also in every realm

⁵ Henri Lefebvre, The Explosion, trans. Alfred Ehrenfeld (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969) 88.

⁶ Schnapp 442.

of society. After the students sparked the movement, professors and labor unions joined the protest for similar reasons. As workers began to look at how authority affected their own lives, they began discussing alternate modes of organization which could eliminate the hierarchical exercise of power. Millions of workers demonstrated in the streets in order to support the arguments put forth by the students. The wave of strikes swept over the automotive, engineering, and chemical industries, rail transport, post offices, public transportation, mines, utilities, textile mills, and Parisian stores. Even in the realm of the church a group called "Some Priests in the Paris Area" expressed its dissatisfaction with authority:

An entire paternalistic and authoritarian concept of politics, the economy, and the University is now being questioned. We know that the Church does not escape this criticism. We contest today, in every domain, the way our thoughts and decisions are made for us.⁷

People did not argue for the elimination of the Church because of its "conservative" reputation, but rather they criticized its bureaucratic nature. This openness to all institutions further emphasizes how people in all areas of society were awakened to the need to decide the nature of their own lives. No institution was inherently oppressive unless one was an anarchist and, therefore, anti-institutional. The lack of popular decision-making in the university, exposed by the students, was in fact a

⁷ Ibid 583.

commonplace occurrence throughout France in other social institutions.

Strangely enough, the allegedly revolutionary French Communist Party (PCF) was one of the primary institutions that the revolutionaries criticized. The apparatchik of the PCF exercised strict authority within the party because members wanted to adhere to the proclamations of Soviet Marxism. The hierarchical structure of the PCF had become even more entrenched after 1956. Even though the PCF adopted certain revisionist policies after Khrushchëv's secret speech denouncing Stalin's crimes, its actions during the Hungarian revolution a few months later did not reflect the change of attitude. When the Soviet Union invaded Hungary to crush the revolution, the PCF jumped to the support of Khrushchëv. Although it had seemed that the Soviet Union was becoming less authoritarian, the Hungarian events demonstrated that the attempt could easily be derailed. Many intellectuals criticized the PCF for supporting the Soviet Union, but the PCF only shunned them as "bourgeois individuals." Thus, the PCF maintained its highly organized hierarchical structure and its strict blueprint for revolution.

Because the PCF emphasized organization, the party refused to accept the "spontaneity" of the students. Richard Johnson's analysis of the PCF describes its ideology as emphasizing consciousness and organization. He acknowledges that these terms are "endowed with strong,

positive affective dimensions."⁸ In other words, the institutional structure of the PCF was quite rigid and strict. The Communist Party, despite its revolutionary claims, was in the eyes of the students as bureaucratic and boring as the "establishment." Furthermore, the members of the PCF exercised rigid authority over the student union UEC, the training ground for the future of the PCF. The Stalinist tradition of the PCF clearly proved to hinder the achievement of state control.

Some communist intellectuals did criticize the dogmatic ways of the party. Jean-Pierre Vernant, a professor at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, described the dogmatic tendencies of the party:

Their intellectual approach consists in starting with these texts, then commenting on them in order to make events fit into them, at the same time that they fail to mention the ones they cannot fit in.⁹

Instead of allowing the intellectuals to develop a new theory to include the arguments of the students, the PCF proclaimed a fixed ideology that no one could change. Finally, in early June, the PCF accepted the ideas of the students and offered to represent them in the elections. The students, however, rejected the proposal. This refusal by the students may have been a hindrance to a seizure of state power, but it is clearly understandable considering the centralized nature of the PCF.

⁸ Richard Johnson, The French Communist Party versus the Students (New Haven: Yale UP, 1972) 119-120.

⁹ Schnapp and Naquet 557-8.

The critique of authority and power was so powerful that even some students turned it on themselves and engaged in intensive self-criticism. The goal was to prevent the new student groups from becoming a mirror of the authoritarian society they rejected. In one pamphlet students argued, "The only possible support is that of a movement which denies itself as a student movement; which prepares its own disappearance and that of all students to the extent that they are a *separate, privileged stratum*."¹⁰ In other words, an emphasis on the problems of the students devalues the concerns of those who are not students. If one revolutionary group asserts itself as different, there exists a danger that it might claim itself as superior. Even the slogans of the movement were subject to criticism lest they be preached dogmatically. For example, the following excerpt from Tribune du 22 mars noted the dangers of the catchphrase "self-management:"

If a theoretical clarification of the scope and limitations of self-management is not made in time, this "slogan" will become compromised in the reformist sense [and be] immediately co-optable by every form of dogmatism of the Communist movement.¹¹

Thus, if such statements become ideological proclamations, they become just as authoritarian as the power they themselves seek to undermine. Such an attack on authority was meant to be a perpetual attack on the various forms of

¹⁰ Ibid 417.

¹¹ Ibid 432.

power in society as well as the new revolutionary organizations.

Greater individual autonomy, the students felt, would result in a more meaningful and creative life. Slogans such as "power to the imagination" gave the movement utopian and romantic overtones. Other statements also exhibited an extraordinary passion to change the quality of life according to one's imagination: *"Sabotage the cultural industry. Occupy and destroy the institutions. Re-invent life. ART IS YOU! THE REVOLUTION IS YOU!"*¹² Despite the romantic nature of this statement, the students did not want to return to a medieval or mystical existence. Rather, the practice of changing old institutions and creating new ones was viewed as the means through which people could become creative. In other words, life could become more meaningful through an active involvement in society.

Such language was inspiring and motivating, yet at the same time it was highly idealistic. The students knew exactly what they did not want, yet they were uncertain of what they, in fact, desired. Of course, the practice of eliminating the boredom of bureaucracy was more difficult than the creation of dreams and theories about freedom. Such purging of structured "boredom" would require a change in individuals, who must take the responsibility of making their own lives. Moreover, a radical change in the

¹² Ibid 203.

structure of every social institution most definitely could not happen overnight.

The dreams of individual autonomy surprisingly extended to all realms of society. Students, workers, peasants, and secretaries demanded more power in decision-making. From the engineering industries to the realm of the church, people wanted to alter the hierarchical nature of organization. The demands for decision-making, however, did not simply stop at the workplace or the university. A statement prepared by the "Freud-Che Guevara" Action Committee gives an excellent summary of the many visions behind the revolts:

The struggle must set as its *final objective* the instauration of a socialist system in which, through the destruction of barriers, everybody's creativity will be given free rein. This objective implies a revolution not only in production relationships, but in everybody's way of living, manner of thinking, human relationships, and conception of sexual life.¹³

In every corner of France, people rethought each aspect of their lives. The students and the workers questioned the relations of power in cultural, social, political, and economic institutions. At work or at leisure, the power of decision, along with the recognition of another's autonomy, became an essential component of everyday life for many people.

In summary, the underlying theme of the revolts seemed to be a desire to build a society in which individuals could

¹³ Ibid 447.

participate in making decisions about matters that affected their own lives. The practice to create such a society, not surprisingly, proved to be a major problem. The criticisms against authority and power precipitated many difficulties when reorganizing the institutions. This was most evident when approximately 60,000 people from the different revolutionary groups gathered together in Charl  ty Stadium in order to select a representative for the presidential election. When the Socialist Party presented retired politician Pierre Mend  s-France as a possible presidential candidate, some of the groups did not support him as a spokesperson for the movement. The nature of the position of a representative, according to some students, seemed to contradict the goal of developing a system of participatory democracy. As a result, the movement failed to organize itself around a particular candidate. It is no surprise, then, that when de Gaulle disappeared from France and it appeared the regime would fall, the opposition did not have a specific candidate for president. Consequently, they lost the possibility of having a representative in the state who could promote reforms toward a participatory system.

There were three types of organizations that attempted to find a workable solution. Unfortunately, two of these groups failed to recognize the challenge to restructure society to allow for individual autonomy. First, the traditional reformist unions, such as the Conf  d  ration Fran  aise D  mocratique du Travail, emphasized the need for

organization, and, like the PCF, they rejected the spontaneous activity of the students on many occasions. During the first weeks in May, however, most of the reformist groups did adopt certain ideas of the students and used them to make significant gains of autonomy in the workplace. The unions still maintained a traditional hierarchical structure without restraints on the use of authority. Second, the anarchist Mouvement du 22 mars, embodying the more extreme reaction to the revolts, rejected any traditional party structure, and it would not participate in the current party system. These anarchists assumed that all political leaders could not regulate the use of their power. They rejected all forms of organization and proclaimed self-organization. Yet, because they argued against all forms of organization, they could not conceive of ways to develop a society of participatory democracy. Such a theory provides an excellent critique of the dangers of authority, but the anarchists--with some consistency--would not make a sincere attempt to develop new forms of social organization.

Some students and workers, on the other hand, criticized both the reformists and the anarchists. They wanted to put direct democracy into effect without a highly bureaucratic organization, such as that of the reformists. They directly addressed the question of organizing people in society without robbing individuals of the power of decision-making. Their subsequent experiments with this

challenge resulted in the development of "action committees." The following statement characterized this radically different form of organization: "Each committee will meet daily. Each committee will plan its own propaganda among the workers. Keep together in demonstrations and in actual fighting."¹⁴ Many also elected a different president every other day. These action committees developed in the thousands and included ten to thirty people in each. They organized people from the grass roots rather than from an already existent hierarchical power structure. Moreover, these committees were concrete attempts to develop new forms of social organization.

The action committees organized not only in "interest groups" but also in coalitions between students and workers. The students examined the similarities in both areas of society:

There Are Many Resemblances between Your Problems and Ours. Who decides the norms and the work rhythms? Who decides the goals for production and the type of production? Everywhere the regulation is the same: we're asked to execute orders. Unions and opposition parties propose nothing that is fundamentally different. It is always a minority who decides for you, in production as well as in society.¹⁵

Rather than showing the workers a blueprint for revolution, the students found common ground in their criticisms of bureaucracy. Probably the most radical and successful of these action committees occurred in the city of Nantes,

¹⁴ Ibid 172.

¹⁵ Ibid 198-199.

where the students attempted to establish a liaison between the workers and the peasants in the nearby countryside. Schnapp and Vidal-Naquet, in their commentary on a collection of documents from the events, observed that in the smaller and more provincial cities, the liaison was most successful.¹⁶ This phenomenon occurred simply because small groups made it easier to give people more autonomy. Even though the majority of the movements failed, the action committees proved to be valuable experiments in uniting a variety of groups without asserting one of them as superior.

The inherent difficulties in uniting various groups contributed, in part, to the failure of capturing state power. This problem surfaced when the unions and the workers negotiated with the government and returned to work. The unions felt that the most important victory was the government's agreement to pass a law giving legal status to each union inside each firm.¹⁷ This law loosened some of the tight bureaucratic chains of command in the life of the workers. Even though the workers made progress, the students were still struggling by themselves in the universities. Thus, all groups argued for more individual autonomy, but the task of establishing decision-making for the people took a different form in each realm of society.

A few contradictions became apparent during the course of the revolts. First, the students criticized the consumer

¹⁶ Ibid 233.

¹⁷ John Ardagh, The New French Revolution (New York: Harper and Row, 1968) 465.

industry, yet they adopted certain aspects of it for their own use. For example, nearly every weekend the students did not organize because of their recreational interests. The government picked up on this fact when it chose to reclaim the Sorbonne on Sunday, June 16. Second, even though the movement was immediately concerned with everyday life in France, it hailed itself as an international battle and it claimed to solve the problems of other countries. Needless to say, it is quite pretentious to argue that attempted solutions in France will solve problems in third-world nations. Third, even though women questioned the nature of their position in society, their participation in the revolts generally was limited to traditional roles, such as cooking. These contradictions further demonstrate the problems of restructuring a society so that all individuals will have sufficient freedom to decide the direction of their own lives. Some groups claimed their own sovereignty in society and, as a result, they devalued other groups' struggle for more decision-making power.

Despite the failure to gain state power, the rebellion's criticisms of French society were not easily forgotten. Until May, 1968, advanced capitalist nations had never seen a revolution that had such resounding cries for a system of participatory democracy. The revolts had a profound impact on Sartre and Foucault precisely because of the people's desire to have the autonomy to control their own lives. Although Foucault was indirectly interested in

individual freedom because he analyzed the effects of discourse on human consciousness, Sartre devoted his entire life to a direct analysis of the nature of human freedom. In order to understand the effect of May, 1968 on him, one must begin by looking at Sartre's theory of existentialism and the roots of his quest for individual autonomy.

Part II: Sartre

The development of Sartre's thought prior to 1968 can be divided into two stages. Before World War II, Sartre developed his first version of existentialism. After the war, Sartre brought Marxism to that theory. Although the idea of individual autonomy occupied Sartre in both periods, he began to recognize how social institutions limited that autonomy, and consequently he began to politicize the role of intellectuals.

Before World War II, Sartre wrote the principal text of his existentialism, Being and Nothingness. In this work, he argued that all individuals freely chose their own condition and are themselves responsible for it. To explain this, Sartre used the thesis "existence precedes essence." In the case of inanimate objects, existence and essence coincide. For humans, however, one's essence is in front of one's being, and therefore one is free to create oneself. In the instance of the waiter, for example, Sartre argued, "it is precisely this person who I have to be (if I am the waiter in question) and who I am not."¹⁸ In other words, an individual is not by nature a waiter, but rather by performing the functions of a waiter, one freely chooses that identity, or essence.

Sartre's existentialism was more than a philosophical adventure. It was, in part, a reaction to the political

¹⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956) 102.

atmosphere dominated by totalitarian conditions. Authoritarian regimes developed not only in fascist Germany and Italy, but also in communist Russia. Under such conditions of oppression, many individuals became politically apathetic and passive. Sartre hoped to combat this apathy with his existential philosophy. Herbert Marcuse, for example, best described Sartre's early ideas as an attempt to "develop the new experience [of totalitarianism] into a philosophy of the concrete human existence: to elaborate the structure of 'being in an absurd world' and the ethics of 'living without appeal.'"¹⁹ Sartre's existentialism, then, was a new ethics showing that people were free to act in the world under any social conditions. This theory could be used to goad people to change oppressive totalitarian conditions.

It was in the prison camps of World War Two that Sartre became more aware of the institutional constraints on individual freedom. He consequently revised his theory of existentialism, explaining in his later years that "in a way, Being and Nothingness itself should have been the beginning of a discovery of this power of circumstances."²⁰ Having become more interested in the institutional limitations on the power of individuals, Sartre turned to

¹⁹ Herbert Marcuse, "Sartre's Existentialism," Studies in Critical Philosophy, trans. Joris de Bres (London: NLB, 1972) 150.

²⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Itinerary of a Thought," Between Existentialism and Marxism, trans. John Matthews (New York: Pantheon, 1977) 33.

the writings of Marx. Rather than being concerned with economic freedom or the mode of production, however, Sartre was interested in the more subjective concern of the development of class consciousness as the basis of group formations and class struggle. Because Karl Marx explained that "individuals certainly make one another, physically and mentally, but do not make themselves," Sartre, like Marx, wanted to find the ways in which individuals could make themselves and, thus, make history as they wish.²¹

In his existential Marxist opus, Critique of Dialectical Reason, Sartre wanted to show how society inhibits individual autonomy and how these restraints could be overcome. First, he described the dependence of individuals on social institutions. He explained,

Upon the basis of given conditions, the direct relations between persons depend upon other particular relations, and these on still others, and so on in succession, *because there is an objective constraint in concrete relations* [Emphasis added].²²

This statement implies that an individual's relations to others depends on his or her relation to the workplace, church, or other social groups. These institutions atomize people and rob them of their ability to organize and effect social change. Second, Sartre showed that individuals have

²¹ Karl Marx, "The German Ideology," The Marx-Engels Reader, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: WW Norton and Company, 1978) 164.

²² Jean-Paul Sartre, Search for a Method, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Vintage Books, 1968) 78. This is a translation of the introduction to Critique of Dialectical Reason.

the capability to change their social and political world. Whereas traditional Marxists thought that the objective structures changed without the aid of individuals, Sartre, with his concern for individuals, focused on the agency of humans as the propellant of historical change. He argued, "It is true that the individual is conditioned by the social environment and that he turns back upon it to condition it in turn. It is this--and nothing else--which makes his reality."²³ He concluded that individuals can comprehend their own objective reality and make the appropriate changes toward a free society.

In contrast to his prior existentialism, Sartre found value not just in individual action, but also in communal social action. As Mark Poster states in his analysis of Sartre's Marxism, "[humans] found [their] freedom in a common act that was directed against the structures that atomized [them]."²⁴ In the process of effecting social and political change, individuals become more autonomous and creative. Although the earlier Sartre might have defined individual autonomy as freedom from a group, he now believed that individuals could be liberated within the community. In terms of his earlier existentialism, Sartre explained that "Labor, as man's reproduction of his life, can hold no meaning if its fundamental structure is not to project."²⁵

²³ Ibid 71.

²⁴ Mark Poster, Existential Marxism in Postwar France (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1975) 289.

²⁵ Sartre, Search for a Method 175.

In "projecting" their essence toward a common goal of social action, individuals reclaim a consciousness of freedom.

This new definition of relations between individuals forced Sartre to consider the position of intellectuals. Rather than being isolated observers, they must align themselves with the political strivings of the laboring classes. Only then can they "decipher its [the action of the underprivileged classes] nature and illuminate its meaning and possibilities."²⁶ The intellectual should demonstrate how the action of the masses translates into the expression of a free society. Because in Marxist theory the historical mission of the proletarian class is universal freedom, or the emancipation of all, the laboring classes and their intellectual allies can claim universality. Through this association, intellectuals can be the voice and conscience of the working class. They must remind the workers that the goal of any social action is to allow for the free development of all.

The second duty is to be continually self-critical. As Sartre claimed,

[intellectuals] must remind [themselves] that [they are] never secure from the danger of lapsing into universalism (which thinks of itself as already *completed*, and as such, excludes the effort of various particularities towards universalization), into racism, nationalism, or imperialism.²⁷

²⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, "A Plea for Intellectuals," Between Existentialism and Marxism 261.

²⁷ Ibid.

In this context, universalism refers to the danger of thinking that a universal theory automatically constitutes a free society. In claiming their theory as an eternal truth, social critics would fall into dogmatic ideology that would be no different from the ruling class that preserves the status quo. Intellectuals must not forget that the concrete possibilities for individual freedom will be different as history progresses. They must be attentive to the real conditions of individuals in society. Any claim of an eternal truth will inhibit the development of a society where individuals can participate in decision-making and, hence, become more autonomous. Intellectuals must not create a strict blueprint for change, but rather they should pay attention to the needs of the worker.

Because the nature of intellectual production is to reveal how the laboring classes can become free, the political role of intellectuals is complex. Sartre recognized the apparent contradiction in their role in that they tell the workers how to be free. Intellectuals are isolated from the underprivileged classes because they occupy a different class position, namely within the bourgeoisie. Intellectuals are responsible for recognizing the mission of the workers and becoming the conscience of the working class because the workers are busy in the factory. Sartre argued, "The intellectual is thus necessarily separated by a gulf from those men whose point

of view he wants to adopt--that of *universalization*."²⁸
 This implies that the intellectuals and the working class should remain in separate spheres of life. They occupy a position of particularity in relation to the people.

Sartre accepted this division and he went further to explain exactly what intellectuals can do from their own peculiar place in society. He explained,

The intellectual, because of his own contradiction, is driven to make this effort [for individual autonomy] for himself, and consequently for everyone -- and it is this that becomes his function.²⁹

This suggests that intellectuals should create a universal and revolutionary consciousness, not simply for themselves as part of their intellectual identity but also, in so doing, for the people. They must be the guardians of individual freedom because the people of the lower classes cannot elaborate the conditions of their own oppression. Intellectuals have a higher political function insofar as they must accomplish what the workers cannot. The workers should change society, and intellectuals should develop a theory for change. In other words, intellectuals should be concerned with *theory*, and the workers' task should be that of *practice*.

As the guardians of the universal goal of the masses, the intellectuals should educate the people. Sartre explained that intellectuals "must make use of the capital

²⁸ Ibid 257-8.

²⁹ Ibid 265.

of knowledge he has acquired from the dominant class in order to help raise popular culture--that is to say, to lay the foundations of a universal culture."³⁰ Since the masses could not themselves realize the universal goal, the intellectuals needed to teach them the significance of their action and their immediate demands; they should remind the underprivileged classes of the ultimate objectives beyond the immediate demands. Also, the "bourgeois" intellectual should help develop "organic" theorists who arise out of the working class. The lower classes cannot produce their own representatives because they do not have the capital necessary for the development of knowledge. As a result, if they were to educate workers to be intellectuals, the two distinct social positions would be abolished. There would be no need for an outsider to represent the working class.

Sartre's concept of the role of the intellectual before the events of May, 1968, then, was that of a theoretician and educator. Sartre advocated a privileged individual who elicited the universal meaning of a specific situation in society. What resulted, however, was an intellectual with an "unhappy consciousness." Sartre borrowed this term from Hegel to explain the workers' rejection of the intellectuals. Even though they support the cause of the laboring classes, the workers will reject them because they occupy a different class position. Moreover, the workers are more interested in concrete demands rather than theories

³⁰ Ibid 262.

of universal freedom. This unhappy consciousness plagues intellectuals with frustration and grief.

When the students rioted in May, it appeared to Sartre that some intellectuals would finally relieve their unhappy consciousness and, thus, gain the support of the working classes. He rushed to the support of the students when they began to criticize political bureaucracies, particularly the PCF. Sartre abandoned his belief that the PCF was a necessary instrument for the political expression of the people, and he consequently broke all ties with the party. The students' criticism of the PCF justified his own attacks on the Communist Party's dogmatic nature. Sartre now became the new spokesperson for the students and workers.

The reaction of the students to Sartre, however, forced him to reconsider the meaning of May, and hence the role of the intellectual. Knowing that the intellectuals of the Communist Party rejected the students, Sartre assumed that by supporting the young rebels, he would assist the development of a revolutionary consciousness. He therefore delivered a speech in the Sorbonne that told the students to go to the factories and unite with the workers. Even though the students were doing exactly this, Sartre was repeatedly booed for telling them how to create a revolt.³¹ The shock of being booed confronted him with the reality that the students were challenging not only the authority of the political bureaucracies, but also authority in all aspects

³¹ Johnson 84.

of life, including those individuals, like Sartre, who felt they were on the same side of the fence.

Sartre quickly came to realize that intellectuals are a nemesis of the working class because of their privileging of their own position. He previously thought that the intellectual should speak for the workers. Yet this position justifies a place of authority over the people of the underprivileged class. Even though intellectuals may support the revolutionary consciousness of the workers and claim to be the mouthpiece and the leaders of the movement, they prevent the working class from being the subject of its own history. Intellectuals do not bring freedom to the people, but rather the people should acquire individual autonomy by making decisions themselves.

Sartre now asserted that intellectuals must change their position in society, and he consequently redefined the political activities of intellectuals. Their first goal is to abolish the distance between themselves and society. Sartre argued, "Let's have done with these separate cells cut off from each other. This is the only way you'll ever change intellectuals."³² This means first and foremost that they should eliminate their claims to a position of authority as the consciences of the people and the privileges associated with that position. Instead of theorizing from the ivory tower, they should suppress their

³² Jean-Paul Sartre, "A Friend of the People," Between Existentialism and Marxism 297.

own intellectual identity. He envisioned a "union of workers and intellectuals"--much like the organic union envisioned by Gramsci.³³ Sartre felt that intellectuals need to devote their efforts to change the public institutions rather than simply talking about revolution.

The second goal of intellectuals is defined by Sartre's new concept of revolution. In defining revolution as the moment of the political seizure of power, a traditional Leninist argument, Sartre outlined a revolutionary process that will dismantle all power relations. As a result,

There will be advances and retreats, limited successes and reversible defeats, in order finally to bring into existence a new society in which all the powers have been done away with because each individual has full possession of himself.³⁴

Since the revolution is a daily event, intellectuals need to be involved consistently instead of only speaking in times of crisis.

Even though the seizure of state power does not constitute in itself a victory for socialism, the revolution will be a process that might include the taking over of power. Although Sartre foresaw the possibility of a seizure of power, he did not see it coming peacefully through a majority vote. It is highly possible that violence would be necessary. Regardless of state control, this new idea of revolution most importantly transfers the responsibility of

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Self-Portrait at Seventy," Life/Situations, trans. Paul Auster and Lydia Davis (New York: Pantheon, 1977) 84.

social change from representatives in government to the workers and intellectuals. It also emphasizes the need to reevaluate the use of authority on a daily basis.

Sartre defined the locus of action for intellectuals as the public sphere of society, especially the factories. He explained, "there is no longer any other way of conceiving universal ends than by forging a direct relationship with those who demand a universal society, i.e. with the masses."³⁵ By relating with the people in the factories or other social institutions, intellectuals will avoid telling the workers how to be free. Possibilities of action include demonstrating in the streets, protesting political actions of the government, writing for the people, and organizing a network of communication among workers. The university, on the other hand, was not included in Sartre's definition of the public realm. He railed at intellectuals for using the university as a "sanctuary."³⁶ This institution, in Sartre's opinion, was far removed from society, and consequently it was simply a place of privilege.

In order for intellectuals to realize their new identity, Sartre thought they needed to leave the university and use their own talents to effect a change in society. In this manner, he united theory and practice. Specifically, he suggested, "The workers explain what they are doing, and the intellectuals are there to understand, to learn and at

³⁵ Sartre, "A Friend of the People" 292.

³⁶ "Sartre Accuses the Intellectuals of Bad Faith," New York Times Magazine 17 October 1971: 119.

the same time to give things every so often a certain type of generalization."³⁷ This idea is best demonstrated by Sartre's use of the interview, especially the collection of interviews in On a Reason de se Révolter. In these interviews, ideas were created through discussing instead of persuading one another about which theory is correct; after 1968 Sartre was against polemicizing with others. He felt that the interview was a useful forum for elaborating viewpoints because intellectuals discuss the possibilities of change with the workers rather than bringing a blueprint for revolution. He wanted intellectuals who would use empirical analysis in conjunction with theory. Such a method would eliminate any hierarchical distinction between mental and manual labor. Furthermore, the classical intellectuals--those who occupy a privileged and privatized space in the world--would be eliminated.

Sartre's new concept of the politics of intellectuals had numerous implications for the nature of intellectual production. Two of Sartre's activities after 1968 illustrate his ideas about intellectual labor. His interest in the journal La Cause du Peuple and his writings of The Idiot of the Family not only redefined intellectual labor in valuable ways but also carried implications that Sartre failed to recognize.

Sartre's involvement in La Cause du Peuple represented his effort to force intellectuals to recognize the necessity

³⁷ Sartre, "A Friend of the People" 294.

of working together in the same sphere of society. The Maoists, who were against all intellectuals because of their privilege, created this newspaper in order to let the workers write or, if they preferred, be interviewed. Not long after its creation, the first and second editors were arrested because of the magazine's "rough, primitive and violent language" against the bourgeoisie.³⁸ The Maoists concluded that they needed a privileged intellectual as their editor in order to ensure the newspaper's survival. They logically approached Sartre with the proposition that he take over the editorship of the magazine. He accepted this position for two reasons. First, he wanted "to save La Cause du Peuple, the only newspaper which allowed the voice of the people to be heard."³⁹ In other words, he wanted to let the people speak for themselves and, thus, to avoid being a voice of the workers' demands. Second, he wanted to show that "it was possible to bring the workers and intellectuals together in at least one area [of society]."⁴⁰ Sartre himself worked closely with the workers, not only as an editor but also as a distributor of the paper in the factories. His example demonstrated to intellectuals and the workers that both groups could work together in the same sphere of society. Although he thought that by consciously using his status he "behaved like a 'leading light,'" his

³⁸ Sartre, "The Maoists in France," Life/Situations 181.

³⁹ Ibid 184.

⁴⁰ Ibid 183.

action is clearly a step in the direction of changing position of intellectuals in society and, thus, abolishing their private and privileged position.⁴¹

In telling intellectuals to direct their work toward the masses in order to abolish power and authority, Sartre consciously ignored the institution of the state. He felt, then, that representative government was in itself oppressive. This belief is exemplified in his refusal to vote in any election. He explained, "When I vote, I abdicate my power--that is, the possibility everyone has of joining others to form a sovereign group, which would have no need of representatives."⁴² In other words, Sartre felt that when voting, one surrenders one's own autonomy and power to change society to that of a representative in an office. Obviously, he firmly believed that society could not be changed effectively by representatives. Sartre's opinion of voting is understandable because of the victory of de Gaulle in June, 1968. Despite the revolutionary atmosphere during May, the voting practices of the population still flowed to the political right. This occurred not only because of the wide variety of interests represented, but also in part because of those people, like Sartre, who would not vote. His definition of the state as an oppressive institution and his consequent decision to

⁴¹ Ibid 184.

⁴² Sartre, "Elections: A Trap for Fools," Life/Situations 204.

boycott elections forced him to tell intellectuals that their energies should not be directed to the state.

Sartre also redefined the nature of intellectual writing after 1968. Because he thought that theoretical production should be directed to the masses, he had a guilty conscience about his project on Flaubert after 1968. Many have criticized Sartre for continuing this project after he himself advocated a more active role of intellectuals. Sartre even recognized his own apparent contradictory behavior; he was convinced that if he were age fifty again, he would not write on Flaubert because when he looked "at the content [he has] the impression that [he] is escaping the true problems of society."⁴³ In other words, he thought that his work was an escape from reality since it was about a family from the nineteenth century rather than the problems of contemporary society. Moreover, he explained that "the masses have neither the time nor the means at the present moment to tackle this type of knowledge."⁴⁴ Because only privileged individuals had, first, the educational background to understand the significance of Sartre's work, and second, the time to read such an opus, his project would not contribute to his goal of abolishing hierarchical distinctions between intellectuals and workers. For these reasons, he often felt uneasy about his continued passion for writing on Flaubert.

⁴³ Sartre, "On The Idiot of the Family," Life/Situations 131.

⁴⁴ Sartre, "A Friend of the People" 295.

Sartre's dilemma forced him to denounce the important contributions of his work to education. Mark Poster, in Existential Marxism in Postwar France, agreed with Sartre and argued that "in working to save himself from the characteristic bad faith of the intellectual--hiding behind one's knowledge--he moved to bad faith at a second level, that of the ultra revolutionary."⁴⁵ Despite Poster's belief that Sartre was not acting as he should, Sartre's work on Flaubert did have a social impact in the realm of intellectual writing. Even Sartre acknowledged that his book on Flaubert was political and had many important messages to convey to readers. The contributions to theory can be placed in two categories. First, he consistently defended his work as a revolutionary way of looking at the family of Flaubert. He explained, "In my book there is undoubtedly a constant attack on the bourgeoisie of the period, of which the Flaubert family was typical."⁴⁶ Second, Sartre wanted to demonstrate "the idea of the imagination as the central determining factor in a person."⁴⁷ This aim echoed the slogan "power to the imagination" of May, 1968, which encouraged people to recognize their own power as individuals. In spite of Sartre's recognition of these potentially valuable contributions to education and the development of theory, he

⁴⁵ Poster 398.

⁴⁶ Sartre, "On The Idiot of the Family," Life/Situations 114.

⁴⁷ Ibid 119.

thought that his work on Flaubert had no concrete value other than for personal fulfillment. Yet, this tension should not be seen as bad faith, that is, a problem of inaction, but rather a problem in Sartre's new conception of intellectual labor.

Sartre's attack on his work on Flaubert, then, is indicative of a larger problem in his definition of the role of the intellectual. By telling critics to suppress themselves as intellectuals, that is, to eliminate their privileged and privatized condition, Sartre consciously devalued the importance of an essential institution of education--the university. If intellectuals abandon the institution or their theoretical work, the university will remain an institution of privilege. I am arguing, then, that Sartre had gone too far in his reaction; he went from one problematic extreme to another, equally problematic. Although he did believe that new institutions need to replace the university, this transformation could be accomplished neither overnight nor by a mass exodus from the university. If the university is not included as an institution that needs change, it will remain a hindrance to the abolition of hierarchical privilege.

Sartre's constant self-criticism only further demonstrates his sincerity in wanting to abolish the privileged and removed condition of intellectuals. Perhaps it was in 1968 that Sartre posed the biggest challenge to himself when he stated, "From 1940 to 1968 I was a left-wing

intellectual and from 1968 on I became an intellectual leftist. The difference is one of action."⁴⁸ Whereas he had thought his identity was first and foremost an "intellectual," that is, one who simply talks revolution, he concluded that his primary responsibility was to be a "leftist," or one who actively works to change society. This shift represented his attempt to challenge himself not only on an intellectual level but also on the the level of everyday life. This challenge is one of the major achievements for what Sartre should be remembered.

⁴⁸ "Sartre Accuses the Intellectuals of Bad Faith" 119.

Part III: Foucault

Even though Foucault and Sartre did not discuss the events of May with each other, they drew similar conclusions about the future role of their lives. The connection between the events of May and the transformation of Foucault's ideas compared with Sartre is less direct. Still, the change in Foucault's thought after 1968 was even more dramatic because not only did he define the position of intellectuals, like Sartre, but he also acknowledged the need to be attentive to social and political institutions, something that Sartre had done prior to 1968. He realized that discourse--language, symbols, etc.--is embodied in social institutions, and, hence, intellectuals had an active role in society.

But Sartre's and Foucault's definitions of an active and political intellectual manifested themselves quite differently. This distinction can be traced to their opposing ideas about the freedom of the individual before 1968. Whereas Sartre focused simply on the freedom of consciousness, Foucault analyzed the effects of discourses on one's individuality. Foucault's works before 1968, Peter Kemp argues, can be divided into two categories.⁴⁹ In his first two books, Madness and Civilization and The Birth of the Clinic, he thought that social practice was the basis for discursive rules. In The Order of Things and The

⁴⁹ Peter Kemp, "Review Essay of Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics," History and Theory 13.1 (1984): 87.

Archaeology of Knowledge he moved entirely away from the analysis of social institutions and toward the effects of autonomous discourse on the human mind.

Foucault's analysis of discourse led him to attack Sartre's discourse of existentialism. He rejected Sartre's theory that affirms the inherent freedom of individuals to choose their own condition. He described the inhibiting effects of existentialism as the following:

There was the great period of contemporary philosophy, that of Sartre, . . . in which a philosophical text finally had to tell you . . . what liberty consisted of, [and] what one had to do in political life⁵⁰

This statement implies that Sartre's philosophy provides individuals with a set of predetermined meanings. These specific definitions of "liberty" and "behavior" inhibit one's own ability to create meaning for oneself. Foucault thought that freedom cannot be defined for anyone. Thus, Sartre's idea that individuals are sovereign creates an illusion of liberation.

Foucault criticized not only Sartre's existential philosophy but also the politics of his existential Marxism. The individual, according to Sartre, could become more autonomous simply by engaging in social action. Foucault "[refused] this politics of learned ignorance."⁵¹ This suggests that Sartre's definition of the politics of the

⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, "Foucault Responds to Sartre," Foucault Live, trans. John Johnston, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989) 35.

⁵¹ Ibid 43.

subject lacked insight into the actual conditions for autonomy. Whereas Sartre believed action in itself had emancipating effects, Foucault thought that this undifferentiated emphasis on action could be led astray. Perhaps the best example of such misguided action would be that of one who acts within a fascist movement.

Rather than accepting Sartre's notion of the fully creative subject, Foucault felt that the content of consciousness and discourse could be traced to the episteme. This order of a given age can best be described as an epistemological field that gives humans the ability to give meaning to the world. The study of epistemes represents an attempt to discover the way in which theoretical discourse is limited by its own assumptions. In the Archaeology of Knowledge, Foucault developed this notion in the following way:

This episteme may be suspected of being something like a world-view, a slice of history common to all branches of knowledge, which imposes on each one the same norms and postulates, a general stage of reason, a certain structure of thought that the men of a particular period cannot escape -- a great body of legislation written once and for all by some anonymous hand.⁵²

In other words, for each era there is a particular underlying structure that conditions how individuals will conceptualize the world. By concentrating on discourse, Foucault could account for the various assumptions that individuals have in the world. These presumptions are rules

⁵² Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972) 191.

that affect the freedom of the mind. People cannot be free to constitute reality as Sartre so dogmatically proclaimed. Rather, Foucault argued that individuals are constituted by the episteme.

The dominance of the episteme in any given age, however, did not destroy the freedom of individuals. Even though in many accounts Foucault appeared to say that discourse determines individuals and, thus, there is no possibility for autonomy, one important passage in the Archaeology of Knowledge did indicate that he was not denying the possibility of freedom: "Discourse is not life; its time is not your time; in it, you will not be reconciled to death."⁵³ Although "discourse is not life" can be taken to mean that discourse denies any prospect of the freedom of the mind, it is important to note that Foucault went further to add that discursive rules do not "kill" individual autonomy. Foucault himself stated that he "wanted not to exclude the problem of the subject, but to define the positions and functions that the subject could occupy in the diversity of discourse."⁵⁴ This also refutes the idea that Foucault was in search of a universally determined structure of the mind; individuals are not defined once and for all by these discourses.

If Foucault had wanted to define a universal structure, he would have also rejected the notion of historical change.

⁵³ Ibid 211.

⁵⁴ Ibid 200.

In his opinion, individuals were neither fully free nor fully silenced. This tension, then, can be resolved in the history of discursive structures. He explained that his work "did not deny history, but held in suspense the general, empty category of change in order to reveal transformations at different levels."⁵⁵ In other words, he wanted to look at the individual in relation to discourse rather than, for example, political or social institutions. In a most unique manner, then, Foucault attempted to liberate the subject by exposing the ways in which individuals were unconsciously trapped in the prisonhouse of discourse. Consequently, the purpose of intellectual production is to show the rules of discourse that condition the meanings that individuals give to the world.

Foucault used the term "archaeology" to describe the nature of intellectual labor. Archaeology is radically different from the traditional "history of ideas" that characterized intellectual production prior to Foucault's writings. In the "history of ideas," a search for origin and totalization are stressed. For example, one might analyze the origins of a political system and trace its development through history. Archaeology, on the other hand, analyzes "silent births, or distant correspondences, of permanences that persist beneath apparent changes."⁵⁶ These "permanences" are the structures of discourse that

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid 138.

inhibit the freedom of the mind. To return to the previous example, an archaeologist might analyze how the language and symbols of the political system condition the thought of individuals. Peter Kemp best describes the specific tasks of Foucault's archaeology: first, it should demonstrate how discourse obeys certain rules; second, it should examine discourse in its historical specificity; third, it should elicit the underlying rules governing the object of study; and fourth, it should be conscious of how the archaeologist's own discourse is simply a description of an object and not the discovery of its true essence or origin.⁵⁷ In summary, discourse provides individuals with certain meanings. On the other hand, all discourse includes a silence: that is, there are meanings excluded from all discourse. It is these rules that archaeology seeks to discover.

Because discourse is exclusive and oppressive, intellectual work is political. The production of theory is not an activity that is an escape from the real problems of society. Foucault explained that

It's not because we are turning away from politics that we are occupied with such strictly and meticulously defined theoretical problems, but rather we realize that every form of political action can only be articulated in the strictest manner with a rigorous theoretical reflection.⁵⁸

Foucault thought that theory delineates the available meanings in discourse and, perhaps more importantly, those

⁵⁷ Kemp 90.

⁵⁸ Foucault, "Foucault Responds to Sartre" 42.

meanings that are not allowed a space. Consequently, the knowledge that theory brings to others will have emancipating effects. Foucault thought that such knowledge can only be achieved by rigorous and strict reflection because of the complex rules of discourse. One wonders, however, if such "rigorous" intellectual verbiage is necessary to show the discursive rules that determine the meanings that individuals use.

This politicized archaeological method indicates a new emphasis for Foucault. Before 1968, he did not focus on the relations between discourse and social institutions. He now acknowledged a relationship between knowledge and power, and consequently it became necessary to develop the idea of a political intellectual.

Whereas Sartre seemed to be influenced more by the criticisms of authority, Foucault was affected by the failure of the revolts to abolish power. Foucault observed two distinct features of the students' failure. First, the revolts dramatically showed how discourse works within social institutions. For example, the Communist Party's platform--or discourse--failed to integrate the demands from, for example, the clinic or hospital. This happened not because of the content of Marxist discourse. Rather, the PCF used Marxist discourse as a power to include or exclude the objectives of others. Foucault was acutely sensitive to this, and he adopted this question in his later work. As he said of his work before the events of May,

But what was lacking here [his previous work] was this problem of the "discursive régime," of the effects of power peculiar to the play of statements. I confused this too much with systematicity, theoretical form, or something like a paradigm.⁵⁹

Foucault's reference to the "discursive régime" implies that discourse is a power. Oppression does not result from discursive content or form.

Whereas before 1968 Foucault analyzed the limitations of discourse on the human mind, he now thought that it was necessary to learn how "the play of statements" operates in society. The question of power and its relationship to knowledge would now occupy the work of Foucault for the remainder of his life. "Power" represents practice in social institutions. "Knowledge," on the other hand, represents the discourse in society. Foucault explained,

The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power. . . . Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power.⁶⁰

Whereas traditional theorists thought that knowledge opposed all power, Foucault recognized that knowledge is itself a form of power. By looking at the way discourse, or knowledge, worked in society, Foucault continued his interest in showing the possibilities of individual autonomy.

The second aspect of the revolts that influenced Foucault is a corollary to the first. In his opinion, the

⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," Power/Knowledge, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980) 113.

⁶⁰ Ibid 131.

diversity of the student movements reflected the difficulties inherent in uniting such a wide range of interests into one common goal. He noted that one of the biggest obstacles to intellectuals since 1968 was "the risk of being unable to develop these struggles for lack of a global strategy or outside support; the risk too of not being followed, or only by very limited groups."⁶¹ Because the movement spread to so many areas of society, Foucault found it more difficult to find a universal body of knowledge that could unite the different groups. He further explained that "Each society has its régime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true."⁶² Truth is relative to the society or institution that produces it. Consequently, any body of knowledge will exclude as much as it includes. Knowledge is a form of power, and it is everywhere.

Foucault's emphasis on the production of theory in society led him to define two new characteristics of intellectual labor. First, his attempt to discover dominating discourses he called a genealogical study. Rather than analyzing the structures of discourse, as in archaeology, the genealogist shows the evolution of discourse. He described this new method as the following:

A genealogy of values, morality, asceticism, and knowledge will never confuse itself with a quest

⁶¹ Ibid 130.

⁶² Ibid 131.

for their "origins," will never neglect as inaccessible the vicissitudes of history. On the contrary, it will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning; it will be scrupulously attentive to their petty malice; it will await their emergence, once unmasked, as the face of the other.⁶³

Foucault's genealogy does not search for a beginning or an origin of discourse. Rather, it concentrates on the dominant forms of discourse and their transformations. In other words, he wanted to trace the "discursive régime," including its changes throughout history. This method determines the nature of the discursive domination, its effects, and how it comes into power. Moreover, by emphasizing the development--or history--of the most contemporary "discursive régime," intellectuals avoid creating a universal goal or direction.

Second, intellectual labor must always take a critical stance in relation to the present state of affairs. This critical nature of mental labor can best be noted in Foucault's interpretation of the Enlightenment. In this essay, he believed that Kant's Was ist Aufklärung? was the crucial break with pre-Enlightenment thought because the text "is the first time that a philosopher has connected in this way . . . a reflection on history and a particular analysis of the specific moment at which he is writing and because of which he is writing."⁶⁴ This passage suggests

⁶³ Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," The Foucault Reader, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 80.

⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," The Foucault Reader 38.

that "modernity" is not a period in time. Rather, it is a critical attitude toward the present state of society. In Foucault's opinion, the "modern" attitude appeared in many forms throughout history, but no one had been conscious of it until Kant. The most valuable quality of the Enlightenment was its emphasis on the critical edge of knowledge.

A disturbing repercussion of Foucault's stress on criticism is his unwillingness to develop a universal ideal. In reacting to the failure of the utopian ideals of the students, he jumped to the other extreme by arguing that intellectuals should always be critical and, thus, avoid developing a universal goal. Edward Said best expresses Foucault's lack of attention to the need for a vision of an universally free society:

What he seemed not quite as willing to grant is, in fact, the relative success of these counter-discursive attempts . . . to begin the difficult, if not always tragically flawed, project of formulating the discourse of liberation.⁶⁵

Foucault did acknowledge that in order to fight discourse in society, discourse itself must be used. His deemphasis of universal goals recognizes that utopian ideals may never be realized. Yet, he hailed only the critical aspects of theory and belittled the attempt to develop a theory of emancipation. Foucault denied the importance of utopian hopes that often inspire a social upheaval. This is a

⁶⁵ Edward Said, "Foucault and the Imagination of Power," Foucault: A Critical Reader, ed. David Hoy (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 153.

tragic consequence of wanting to liberate individuals from progressive ideologies and discourses.

Because intellectual labor must be attentive to discursive forms of power in society, Foucault felt compelled to define once and for all the role of intellectuals. He first provided a history of this role. The traditional conception of the intellectual was similar to that of Sartre's before 1968. This figure certainly was prominent in the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries. The traditional figure thought him or herself the bearer of truth, and consequently he or she opposed power. This social thinker was modeled after "the man of justice, the man of law, who counterposes power, despotism and the abuses and arrogance of wealth with the universality of justice and the equity of an ideal law."⁶⁶ This figure was typically a great writer who argued for the eternal, the just, and the true. The intellectual claimed to be the bearer of a revolutionary consciousness, and therefore he or she would guide the people toward a new society. Parenthetically, the position of such a figure was separate from the lower classes. Such an intellectual could develop a theory and all lower classes would identify with the intellectual's writings. Foucault argued that this ideal figure is something of the past.

In Foucault's opinion, after World War Two and the growth of technology, the universal intellectual became

⁶⁶ Foucault, "Truth and Power" 128.

anachronistic and archaic and a new type--the specific intellectual--emerged: "The 'specific' intellectual derived from quite another figure, not the jurist or notable, but the savant or expert."⁶⁷ The development of technology created a specialization in not only manual labor but also mental labor. Knowledge became not only more compartmentalized within society but also more complex. The intellectual was recognized not for his or her general knowledge but rather for his or her disciplinary expertise. Consequently, this figure can be found in microspheres of society rather than in isolation from the world. The specific intellectual existed in the hospital, the asylum, the university, and other areas.

Perhaps the revolutionary criticisms of every sphere during May, including Sartre's, proved that the goals of intellectuals should be reconsidered. This new aim can be traced to the threefold specificity of intellectuals. They are specific first to their class and second to their own place of work. Third, and most importantly, they are specific to discursive practices in society.⁶⁸ In short, the goal of the theorist is to show the relationship between social institutions and the codes of behavior, symbols, and values that are expressed. It can be said that the theorist should be arguing not on behalf of truth but rather for the status of truth. The possibilities of self-constitution can

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid 132.

be known if the specific intellectual shows the power effects of truth, or knowledge, in society. Furthermore, the new goal of analyzing knowledge and power must be done on a daily basis. Foucault argued that "The mechanics of power in themselves . . . could only begin after 1968, that is to say on the bases of daily struggles at grass roots level [sic]."⁶⁹ On this point, Sartre and Foucault converge.

One of the advantages of Foucault's politics of intellectuals is that it emphasizes specificity and, thus, avoids the problem of ignoring certain realms of society. Whereas Sartre did not include the university and the state in his definition of change, Foucault recognized the need to change all areas of society in any revolutionary process. When asked about the significance of the state, he replied,

I don't claim at all that the State apparatus is unimportant, but . . . nothing in society will be changed if the mechanisms of power that function outside, below and alongside the State apparatuses . . . are not also changed.⁷⁰

Foucault argued for fighting at the level of the state, including voting. As he explained, "I consider that voting in itself is a form of action."⁷¹ Foucault also acknowledged the importance of the university, but he warned against limiting the struggle to this institution: "It

⁶⁹ Ibid 116.

⁷⁰ Foucault, "Body/Power," Power/Knowledge 60.

⁷¹ Michel Foucault, "Practicing Criticism," Politics, Philosophy, and Culture, ed. Lawrence Kritzman, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Routledge, 1988) 152.

isn't enough to suppress or overturn the university."⁷² Intellectuals have an important role in whatever corner of society they operate.

Foucault consequently felt that intellectuals should use their own talents within their own sphere of life as a political tactic. In other words, they can use their theoretical expertise to show the workings of discourse in social institutions. In this manner, he brought theory and practice together. In contrast to Sartre, Foucault did something entirely different with this relationship. Rather than hailing them as both necessary, as Sartre had done, Foucault defined theory as practice. He argued that

theory will never express, translate or apply a practice: it is a practice. . . . It involves a struggle against the establishment to force power and authority into the open and impair them where they are most visible and insidious.⁷³

Whether one is in the hospital, prison, or the university, one's theory would undermine the legitimation of authority. This would open up channels whereby the voice of the underprivileged classes might be heard. Thus, if intellectuals argue against the régime of truth that inhibits individual creativity, people can learn more about the various ways discourse affects one's individuality.

⁷² Michel Foucault, "Revolutionary Action: 'Until Now,'" Language, Counter Memory, Practice, ed. Donald Bouchard, trans. Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977) 224.

⁷³ "Intellectuals and Power," Telos 16 (Summer 1973): 104.

The potential problem, however, is asserting the primacy of theoretical practice. If this is done, it will perpetuate, despite its intentions to the contrary, a hierarchical distinction between mental and manual labor. If theory is given a higher status, intellectuals will simply be telling others how they are oppressed. This would result in a situation similar to the one Sartre recognized before 1968: that is, intellectuals would be acting as the "guiding lights" of the people. There subsequently might be a return of the Hegelian "unhappy consciousness" that plagued Sartre.

This predicament can be easily solved if intellectuals concentrate on how their work is performed. As Foucault argued, "The problem is not changing people's consciousnesses--or what's in their heads--but the political, economic, institutional régime of the production of truth."⁷⁴ People do not need to be told what to think, but the intellectual can research and present the workings of values, language, and symbols in society. In preparing his book Discipline and Punish, for example, Foucault attempted to determine the "discursive régime" of the prison by going directly to the institution itself. He would then have first hand experience of the prisons, and as a result he could write a better account of prison discourse. This work, then, is similar to Sartre's use of the interview within the factory. Moreover, Foucault felt that the form

⁷⁴ Foucault, "Truth and Power" 133.

of presentation is just as important as the content of theory. His description of his own intellectual work demonstrates how he avoided didactic presentations: "I consider myself more like an artisan doing a certain piece of work and offering it for consumption than a master making his slaves work."⁷⁵ Persuasion as a tactic fails because people do not want to be told "the right way" to freedom. Thus, Foucault's definition of theory as practice emphasizes that even the intellectual's sphere needs to be revolutionized. Whatever one's job, one can undertake a revolutionary practice. Hence, Foucault avoided Sartre's illusion that intellectuals should abandon their current position in society and, consequently, their intellectual endeavors.

Probably even more than before 1968, Foucault was concerned with the freedom of the individual. In the afterword to Dreyfus and Rabinow's book, Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, Foucault explained that his interest in power had always originated from the question of the subject. He tried to "create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects."⁷⁶ Foucault wanted to show the possibilities within discourse for self-constitution, the power of

⁷⁵ "A Conversation with Michel Foucault," Partisan Review 38.2 (1971): 200.

⁷⁶ Michel Foucault, "Afterword: The Subject and Power," Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982) 208.

decision, or the creative development of one's individuality. On this point, Peter Kemp's analysis falters; he goes so far as to say that "the idea of freedom has turned up in Foucault's philosophy as a condition for the resistance to power."⁷⁷ This statement implies that individuals are already free "as a condition" to resist power--a position similar to Sartre's existentialism. Kemp seems too ready to grant Foucault a place in the French philosophical tradition of radical freedom. Foucault, however, did not think individuals were inherently free to resist power and authority, but rather he wanted to define the possibilities for autonomy by showing the power of discourse.

⁷⁷ Kemp 99.

Conclusion

In retrospect, although the May revolts did not create a grand political change in France, they certainly shook French culture and society. Their impact was so agitating that Sartre tended to idealize them. He took the criticisms of authority and power to their extreme; he defined intellectual labor in a way that would create a guilty conscience for those who occupied a position of power. Foucault's reaction to May, however, was less extreme. He took into account the nature of the failure of the rebellion. As a result, he became very active, particularly in the prisons. Although Sartre's and Foucault's definitions of the intellectual diverge in many respects, they nevertheless contain complementary ideas. Sartre emphasized the need for intellectuals to descend from the ivory tower and search for different ways to occupy their time than with meticulous theory. This is good in the sense of abolishing privilege and isolation. Foucault, on the other hand, recognized the need for every sphere of society to be revolutionized. Thus, even the university is a place for change. Foucault's analysis, however, placed too much emphasis on the significance of discourse. As a result, the importance of concrete demands might be overshadowed. Another ramification of criticizing the nature of discursive power was that he became cynical about utopian and reformist goals. More importantly, and in spite of these shortcomings, both Sartre and Foucault concluded that this

new intellectual should be active in society on a daily basis. Consequently, these ideas can be viewed as a system of ethics for the modern intellectual.

This new concept of an active intellectual is significant today because the primary task of May, 1968 still remains: decision-making power must be transferred to more people in society. Since the revolts demonstrated the difficulties in developing direct democracy, social change needs to be a continual process in every institution. A seizure of state power does not constitute a final victory for social movements; it is merely a means--not an end--to transform society. The elimination of hierarchical authority can best come about by the practical necessity of each social institution rather than a grand theory of social change.

Perhaps the legacy of the May movement has been best summarized by the intellectual historian Arthur Hirsh. He argues that the most significant attribute of May was the students' "attempt to redefine politics so that it encompasses all aspects of everyday life."⁷⁸ This new definition of politics recognizes that decision-making and aesthetic expression are essential components of freedom. Furthermore, such a politics will enhance the quality of life not only for intellectuals and other privileged groups but for everyone.

⁷⁸ Arthur Hirsh, The French New Left (Boston: South End Press, 1981) 153.

Strangely enough, despite Sartre's and Foucault's proclamations of a more active and political intellectual, this new type of personage has not come into full existence in today's world. In Intellectuals and the Left in France Since 1968, Keith Reader noted the separation of intellectuals from politics and society even when the socialist François Mitterand came to power in 1981. He marveled at "the distance between the intelligentsia and, on the one hand, the 'socialist people' . . . who did flock the Bastille, on the other, the professional 'apparatchiks' in whose hands the reins of power now were."⁷⁹ In other words, the social critics continue to discuss matters of theory in a position isolated from the people. This problem has not only been prominent in France, but also in other advanced capitalist nations. Edward Said recognizes best the continued problem of intellectual life: "a precious jargon has grown up, and its formidable complexities obscure the social realities that, strange though it may seem, encourage a scholarship of 'modes of excellence' very far from daily life."⁸⁰ Intellectuals have been too wrapped up in theory to notice, first, their isolation from the public realm and second, the actual problems of authority in their own sphere of life--whether in the form of discourse or speaking for others. Unless intellectuals become more active, their

⁷⁹ Keith Reader, Intellectuals and the Left in France Since 1968 (Hong Kong: MacMillian Press LTD, 1987) 137.

⁸⁰ Edward Said, The World, the Text, and the Critic (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983) 4.

theory will function as a secure system of belief rather than as a source of constructive, critical ideas leading to social change.

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