



SYMPOSIUM

Intolerable: A Book Symposium

PERRY ZURN

American University, USA

The present symposium celebrates the release of *Intolerable: Writings from Michel Foucault and the Prisons Information Group, 1970-1980*. This groundbreaking collection documents Foucault and the GIP's efforts to expose the problem of prisons in France in the early 1970s. Marshalling public announcements, manifestos, reports, pamphlets, interventions, press releases, interviews, and roundtable discussions, it curates an unusually prescient archive of resistance. In today's political climate, marked by an ever-expanding carceral archipelago, forceful protests against police violence, and the mainstreaming of the term "prison abolition," *Intolerable* invites readers to learn from an earlier moment in time. What does it mean to think (and speak and act) in decarceral ways? Whose voices are lifted up? Whose frameworks are used and applied? What relationships is the work built upon? And what is the scholar's place (and the artist's, and the lawyer's, and the organizer's, and the prisoner's)? The GIP dramatizes endlessly innovative strategies and tactics for anticarceral activism and scholarship, and that archive is now finally available in English translation.

Symposium contributors explore what *Intolerable* contributes to ongoing conversations in prison activism, critical prison studies, and Foucault studies. Bernard Harcourt, Liat Ben-Moshe, Delio Vásquez, Sarah Tyson, Ren-Yo Hwang, Kevin Thompson, and I offer brief essays that connect the GIP archive to a range of issues, including contemporary prison uprisings, Indigenous resurgence, disability justice, critical praxis, the figure of the intellectual (and the academy), the tension between reform and abolition, and the necessity of hope. Refusing the carceral enclosures of disciplinary constraints and authorial hierarchies, contributors fashion an assemblage of interventions that multiply lines of flight from this archive to the present (and to other archives and other presents). It is the kind of archipelago that, to invoke Édouard Glissant, pits a poetics of relation against the forces of territorialization. The GIP is one model of that anti-carceral archipelagizing work. One invitation. May *Intolerable*—and this symposium that celebrates it—be yet another.

Harcourt sees the GIP archive as an invitation to critical praxis and, indeed, as a confrontation to those who would speak and write about the prison but absent themselves from the work of prison abolition. That work, Ben-Moshe argues, requires a dis-epistemology or otherwise ways of knowing which are traceable in the disability and anti-psychiatry struggles at the heart of the GIP's mobilizations. Vásquez takes the GIP as an opportunity to link critical prison studies with critical university studies, identifying the carceral tactic of "concealment" and invisibilization common to both institutions. Turning to think carcerality and colonialism, Tyson allows the recent "news" of Residential School mass graves to reverberate throughout her rereading of Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?," itself a response to one source document in the GIP archive. Heeding the GIP's call to specificity and current prisoner struggles, Hwang identifies a recent prison insurrection in St. Louis, prompted by the carceral crisis of COVID-19, as a contemporary moment of intolerability and accountability. Thompson sets out to think globally about the GIP and Foucault's intertwined but separable legacies and offers illumination on their respective relationships to reform, abolition, and problematization. Finally, Zurn, turning to letters the GIP published from H.M., a repeatedly incarcerated queer crip figure, argues that there is a hope—and indeed a prophetic imagination—at the heart of the GIP and of abolition.

As a companion to the symposium, we include an interview with Nicolas Drolc. Drolc is a documentarian who created the first film on the GIP (*Sur les toits*, 2014), as well as a second film devoted to Serge Livrozet (*La mort se mérite*, 2017), a former prisoner, writer, GIP member, and cofounder of the GIP's successor organization: the Prisoners Action Committee. Drolc's shoe-string aesthetic and anarchist philosophy make him the perfect contemporary counterpoint to the GIP. His firsthand accounts of witnessing incarceration, venturing into the Nancy archives, interviewing still-local former GIP members, developing an unbreakable bond with Serge Livrozet, and wrestling with the soullessness of the film industry bring home precisely the urgencies and intimacies he documents.

We hope readers are here unshakably gripped—as we still find ourselves—by an archive (and a moment) that has still other lives to live.

Author info

Perry Zurn
pzurn@american.edu
 Assistant Professor
 Department of Philosophy
 American University
 USA

Perry Zurn is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at American University. He researches in political philosophy, critical theory, and feminist and trans studies. He is the author of *Curiosity and Power: The Politics of Inquiry* (2021) and the co-author of *Curious Minds* (forthcoming 2022). He is also the co-editor of *Intolerable: Writings from Michel Foucault and the Prisons Information*,

1970-1980 (2021), *Curiosity Studies: A New Ecology of Knowledge* (2020), *Carceral Notebooks 12* (2017), and *Active Intolerance: Michel Foucault, the Prisons Information Group, and the Future of Abolition* (2016).