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Foucault and 1968

There is no question that the “later” Foucault is preoccupied with the lessons of 1968. He is one of those writers who are at least ambivalent about 1968, who see it as spelling the end of an older form of political action and as well as (or more than) a new beginning. Foucault’s mature writings of the mid-1970s would seem to suggest a critique of the efficacy of “revolution” and mass movements of the type exemplified by May 1968, but this is belied by statements and analyses made in the aftermath of 1968 (e.g., his debate with Maoists, his work on educational reform) which indicate a more positive stance toward 1968 as well as his later endorsement of the Iranian revolution (to me an oblique discourse about 1968). From his shorter and less celebrated writings, one can find a conception of 1968-style uprising which is both complex and subject to fluctuation, and which presents certain problems for the standard readings of *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.