

1968: A Global Perspective

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Nietzsche in France

The French academic press – and the French academy generally – witnessed a proliferation of Nietzsche studies throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. The studies coincided with the publication of the Gallimard edition of Friedrich Nietzsche, *Oeuvres philosophiques complètes* (1967); along with M. de Gandillac, Gilles Deleuze served as general editor of the complete edition and contributed an introductory essay to Tome 5: *La gai savoir*. The period and publication are book-ended, respectively, by Deleuze's *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (1962) and the 1964 Nietzsche conference at Royaumont, and Jacques Derrida's *Eperons: La styles de Nietzsche* (1977) and the 1972 Nietzsche conference at Cerisy-la-Salle. During the interim eight years, Pierre Klossowski published his contribution to the Royaumont conference – "Oubli et anamnèse dans l'expérience vécue de l'éternel retour du même" – in expanded form, under the title *Nietzsche et la cercle vicieux* (1969); Michel Foucault's Royaumont paper – "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx" – appeared in *Cahiers de Royaumont: Nietzsche* (1967), edited by Deleuze; Foucault also published "Nietzsche, Genealogie, et Histoire" (1971), and *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison* (1975), which develops themes of punishment and criminality first introduced by Nietzsche in *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (1887).

The aim of the proposed paper is to read these various, theoretical engagements of Nietzsche in the context of the politics of France in the 1960s, and specifically in the context of the event(s) of May and June 1968. Nietzsche's late works, the paper argues, serve as source material for articulating a post-imperialist, non-repressive, and non-Statist theory of politics; significantly, the "theorization" of the political becomes, through Nietzsche, real, political action. The paper develops this thesis by showing the inability of Marxism as a theory and as a political praxis to respond to the "post-modern" political event(s); "post-modern" is here an index of complexity: such an "event" is complicated by issues of performativity, historical inheritance, self-reflexivity, the pluralism of revolutionary agency, and issues of race, gender, and ethnic alterity. Given the Marxist hegemony in left politics in France after World War II, the dynamic of a paired theory and practice is familiar; the only failure of Marxism, then, is its inability to countenance the structure of the event(s) as it unfolds in Paris and the Parisian suburbs in May and June 1968. It is here that the French, philosophical reading of Nietzsche is pertinent.

Nietzsche's concerns in the late writings – *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1885) and after – with a plural, and active form of subjectivity, his insistence on radical pluralism, his antipathy toward a unified German nation-state, his vehement anti-racism and anti-sexism, and his theorization of the "event" or "experience" of eternal return are all relevant within the political and theoretical landscape of France in the 1960s. It is the aim of the proposed paper, which is part of a larger manuscript on the politics of the French reception of Nietzsche in the 1960s and 70s, to develop together the Nietzschean and socio-political aspects of mid-60s French, intellectual culture; the event(s) of May and June 1968 are by this means shown to exemplify left political theory and agency in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.