Engaging Foucault

Volume 2

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Engaging Foucault

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Edition        Conferentia
Title          Engaging Foucault (Vol. 2)
Edited by      Marjan Ivković, Gazela Pudar Draško, Srđan Prodanović
Reviewers     Ana Birešev, Predrag Krstić
Publisher     Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Belgrade
ISBN          978-86-82417-88-0

This Volume contains a collection of papers presented at the Engaging Foucault International conference which was held in Belgrade 05-07 December. The organization of the conference was supported by Heinrich Boell Foundation and Fund for an Open Society.
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Chateaubriand and Foucault: A Strange Encounter In Political Theology

Introduction

The strange encounter starts with two prosaic disclaimers. They may not be strange but they seem to be necessary. The first one concerns the concept of political theology. It is not used as a precise reference to Carl Schmitt who, following his conservative teacher Donoso Cortés, notably claimed that all concepts of political theory are secularized theological concepts (Schmitt 1985: 36).1 By political theology I do not mean that state is a secular God which would hardly fit any analytical framework informed by Foucault. The concept is not used as a reference to Ernst Kantorowicz either. It is not an homage to his study in medieval political theology, dealing with the King’s two bodies (Kantorowicz 1957). Although that book and its argument tend to be important for Foucault, especially in his Discipline and Punish where it is explicitly mentioned in the context of writing of a genealogy of the body of the condemned, it is not of importance for this comparison. The term is instead used in a vague sense of political spirituality. Political theology, proposed by an author, refers to some kind of utopian vision, explicitly stated or implied, usually energetic and emotional, that has political connotations or relevance. By political theology within this text I shall mean such projections by the two compared authors: their normative visions, eschatologies if they offer any, hopes and plans, associated with the non-places to be achieved or that are unachievable; a displacement of such motives to unexpected by-places, and the affirmation or the critique of practices that try to achieve utopian projections.

Second disclaimer is a necessary exercise in ad hominem modesty. One cannot be too small in the shadows of the vast an ever expanding Foucault industry, but reading, writing and teaching about his work for some years now, makes me more or less interpretively confident in dealing with Foucault. It is not so with Chateaubriand: this is my first paper dealing with him beyond disparate peripheral remarks. I have got to know him recently, mostly through reading of his longish memoirs—a traditionally unreliable genre of literature—which are in this particular case written by a “romantic” character who had a decent reputation of being unreliable himself. Although I feel I have mastered the basics, or at

1. More specifically, Schmitt wrote about the concepts “of the modern theory of the state”, Cortés opens his Essays on Catholicism, Liberalism and Socialism with contempt for Proudhon’s bewilderment expressed in Les confessions d’un révolutionnaire: unlike for Proudhon, it is perfectly natural for Cortés that we should stumble on theology in all our political questions.
least the things necessary for the here proposed argument, Chateaubriand’s life and work are for me still largely an uncharted territory which, I hope, I will have time to read and explore in the future. Thus, if there are serious strains, faults or omissions in the interpretation offered, they are more probably to be expected on the older historical pole of this encounter. The argument will anyway speak for itself. I believe I have not overseen something crucially important but that is anyway on readers to judge.

To compare Chateaubriand and Foucault — the theme of this essay — is something that to my knowledge has not been done by myriad of followers and critics of Foucault. The first point of this comparison is as general as it can be, which suggests it is simple and useful. If analogies and metaphors are not only stylistic ornaments but creative ways of thinking, the unusual comparisons have a good chance to shed new light on the old worlds, and even create new worlds. War is a continuation of politics in Clausewitz, while in Foucault’s thinking from the 1970s, exemplified in his debate with Chomsky, To Discipline and Punish and The Society Should Be Defended course at the Collège de France, politics becomes a continuation of war, creating an interesting conceptual frame to explore society. Similarly, a valuable perceptive prominence is gained when one author is viewed through the lenses of another, and vice-versa. It is even more so in the elusive terrain of utopianism which offers at the same time similar and radically different visions, which are best ascertained by comparison to their peers. By the means of comparison we tend to see things more clearly. In this specific case, the idea of comparison is to sharpen the picture of utopianism in Foucault which calls for a more systematic investigation. Secondly, this brings up a specific argument that will emerge out of comparison: in spite of his declared “hyperactive pessimism,” scepticism, and frequent warnings to be careful and avoid dangers, Foucault was in fact a passionate utopian thinker, focused on the body as a vessel of utopianism and risk-taking as its mode; envisioning worldly political utopias of open games of aestheticization of the self; in an uneasy political liaison with liberalism in the fundamental sense of liberties of speech, movement, conduct and human endeavour.

The essay is structured as follows. It first explains the reasons for this strange encounter. By listing and elaborating the differences and similarities between Foucault and Chateaubriand, it provides the answer to the question: Why at all this comparison makes sense unlike, let’s say, a comparison between (utopian thinking of) Karl Marx and Lady Gaga? Notwithstanding all the differences of lives, deeds, texts and styles, parallel and promising motifs will emerge justifying comparison. The second part briefly lays down a conceptual framework for the comparison, given the expected question: what are we comparing exactly? The answer draws on the typological distinction between utopias and heterotopias. The third section provides an overview of Chateaubriand’s utopianism, while the fourth does the same for Foucault, elaborating on his ideas on the utopian body, the controversial Iranian episode and his turn toward liberal utopianism paired with the hermeneutics of the self. The final section develops the theme of the two revolutions in which two authors took part each in their own way, as actors and spectators. After diagnosing that the utopianism in both authors is of the colour grey, that is, a combination of utopian and heterotopian motifs, the essay thus ends up by tackling the themes of violence and universality, important for any political theologies of utopian thinking. The specific event used to provide a modest sketch of these problems is The French Revolution.
Chateaubriand and Foucault: a not so strange encounter?

To start with the obvious: the trivia associated with the social and metaphysical categories such as class, space and time that tend to erect an insurmountable distance between people. François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848) was an aristocrat, a self-described gentilhomme, in times when aristocracy was in a historical decline. He was a man of words, but foremost a man of action: a diplomat, politician, and even a soldier, wounded in battle. He was a proto-romantic. Awaiting death in his seventies, he writes his memoirs that became a classical peace of the world’s literary heritage. Melancholy soaks the pages from the beginning, as the ocean bathes the coast of Brittany where he was born, in the port city of Saint-Malo, spending his later childhood days in the secluded chateau de Combourg (1.1.3). Michel Foucault (1926-1984), on the other hand, was a professor and a global academic star from the 20th century, an influential public intellectual but foremost a man of words, “an author,” no matter how he eschewed that position in his prefaces and theoretical elaborations. He was born into a provincial bourgeois family of good standing, as a son of a reputable surgeon—in central France, far away from the sea. On the surface, he seemed cynical in the sense of not expressing his emotions or beliefs directly on the pages of his works. In Charles Taylor’s words, if he made us believe anything, it is the fact that everything is a “sham” and there is no firm historical or metaphysical ground to stand on (Taylor 1984). Chateaubriand mostly writes as a devout believer, a catholic firmly placed within Christian paradigm and its apologetics. And Foucault? Even if his interest in the practices of the self in early Christianity and in the role of confession in forming Western subjectivity; his monkish practices of work in a Dominican library, and his early years attendance of a Jesuit college, make him very close to Christianity, he can at best be described similarly to Joyce: as a “corrupted” Jesuit pupil, agnostic and secular when it comes to dogmas and institutional religion. Perhaps this is best summed up in a sentence that was used at the very end of his 1969 The Archaeology of Knowledge: “it is quite possible that you have killed God under the weight of all that you have said; but do not think that you will make, from all that you are saying, a man who will live longer than he” (Foucault 1991: 72).

Finding similarities between the two seems a desperate task. Even their counter-enlightenment seems to be different. Indeed, there are many various counter-enlightenments. The one of Chateaubriand belongs to is an early conservative emnity to secular reason and belief in human progress. Ironically, it is exactly Voltaire’s off-shot derisive remark about the Encyclopaedia, the secular bible of the Enlightenment, as a “Babel of the sciences and reason” (Garrard 2006: 73), that sums it up. The Enlightenment is an intolerable godlessness destined to fail as the tower of Babel from the Book of Genesis. Foucault, on the other hand, did not run away from Aufklärung, but took it as an invitation for the critical ontology of ourselves. Of course, Foucault’s archaeologies chart histories of exclusion, and he finds

2. The melancholic motifs include his lonely sitting on the seashore in Brittany (1.1.4), his observing of the moon over the sea (1.1.6), and the special place of autumn among the seasons, whose scenes of fading and dying nature are secretly tied to our destinies (1.3.12). The voluminous memoirs (Chateaubriand 2000a) are divided in three parts, each subdivided in books and chapters to which the three numbers in the brackets refer in succession (in this last instance: part 1, book 3, chapter 12). I shall cite from the memoirs in this way throughout the text.

3. Cf. Il se peut bien que vous ayez tué Dieu sous le poids de tout ce que vous avez dit; mais ne pensez pas que vous ferez, de tout ce que vous dites, un homme qui vivra plus longue que lui. (Foucault 1969: 275).
parallels between his thinking and the one of the Frankfurt School, but ultimately since there might be no God, we might critically reflect on our practices as Kant has suggested.

Finally, if their personal positions, styles and beliefs seem to be disparate, the epistemic status of their Chateaubriand’s and Foucault’s discourses is different (the authors are working in different epistemes, Foucault might say). As Brian Leiter, an expert for Nietzsche, among other things, claimed: maybe Foucault is a Nietzschean, but he is a theorist that sits in the second row, not in the sense that he is a petty derivat or an unoriginal thinker, but in a sense that he is a radical nominalist (Leiter 2004). Nietzsche may substitute truth with power, and concept of language as the mirror of reality with an effective simile of a mobile army of metaphors and metonyms but he speaks of how things are. He offers his truth on man, power and the death of God. He is a naturalist and a psychologist. The same can be said for Chateaubriand, who wrote when the world was much younger and one could write naively about things as they seemingly are. We might very tentatively call him a realist in this epistemological sense. But not Foucault: he speaks of contingent historical discourses and different constellations of power, words and things: his nominalism is quite radical.

However, a parallel story might be told, one that substitutes irreconcilable differences with curious similarities of person, sensibility and style, as well as of the themes and motifs in their works. Stories of Foucault’s younger years, including self inflicted harm and turmoils of his heterodox sexuality are well known and covered in his biographies, Eri bon’s, Macey’s and Miller’s, and I will not recount them here. Likewise, Chateaubriand himself wrote vividly about the two years of violent passions that haunted him, about his solitude and meagre sleep. Unlike Foucault’s morbid posters from the ENS, Chateaubriand, still a boy, imagined an ideal woman composed of the women he saw, the portraits of ladies, classical beauties from Greek mythology, and even virgins from the churches (1, 3, 10-11). And to add yet another similarity, Chateaubriand also wrote about his failed suicide attempt to be done by a hunting rifle he stuck into his mouth (1, 3, 14), and generally described himself in early days as “a pilot without experience on the sea of tempestuous passions,” which is a description probably fitting the young Foucault.4

These comparable strong passions come out of ordinary and might be formative for the delicate characters of the authors, their later preoccupations and various layers of their work. There is one more interesting parallel in this vein, perhaps no more than a banal speculative psychologization5, that nevertheless deserves several sentences. Chateaubriand devotes considerable space in the memoirs to Lucile, fourth of his sisters who was two year older than him (1,1,3). I was surprised to find out that this relationship figures prominently in the cultural history of incest (cf. Shell 1988: 208, cf. notes 55 and 60). His sexual fantasies are indeed built around a women that is à la fois vierge et amante, a virgin and a lover at the same time (1,3,13), but this image probably owns its existence to the eponymous story of René, a short romantic novella that fuelled the fads of the early romanticism, that

4. The metaphor is worth quoting in length: Ces passions dont mon âme était surmenée, ces passions vagues encore, ressemblaient aux tempêtes de mer qui affluent de tous les points de l’horizon : pilote sans expérience, je ne savais de quel côté présenter la voile à des vents indécis (1, 3, 15).
5. It is what Foucault would, in constant search for distinction (in Bourdieu’s sense), perhaps call a “Freudianism of a very low quality” (un freudisme d’assez basse qualité) (Foucault, 2001b: 1686).
can be read as a sublimation of incestuous desire, with stark parallels to Chateaubriand’s life as depicted in his memoirs.

The plot is simple and suggestive: young hero is strangely dissatisfied with the whole world, melancholic and “full of passions”, has an intensive emotional relationship with his sister Amélie; “timid and stifled before his father,” he finds consolation in her, remembering their sweet childhood as the most beautiful experience of his life (Chateaubriand 2000b: 6, 8). As an archetypal romantic hero, he is persecuted by ennui and somewhat suicidal, unable to resolve his psychological troubles constructively. His sister Amélie ultimately leaves for the convent to become a nun. Understandably, René is desperate. She, who saw his first feelings, reminds him it is easy to die, but that he has to live, to find a beautiful woman, an embodiment of pure love and innocence completely dedicated to him, who will substitute her.\(^6\) Amélie, once again understandably, loses conscience during the ritual of ordination and is overtaken by hard fever. She rocked him in his cradle, often they “slept together,” but now she is to spend her life in the cold sanctuary; ultimately “the religion triumphs” (Chateaubriand 2000b: 14, 16). The sister in the end dies in the convent, a place where she attempted to overcome her “criminal passion” (criminelle passion) more or less constructively, in Christianly love and prayers, taking care of the sick nuns. René can only exclaim in resignation how joys of religion are grand and terrible at the same time.\(^7\) He leaves for the new world where he is killed, however appearing as a peripheral character in the story of Atala to be recounted in the section about Chateaubriand’s utopianism.

According to biographies and to biographic fiction, Foucault also had a strict father with whom he did not fare well; whose name he has dropped, becoming only Michel instead of Paul-Michel but, unlike Chateaubriand and his characters, he had “no religion to triumph”. Besides, he had a slightly older sister, Francine, born in 1925. Unable to separate from her, he stubbornly followed her to school, where place was found for him to sit in the back of the class, a motif that gained prominence in the psychoanalytical readings of his life as a case, fuelled by Hervé Guibert’s terrible dioramas. In Miller’s words: “Foucault was struck by something apparently sexual, about his relationship to his sister: both Bersani and Defert have also told me that a personal revelation about his relation with his sister was crucial for Foucault” (Miller 2000: 438),\(^8\) I do not wish to develop this motif any further, nor speculate about the exact nature of the possibly incestuous relations and psychoanalytical family puzzles split by a more than a century and a half, but I feel that it should have been mentioned at least as an interesting coincidence and a pretext to recount a story about René which involves both a heterotopia of a convent, and the bitterness of other world utopias in perspective of unrealized and probably unrealizable worldly passions. The concepts of utopia and heterotopia will be further explained in the next section.

Wherever it might come from, both Chateaubriand and Foucault were extremely prolific writers and accomplished stylists. Chateaubriand’s on-and-off relationship with Napoleon who admired his The Genius of Christianity and found it politically useful involved the following praise by the “world spirit on horseback”: “Chateaubriand has by nature received

\(^{6}\) The finale has a delicate phrasing of René literally believing he found a sister again: \textit{Elle serait tout amour, tout innocence devant toi : tu croirais retrouver une soeur} (Chateaubriand 2000b: 13).

\(^{7}\) \textit{O joies de la religion, que vous êtes grandes, mais que vous êtes terribles!} (Chateaubriand 2000b: 16)

\(^{8}\) Daniel Defert is Foucault’s lifelong partner while Leo Bersani is James Miller’s friend, literary theorist, professor of French, and the author of the collection of essays Is Rectum a Grave?
the sacred fire: his works witness to that. His style is not that of Racine, but of a prophet.”9 This fire so impressed Charles White, Chateaubriand’s American translator, who in 1856 described his style as a “combination of impressive eloquence, descriptive power, and pathetic sentiment,” further quoting an eulogy concerning Chateaubriand’s style from J. L. Balmes’ Protestantism and Catholicity Compared: “in surpassing language he points out to astonished men the mysterious golden chain that connects the heavens and the earth” (White 1976: 8, 10).

Although some of the more conservative critics were irritated by his uncertain neologisms (cf. Sournia 1977), if anything was widely admitted to Foucault, from his contested dissertation on madness to the last of his works, is that he wrote nicely; he had le talent d’un poète, in a lucky phrase employed in the title of one of the chapters in Eribon’s biography. And the style is the man himself, as Comte de Buffon stated. The style also suggests a certain sensibility, perhaps shared by both authors, described by the following account. Antun Gustav Matoš, Croatian belle époque choleric novelist, recounts how he had received a book from Édouard Champion—the memoirs of certain Julien, who was Chateaubriand’s valet de chambre. These counter-memoirs juxtaposed to Chateaubriand’s have a similar function and effect as would the Sancho Pansa’s memoirs to the perspective of Don Quixote, memorably lost in a renaissance épistémé in the pages of Foucault’s Les mots et les choses. It is, in other words, a bashing of a romantic from the point of view of a realist, that returns him down to earth. In his Literary Remarks from 1908, Matoš puts it like this: judging on the basis of the account by Julien, it seems that Chateaubriand “makes things up—to put it shortly—lies,” and that he is “as all big romantics, a grand phraser, who cares more for the effect than for the truth” (Ujević 1955: 64).10

Furthermore, Foucault and Chateaubriand changed their positions, political, authorial and aesthetic in a pattern that is not dissimilar. They were both arguably brilliant and unreliable, and manifested a combination of scepticism and utopianism. Foucault: from the Communist Party membership and Stalin as a theoretical reference to not only descriptive lectures on neoliberalism; from Mental Illness and Personality to The Care of the Self. Chateaubriand: from royalism, via Napoleon, against Napoleon (compared to Nero), back to royalism, to constitutionalism, freedom of expression, and the criticism of the July Monarchy; from The Essay on Revolutions to The Memoirs Beyond the Grave. Scepticism, rightly diagnosed by Veyne as one of Foucault’s defining traits, can perhaps find a religious parallel in Chateaubriand’s “Jobian despair” (Pesce 2014: 124). In a comparable shibboleth of political events, that worked as trial of their characters and induced the change in their positions—a theme I unfortunately don’t have space to develop here—several motives and themes emerge that are promising for comparison. Both Chateaubriand and Foucault, separated by distance of position, space and time, in different time and in different roles were witnesses of revolutions and wrote on them, on the events of par excellence utopian energy or at least utopian proclamation: the French (Bourgeois) Revolution and the Iranian Islamic Revolution, to which we will return in the last sections. They shared a set of scholarly interests and competences. Chateaubriand was extremely versed in Classical Antiq-

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9. According to emperor’s memoirs rendered by, among others, his general comte de Montholon, who accompanied him to exile on Saint Helena: Châteaubriant a reçu de la nature le feu sacré: ses ouvrages l’attestent. Son style n’est pas celui de Racine, c’est celui du Prophète (Montholon 1824: 248).

10. Another interesting coincidence in this context is that Chateaubriand’s 1811 Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem is scrutinized by the same Sournia who was highly critical of Foucault (cf. Sournia 1968).
uity, Foucault’s preoccupation from his last “phase”. “His knowledge of history and classical literature is equalled only by his intimate acquaintance with the early annals of the church, and the fathers of the Catholic faith,” writes Sir Archibald Alison, a conservative historian in an essay on Chateaubriand, lauding his writing skills (Alison 1850: 40). “[T]he most perfect living master of their [French, KP] language,” even if he is “a bigoted Catholic” (Alison 1850: 4, 16). If the second part cannot apply to Foucault in any of the possible worlds, the first part, at least as an utter overstatement, hints to a right direction.

Beyond that, I shall stress two more things. Both authors were travellers, globetrotters one might say, certainly not Kantian sedentary spirits with the problem of ascending heartbeat when chariot exits the tranquil Prussian borough. Ships and the sea were their common theme that exemplifies this. J’ai traversé plusieurs fois les mers, writes Chateaubriand about his maritime travels in the general preface of his works from 1826 (1858: 1). And in Foucault, it is a partly allegorical ship of fools that evokes tragic allure of Bosch’s pictures, floating on the abyss of madness, on beautiful and elusive water from Tarkovsky’s Nostalgia. It is also morceau flottant d’espace, a floating piece of space with which Foucault ends his text on heterotopias, a place of dreams: Le navire, c’est l’hétérotopie par excellence. Dans les civilisations sans bateaux les rêves se tarissent, l’espionnage y remplace l’aventure, et la police, les corsaires (Foucault 2001a: 1581). And both authors were fascinated by death. “When the mysteries of life are at an end, those of death commence,” concluded Chateaubriand his memoirs. Death—roaming on Foucault’s pages from the opening of The Birth of the Clinic and the ending of The Archaeology of Knowledge, through omnipresent de Sade, Pierre Riviè, and the torture of Damiens from To Discipline and Punish, to the meleete thanatou of Stoics dealing with care of the self—is a recurrent theme, explored in detail in Miller’s controversial biography, not only a tendentious reading of an American sensationalist biographer, as some understandably insisted, but probably a single most important motive in an “examined life”. This is at least a promising start, but a conceptual clarification is needed, before the exploration of utopias offered in their works.

**Typologizing utopia: non-places and other places compared**

What are we searching for exactly? The concept of utopia varies. It can imply a political messianism or a religious prophecy, or be secular in the sense of a rational plan. Concrete versions may emphasize alternative time in a fantastic narrative (u-cronias), or exactly the place (u-topias), but often utopias will involve both. While in this area, of “utopology” and “heterotopology,” an exact science involving measurement on the trail of Lord Kelvin would not have much sense, a brief conceptual elaboration and a taxonomic exercise is in order, to achieve minimal clarity of thinking and comparison.\(^\text{11}\)

I rely here on Johnson’s summary distinction of differences between utopia and heterotopia, building on Ruth Levitas (Johnson 2012: 17). It is a simple operation of sketching ideal types consisting from five opposed characteristics that serve to see both utopias and het-

\(^{11}\) I shall do it without any ambition to enter into the philosophy of utopia, a developed field on its own where Foucault is dismissed (Stillman 2001: 23-24) as the one who “looks at the placid surface” (which could well be description of his method as he himself saw it in the late 1960s).
erotopias more distinctly. Its purpose is to highlight the extreme points on the continuum of dimensions for comparison and open space for their possible combinations, rather than to entrench opposing camps in an exclusive binary schema. First, utopias are holistic, they offer the whole picture, and intend for the complete change of a system. Heterotopias are fragmentary, they refer to parts or appear in parts of something; they are fragments, fortunately described as “utopian debris” (Johnson 2012: 17). Second, utopias are imaginary, other places, fantastic and by definition opposed to reality, while heterotopias are concrete, considerably pedestrian other places, more strange and simple displacements than grandiose other worlds. Third, utopias are highly normative, presupposing goals and ideals to be achieved while heterotopias are more value-free, outlandish places than desirable shambalas. Thus, fourth, utopias are prescribed, by grammar or the desirability of their content, while heterotopias can be described more neutrally. Fifth, both utopias and heterotopias can be anchored in the present, but according to Johnson, utopias are in this ideal distinction to be thought as future oriented while heterotopias might be placed in the past, although, pace history, both Platonic philosophy and speculations on primitive communism might suggest otherwise.

These five provisory distinctions are a good preparation for a definition. To quote Levitas, who reminds of “Thomas More’s original pun – eutopos/outopos combined as utopia, hence the good place which is no place”: “Utopias, then, are blue-prints of the good (or even perfect) society, imagined elsewhere and intended as prescriptions for the near future. They are intrinsically linked to the concerns and assumptions of modernity” (Levitas 2003: 3). On the other hand, heterotopias are, in Foucault’s words, not opposite totalizing schemes, but real other places within society that, paradoxically, contradict it: des lieux réels, des lieux effectifs, des lieux qui ont dessinés dans l’institution même de la société, et qui sont des sortes de contre-emplacements, sortes d’utopies effectivement réalisées dans lesquelles les emplacements réels, tous les autres emplacements réels que l’on peut trouver à l’intérieur de la culture sont à la fois représentés, contestés et inversés, des sortes de lieux qui sont hors de tous les lieux, bien que pourtant ils soient effectivement localizable (Foucault 2001a: 1574-1575).

Very generally, this framework serves a simple function within this paper. I will not be too explicit with it, for example by fitting the narrative from the next two sections into procrustean tables, but having these distinctions in mind, a reader will probably find more sense in what I am writing. Principally, it will help to show that neither Foucault’s, nor Chateaubriand’s ideas fit clearly into the extreme boxes of ideal utopias and heterotopias. However, the surprise comes from different directions since the stereotypes about two authors might be different. While at least some would expect Foucault to fall neatly into a heterotopian square, it will be shown that he is much more of an utopian thinker. Conversely, Chateaubriand is not only an author of otherworldly projections of heaven to soothe the earthly despair but a creator of heterotopias, mostly associated with the new world of tribes and colonies to which he travelled, still a part of this one (since this earth is, in general, more or less opposed to heavens). A strange encounter between a devout Christian and a cynic, who coldly portrayed heterotopias, which could in, David Harvey’s words, be either banal or dangerous, piling together frivolous Disneyland and deadly concentration camps?

Instead of silent ships passing each other in the fog, we will have a much more cordial encounter finding a common ground—a not so strange encounter between a romantic sug-
gesting concrete utopias in the present instead of holistic imaginations of heavenly bliss, and a more of a Cynic than a cynic, if we follow a language game offered by Sloterdijk; an utopian spirit imagining a labile picture of aesthetic projects of the bodies at risk within liberal framework, instead of cold archaeologist that digs up fragments of the times lost.

Chateaubriand’s utopianism; A Christian transcendence?

At first, it seems that Chateaubriand’s utopianism, that can be constructed on the basis of his memoirs, stories, and Christian apologetics—vitriolic pamphlets of the day can perhaps be put aside in this exercise—is one of simple Catholicism. It is the political theology that aims for the other worlds, waits for the Judgment day, and leaves worldly things to the emperors, states (and the Pope). More careful reading, however, will show elements of heterotopianism, as well as understanding of Christianity as a transformative force on this world.

Due to its possibly personal layer of meaning, the plot of René has already been presented in the context of psychological speculations preparing the comparison. Forbidden love and death of the protagonists perhaps suggest specific enjoyment of intensive emotions, but sorrow and spleen make turn it into a melodramatic version of Ecclesiastes. Everything falls apart, and, since nothing is stable in this world, salvation is to be sought elsewhere. René’s romantic destiny is just a poignant illustration of the general logic on which he ruminates while he roams. World is a “tempestuous ocean” marked by “force of nature and weakness of man”: “a leaf of grass often pierces the toughest marble of this tombs, which all those dead, however powerful, will never lift” (Chateaubriand 2000b: 7). Convent as a refuge is a thin descriptive heterotopias. It involves faith and utopian energies, managing of space, time and prayers, but it is not very promising either as a vehicle to firmly ground the interpretation of Chateaubriand’s worldly utopianism.

Much more is offered in The Genius of Christianity and Atala. The Genius, a monumental work, is it to be left aside here because one cannot do justice to it in a small heterotopian space of a short essay. However, suffice it to say that is book with heterotopian elements in the sense of the above distinction for the simple reason: its whole structure and content, four parts divided each into six books, defend Christianity as a changing force in this world. As for Mario Vargas Llosa’s Don Rigoberto, according to whose peculiar understanding Catholicism has positive externalities in the sphere of sexuality, offering special pleasures as—to think with Foucault against Foucault—a productive force. Catholic faith professed by Chateaubriand, and Christianity more generally, are for him a real world utopia. Not only its doctrine, dogmas, sacraments and variety of miracles and institutes, be it virginity or

12. As in Chateaubriand’s account, Don Rigoberto’s Catholicism goes with “beautiful cathedrals, rituals, liturgies, ceremonies, representations, iconographies, music”, but also with “inquisitor’s flames and pincers,” which are strangely productive, according to practical insights of this secluded mild pervert: “(...) without (...) prohibitions, sins, and moral fulminations, desires—especially sexual desire—would not have achieved the refinement they have reached at certain times. Consequently (...) I affirm that people make love much better in religious countries than in secular ones (better in Ireland than in England, in Poland than in Denmark), better in Catholic countries than in Protestant ones (better in Spain and Italy than in Germany or Sweden), and that women who have been educated in nuns’ academies are a thousand times more imaginative, bold and delicate than those who have been have studies in secular schools (...)” (Vargas Llosa 1999: 115-116).
marriage, but its poetic force and influence on arts is defended. Moreover, Christianity is the force that transmuted morals. In Foucault’s perspective, occidental subjectivity was formed by confession. Similarly, in Chateaubriand’s opinion Christianity changed the world in a profound way, changing the very “bases of morals”: Chez les anciens, par exemple, l’humilité passait pour bassesse, et l’orgueil pour grandeur : chez les chrétiens, au contraire, l’orgueil est le premier de vices, et l’humilité une des premières vertus. Cette seule transmutation de principes montre la nature sous un jour nouveau, et nous devons découvrir dans les passions des rapports que les anciens n’y voyaient pas (Chateaubriand 2014: 235). Christianity has changed aesthetics, moral and even human nature where it operated (a theme that received a specific twist in Nietzsche). The title of the last chapter of the last book of the last part of The Genius announces a counterfactual conditional: “What would be the state of society today, if Christianity had not appeared on this earth?” For Chateaubriand the answer is to be found along the lines of a catastrophic dystopia of barbarity. Christianity for him worked as a real world utopia, with concrete and positive influence on the history of the Western civilization. He is categorical in his opinion that le christianisme a sauvé la société d’une destruction totale (Chateaubriand 2014: 634).

Atala, Chateaubriand’s preparation for The Genius of Christianity, a romantic novella that works on amplifying love and emotions by obstructing their realization and happy ending, similarly to Cameron’s Titanic, is worth a closer look because its embodies Chateaubriand’s paradoxical position of an utopian heterotopianism and heterotopian utopianism. It displays Christianity as a transformative force, especially on other places (colonies) where it constructs yet other places (Kingdoms of Christ). In the following few passages I will recount its plot and interpret it, thus concluding this section.

Chactas, is an old Indian who accepted Christianity. He recounts his story to René, our tragic character from the eponymous novella. Chactas fell in love with Atala who also fell in love with him, but, unfortunately, she has given a wow of chastity to her mother, making their love more intense, beautiful and tragic. They ran together from their brutal pursuers—Atala’s father Simagan who sentenced Chactas to burn on a stick. They are saved by providence working through Father Aubry, probably a Jesuit missionary. Aubry’s hands are mutilated, he was tortured but he hates no one. He loves others and the world even more, preparing for death and praising God in his hermitage. Christ died for all, pour le Juif et le gentil, he explains, and his blood pays for the sins of all humankind (Chateaubriand 2000c: 29). A Christian should replicate his example humbly with small deeds. Father Aubry, “saint hermit,” went further and managed to create a Christian heterotopia by successfully preaching to the Indians who accepted Christianity. Chactas was curious comment il gouvernerait ses enfants, and he responded:

Je ne leur ai donné aucune loi ; je leur ai seulement enseigné à s’aimer, à prier Dieu et à espérer une meilleure vie : toutes les lois du monde sont là-dedans. Vous voyez au milieu du village une cabane plus grande que les autres : elle sert de chapelle dans la saison des pluies. On s’y assemble soir et matin pour louer le Seigneur, et quand je suis absent, c’est un vieillard qui fait la prière, car la vieillesse est, comme la maternité, une espèce de sacerdoce. Ensuite on va travailler dans les champs, et si les propriétés sont divisées, afin que chacun puisse apprendre l’économie sociale, les moissins sont déposées dans des greniers communs, pour maintenir la charité fraternelle. Quatre vieillards distribuent avec égalité le produit du labour. Ajoutez à cela des cérémonies religieuses, beaucoup
de cantiques; la croix où j’ai célébré les mystères, l’ormeau sous lequel je prêche dans les bons jours, nos tombeaux tout près de nos champs de blé, nos fleuves, où je plonge les petits enfants et les saints Jean de cette nouvelle Béthanie, vous aurez une idée, complète de ce royaume de Jésus–Christ.

(Chateaubriand 2000c: 34).

It is a community with no repressive laws: only love and prayers, a hut as a church, a new Bethany, a small kingdom of Christ. It is also a heterotopia similar to Foucault’s evocation of Jésuits du Paraguay from the essay on heterotopias, that is easily associated with The Mission, a 1986 Roland Joffé film with Jeremy Irons as Father Gabriel, who preaches to Guarani Indians, successfully establishing a Jesuit mission above the waterfall, playing his oboe. But Christianity is also intimately engaged with death as it is shown in the same film where violent Mendoza (played by de Niro), who found his redemption, is killed by military force, as well as Father Gabriel, carrying a monstrance in a procession with his peaceful converted Guarani. This is a world of pain and decay. Everyone is suffering, in hut and in palace: queens cry as the simple women (Chateaubriand 2000c: 38). Adam and Eve were perfect and did not last, reminds Aubry: a marriage of those in love often brings poverty and contempt. He preaches that nothing is lost in this world, which is full of pain, social evils and suffering. The fact of death is inexorable and the grave is final destiny in this valley of sorrow. For a moment we can imagine Chateaubriand’s remnants buried back on the Grand Bé near Saint-Malo, in a tomb looking at the sea and surrounded by tide, while the resigned lamentation from Ecclesiastes is evoked by Aubry (ô vanité des vanités): the truth of earthly love lies with the maggots of the coffin (Chateaubriand, 2000c: 39).

No wonder that Atala takes poison and dies in chastity. She asks Chactas if he will accept Christian faith and he promises Atala that he will. She dies and a mystical moment ensues.13 In an epilogue, the narrator, “voyager to the countries far away” (Chateaubriand 2000c: 45), sees an Indian mother mourning for her dead child. According to the Indian custom, she leaves the body to dry on the branches of trees—a maple with red flowers, serving as a natural perfumed mausoleum for the body. It turns out that she is the daughter of René, European whom Chactas adopted. She recounts how father Aubry was killed by Cherokees, praying for his torturers, so that “some of them, impressed by such a death, have become Christians”. Near the very end, Chactas laments in an ontological key, essentializing pain as the defining moment of human existence: Ainsi passe sur la terre tout ce qui fut bon, vertueux, sensible ! Homme, tu n’es qu’un songe rapide, un rêve douloureux ; tu n’existes que par le malheur ; tu n’es quelque chose que par la tristesse de ton âme et l’éternelle mélancolie de ta pensée ! (Chateaubriand 2000c: 47).

To sum up this section: in Chateaubriand, worldly utopias, utopias with heterotopian elements, are present, and Christianity is an educating utopian force. However, its ultimate truth within this world, a vanity fair from the Ecclesiastes, is death. Is Foucault’s utopianism that different?

13. Chactas recounts nothing less than a grandiose theophany in the presence of Father Aubry and Atala’s corpse: une force surnaturelle me contraint de tomber à genoux et m’incline la tête au pied du lit d’Atala. (...) La grotte parut soudain illuminée ; on entendit dans les airs les paroles des anges et les frémissements des harpes célestes, et, lorsque le solitaire tira le vase sacré de son tabernacle, je crus voir Dieu lui-même sortir du flanc de la montagne (Chateaubriand 2000c: 41).
As almost everything is contested, including the declarations and professions of faith made by author's themselves. So is perhaps the fact that Foucault owns much to Nietzsche, and at least something to Heidegger. Especially to Nietzsche. Can a Nietzschean be a utopian thinker, if he is not interested in utopias associated with the releasing of the will to power against the slave morality of the meek? There is one aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy that is especially important here and serves Foucault to develop his own utopian thinking. It is the focus on the body, the Nietzschean *Leib* and its historical taming. It is not only important for Foucauldian genealogies of the Western soul, linked to the exclusion of madness, birth of the human sciences, the carceral system and *scientia sexualis*, where body is historically disciplined, produced into a specific subject, and its dispositions changed by historical layers of discourse. The body is also a utopian vessel. Remarks from Eribon’s biography and Veyne’s memories of Foucault show a man who, although an intellectual, at the most basic level linked courage to the body, to physical braveness, and who did not subscribe to the stereotype of body versus soul, a ghost in the machine of Cartesianism, or a ghost in the shell of Japanese mangas.

That is the starting point of this section. It will build on a bit more obscure Foucault's text on the utopian body and an interview on de Sade and cinematography in which Foucault seeks to go beyond Sade as a “sergeant of sex”. Text on heterotopias is another expected morsel, already built into this mosaic. I will test it as a tentative bridge from body to the social element of Foucault’s utopianism: Foucault’s reflections on collective action and liberalism, and his ideas on hermeneutics, aesthetics and politics of the self, built on the basis of exegesis and commentary of the texts from the Classical antiquity.

The first relevant series of Foucault’s utopian thoughts date to the second half of the sixties defined by his beautiful and strongly contested masterpiece *Les mots et les choses*. Like Borges stories on the Library and the Lottery of Babel, it helps us think about the other places. It tantalizes us with unfamiliar categorizations and the uncertain promises of other worlds. Not surprisingly, it begins with a bizarre categorization offered by a certain Celestial Encyclopaedia of animals, rendered within Borges’ story on the analytical language of John Wilkins that coins words phonetically as a system of codes for the hierarchy of (ultimately: arbitrary and baroque) set of categories to make sense of the world.

This phase offers two texts, on heterotopias (*Les Hétérotopies*) and on the utopian body (*Le corps utopique*), that were not authorized by Foucault for publishing in written form. They were published only after his death, but both were made public since they were broadcasted as a radio lectures on 7th and 21st December 1966, while the much better known text on heterotopias was developed into a lecture *On other spaces (Des espaces autres)* held on March 14th 1967 (cf. Foucault 2009).

The text on the utopian body is crucial, not because it is so revealing in the sense of peculiar infantile fantasies (the author is prince charming and “all the pretty boys may turn nasty and hairy as bears”), but as revealing his early focus on the Nietzschean theme explored in *Discipline and Punish*, of the body imprisoned by disciplined soul, the body as a theoretical...
nexus for his utopian projections. The text begins as a simple reverie. The author is not bound by an ugly body in which he wakes up every day and in which he will rot like in a coffin, but instead has a body without body, a body that travels at the speed of light, a body of superhero which does not grow old and in which all wounds are miraculously healed. It is a land of fairy tales, sexual of course, of visibility at will: “Utopia is a place outside of all places, but it is a place where I will have a body without body, a body that will be beautiful, limpid, transparent, luminous, speedy, colossal in its power, infinite in its duration. Untethered, invisible, protected—always transfigured. It may very well be that the first utopia, the one most deeply rooted in the hearts of men, is precisely the utopia of an incorporeal body” (Foucault 2006: 229).

But then the story changes. It is turned upside down by the introduction of the mummies and Mycenaean golden masks, statues and the cities of the dead, culminating with “the most obstinate, the most powerful of those utopias with which we erase the sad topology of the body” – “the great myth of the soul” (Foucault 2006: 230). Foucault concludes that it was wrong to chart utopias without the body. Lines in the genre of the phenomenology of bodily experience ensue, the body that is visible and captured but also a vessel of pleasure: it is felt under fingers, it is necessary for making love, an experience that is only possible with the body. The reality of body here and now seems to erase even Foucault’s ostensible obsession with death: “There’s no need for a soul, nor a death, for me to be both transparent and opaque, visible and invisible, life and thing. For me to be a utopia, it is enough that I be a body”; body does not oppose itself to utopia, on the contrary, in Foucault’s opinion: “the human body is the principal actor in all utopias” (Foucault 2006: 231).

The bodily experiments as a utopian practice are intimately connected with its enjoyment. There is a sexual element to it, not necessarily in a narrow “genital-oriented” sense (Plant 2007: 535), and the whole citadel of private utopias can be built around it. Miller’s interpretation of the life of Foucault as the last philosopher after Nietzsche and the literature on Foucault and sadomasochism are an important reference here that I won’t develop due to the shortage of space and the fact they are reasonably well known, as well as the ethical controversies surrounding Foucault’s comments on sadomasochism. One revealing vignette will suffice. There is a telling phrase from an interview with Foucault about the difficulties of transferring de Sade to the cinematic format. According to the phase (“disciplinary power”) in which Foucault was then immersed, disciplinary interpretation of Sade as a figure that develops eroticism proper to the disciplinary society, while just a while ago his novels signalled, or at least served as a handy symbol of the epistemological shattering of the Classical age. There Foucault signals how, in his opinion, we should transcend Sade, and in that sense he wants to develop un érotisme non disciplinaire: celui du corps à l’état volatil et diffus, avec ses rencontres de hasard et ses plaisirs sans calcul (Foucault 2001b: 1690). The focus is again on the body, a volatile and diffuse body, taking risk in chance encounters and enjoying pleasures without calculation.

How to make peace between these loosely sexualized bodily visions and a collective utopianism? Can we imagine or point our finger to other place organized to fit this loose picture of utopian bodies? The text on heterotopias offers tentative principles for a heterotopology. This means it provides a taxonomic sketch of typical characteristics of places that are not like utopias, i.e. are not fondamentalement essentiellement irréels, and correspond to the above listed characteristics summarized by Johnson. Those who offer some utopian ele-
ments—beyond mirror, which is the combination of utopia ("I am not there") and heterotopia ("it is there")—bring Foucault closer to Chateaubriand’s Christian communities of converted Indians, but also sound a bit disciplinary, like de Sade Foucault would like to transcend: although Foucault in the 1960s seems bewildered by these historical colonies merveilleuses which offer an example of des autres lieux absolument parfaits, life in them is meticulously regulated, organized by ringing bells and taking place in the settlement following the geography of the cross (Foucault 2001a: 1580). People wake up, work, eat, and go to sleep in the same time, which sounds like a prison, and not like a successful experimental orgy, Sadean or other. To develop a less idiosyncratic utopianism we might, for starters, go to Foucault of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Namely, it seems obvious that Foucault’s Nietzschean search into the historicity of the subject has a utopian motivation. In the last years of his work, he turned back to the subject, but did not abandon the body. It was a conceptual discovery of the techniques of the self, along with disciplinary techniques he discussed earlier, that sometimes define heterotopias such as asylums, prisons, and missionary colonies. Foucault explains his turn with the following words:

“I became more and more aware that there is in all societies, I think, in all societies whatever they are, another type of techniques: techniques which permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on. Let’s call this kind of techniques a techniques or technology of the self”.

(Foucault 1993: 203)

The utopian politics by Foucault is to be sought in the development and socialization of this moment, which is necessarily posited as a culture, even if we speak about the asheness of a hermit facing the tradition and discourses of his peers. From the late 1970s until his death, this motif paradoxically becomes more collective and individual at the same time. Concerning Foucault’s Iranian episode and his early treatment of neoliberalism, before it became a general anathema of the Left, I rely here on an excellent study by Beaulieu who claims that “[t]he search for a ‘liberal Utopia’ was one of the later Foucault’s preoccupations” (Beaulieu 2010: 811). It is important because Foucault, as on the spot journalist reporting and reflecting on the events, was impressed by revolutionary movement as a moment of political spirituality. It was his audacious attempt to understand others, “even at the risk of misunderstanding” (McCall 2013: 50). “Horror” of the repression that ensued by the “bloody government of an integrist clergy”, as he wrote for Le Monde in May 1979, did not in his eyes delegitimize the promising “intoxication” of the revolutionary moment as such, and its rediscovery of the spiritual knowledge forgotten in the West on which Foucault insisted in his last Collège de France lectures.

Even if it is for more than few reasons too much to suggest that Khomeini was in any way to Foucault what Hitler was to Heidegger (cf. Beaulieu 2010: 805), Beaulieu’s reading of Foucault’s lectures on liberal governmentality as an attempt of “Khomeinization of the

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15. This turn to liberalism paired with the hermeneutics of the self, however, does not mean Foucault abandons collective political action (McCall 2013: 31-32).
Shah,” that ensued as a sobering up after Iran, is accurate: “By introducing a spiritual dimension into liberalism, the later Foucault’s ethics combine the best of the two worlds he saw in action during the Iranian uprising” (Beaulieu 2010: 811). A precise timetable in Beaulieu’s article shows how moments of the Iranian episode intertwine with Foucault’s thoughts on enlightenment, his essay on Kant and his Collège de France lectures after the 1977 sabbatical (Beaulieu 2010: 802). Beaulieu’s argument is that Foucault was impressed by political spirituality in Iran and disappointed with its outcome. He thus combined the idea of a spiritual revolution with Kantian motifs and liberalism:

“What followed in his work must be considered a long explanation of the meaning of a spiritual revolution. In that sense, his later ethics, which put the Greco-Roman and medieval spiritual exercises at the fore, are a way of overcoming the romantic perspective he had adopted earlier: there is no radical Other who will save us, but we can find resources for a change within the western tradition. This is the first major self-critique that Foucault made of his interpretation of the Iranian uprising. The second deals with his negative assessment of liberal tradition. Foucault realized quickly that the liberal environment is perhaps not so bad after all”

(Beaulieu 2010: 806)

Spirituality as something that is lost—as exemplified by one of his interpretations of Faust as a mourning for the lost spiritual knowledge—is certainly something that preoccupied Foucault in his last phase, dealing with the Stoics and the Cynics whose search for truth was opposed to the platonic figures, in a sense that a bios kunikos as manifestation of truth is not a bios theoretikos of a mathematician or a scientist. It is, in fact, an old motive present in Foucault at least from his first, unabashedly Nietzschean, Collège de France course on The Will to Know: it is derived from the understanding of truth as a trial of the subject (l’épreuve) opposed to the understanding of truth as research of the facts (l’enquête). A battle in the present, instead of a sterile investigation in the past, was at the same time an understanding of truth and a juridical form that is today mostly an anachronism, or present as the battle of champions in the bestsellers of the fantasy genre such as The Game of Thrones. This understanding of truth as a test forms the basis of Foucault’s utopian ethics.

Even if that motif is much older than one might infer from reading Beaulieu, we may agree with his account as a more or less fair logical synthesis of politics and ethics in the later Foucault. Foucault’s utopianism of, as we have seen, the body that takes risks, makes love, and employs techniques of the self, was integrated into a liberal framework which allows subjects to, perhaps collectively, search for the forgotten knowledge, for the lost secular spirituality in the sense of the care of the self.

It may be a distasteful reflection when made with normative overtones, at least from certain class positions far from insecurity and precarious work, but liberalism seriously taken is government of risk. Historically, in Foucault’s account, frameworks of biopolitics and governmentality suggest a riskophobia of calculation, which is, however, combined with ris-kophilía on the level of the self (Beaulieu 2010: 809). Liberalism, not in the narrowly economical sense of free enterprise and its ideology, thus seems congruent with Foucault’s courage of truth, authentic free speech of a parrhesiast. “In the midst of his 14 March 1979 lecture (BB), Foucault made a unique, surprising and also very significant statement about Utopia: ‘(...)Liberalism also needs a Utopia. It is our task to create liberal
Utopias.’ [AB’s translation]” (Beaulieu 2010: 812) Maybe this should not be taken to far, since it comes amidst of lecturing on Hayek, and Foucault’s Collège de France courses belong to the genre of historical hermeneutics, not being normative in an overt way. Furthermore, perhaps there is an interesting paradox in the connection of parrhesia with some kind of oppression or domination (there should be a king in order for someone to exclaim that he is naked), but for the purposes of this essay, we may envisage some kind of open game of collective enkratiea, rule over the self, and liberal government of others paired with risk, “a conduct of conduct” as an approximation of Foucault’s secular utopia on this earth.

We could sum up this section as follows. Transformation of the self and the others starting from the body as the vessel of utopianism, is a theme that defined Foucault’s work and lectures, be it understanding of sexual ethics of Classical Antiquity or the relation of philosophy and politics in Plato: it is both utopian and heterotopian, it belongs to the future and the past, it is imaginative and fragmentary. It works on this earth as does Chateaubriand’s Christianity, but with the shadow of death transfigured to the enticing shadow of risk. Maybe it was useless to revolt from the point of history, but not from the utopian perspective of testing and building of the self and the others. For Foucault it was the risk worth taking.

In the way of conclusion: utopias and revolutions

As far as one can speak of Foucault’s affirmation of liberalism, it can perhaps be linked to Chateaubriand’s adherence to constitutional liberalism during the Bourbon Restoration, in one more parallel between the two volatile spirits. However, a more promising starting point in this last section, after we have glimpsed at the “Foucault and the Iranian Revolution” episode, is to check how does Chateaubriand see the revolution that has turned his life upside down? He certainly does not take it with a Žižekian enthusiasm.16 He takes it with utmost loathing. The parading with heads on the sticks was for our gentilhomme a disgusting brutality. The French Revolution quickly (d)evolved from cruel outburst of violence into a petty satisfaction of interests, a corrupt race for pensions for the real and phony revolutionaries, while the moment itself was a plebeian orgy, following a hazardous event of quelques invalides et un timide gouverneur who forgot to lock the door of the gaol:

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16. “I think the French Revolution, this violent explosion of egalitarian terror, is crucial. Before, terror simply meant the ‘mob’ erupting in violence, but they don’t take over—they simply kill. I am speaking of the Jacobin Terror. This is the key event. You either buy it or you don’t” (Žižek 2007).
There was nothing radically new in the event: Jacobins were, for Chateaubriand, simple plagiariests (1,9,4). The complete veracity of the following recounted moment is less relevant than its function as a display of loathing: as we can today see lynching mobs in India that use mobile technologies to record beaten bodies of the rapists, the mob seen by Chateaubriand parades the streets with heads of Foulon and Berthier on pikes, exiting through open mouth while the teeth of the dead are clenching the iron. He shouts from his balcony: “Is that your understanding of liberty?” Chateaubriand is abhorred by the cannibalistic feast. The mob did not destroy the gate and kill him. Encore à la mer (1,5,15): he sets on sea again, on a piece of heterotopia, where Byron, one of the obsessions of his memoirs, is his habitual reference.

Chateaubriand sees the events in that way because they lack spirituality from his point of view. He is a Christian and his spirituality is religious. Violent revolution is in his eyes an antiutopia, a temporary orgy of fallen men. This is his sincere sentiment, or at least one expressed in the memoirs, in contrast to an attempt of a classicist explanation from the earlier essay dealing with the same phenomenon. An impressive excerpt from the Genius conveys the gist of Chateaubriand’s feelings on the matter:

Long shall we remember the days when men of blood pretended to erect altars to the Virtues, on the ruins of Christianity [the charming comment in the here quoted American edition: ‘The author alludes to the disastrous tyranny exercised by Robespierre over the deluded French people.’, KP]. With one hand they reared scaffolds; with the other, on the fronts of our temples they inscribed Eternity to God and Death to man; and those temples, where once was found that God who is acknowledged by the whole universe, and where devotion to Mary consoled so many afflicted hearts,—those temples were dedicated to Truth, which no man knows, and to Reason, which never dried a tear. (Chateaubriand 1976: 52)

This lack of spirituality, the heartless values of truth and reason, makes revolutionary violence senseless for Chateaubriand. On the other hand, French Revolution has a strange status in Foucault’ studies: it figures more prominently in The Birth of the Clinic, it is present but ultimately not so relevant in To Discipline and Punish; it is a defining epochal event both in The Archaeology of Knowledge, and in the mentioned self-apologetic piece Is it Useless to Revolt? But in the eyes of early 1970’s Foucault who discusses politics of the day with Maoists and with Chomsky, the event looks strangely similar to the one depicted by Chateaubriand, with the sole distinction that Foucault’s portrayal of events is cynical in tone. Head on the stick, for Foucault, is an old Germanic custom, a form of people’s justice. The clashes with the police should be framed in terms of war, because the people’s court would, following bourgeois form, reproduce a bourgeois justice. There is no spirituality in French revolution, only power. Proletariat wages war to claim power, not because it is just, Foucault exclaimed to Chomsky (who, of course, did not agree). Neither truth, nor reason,

17. L’œil d’une de ces têtes, sorti de son orbite, descendait sur le visage obscur du mort ; la pique traversait la bouche ouverte dont les dents mordaient le fer. “Brigands !” m’écriai-je, plein d’une indignation que je ne pus contenir. “Est-ce comme cela que vous entendez la liberté?” (1,5,9)

18. Chateaubriand seemed frustrated with the lack of Byron’s recognition, portraying him as a son who, in terms of art and spiritual heritage, did not acknowledge his father (1,12,4). Cf, also Clubbe (2013).

19. Although he is an acteur, & acteur souffrant, Chateaubriand claims that his blood has calmed before he set out to write, building disinterestedly from the principles: Je causerai toujours simplement avec vous. (Chateaubriand, 1797: 5-6).
was present. Unlike in his picture of Iran of the late 1970s, spirituality was absent. Thus there was no place for utopia of political spirituality. This is of course not a claim in any sense about the facts and feelings in French Revolution as such, or any other revolution whatsoever, which might be more or less spiritual; this is only a claim that Foucault discovered spirituality later, and that his perspective, judged by his discourse, became less cynical.

Is revolution a utopia, then, depends on the point of view of the observer and actor. Utopia can serve to legitimize violence. Where one sees a righteous caliphate, others will see bloodthirsty cutthroats of Daesh. Utopia is sometimes devised in the shadow of power and violence to abolish both. Christianity is potentially universal but adherence to it was often achieved as a compelle intrare operation, by force more than by a missionary zeal. It is not so in Chateaubriand. His heterotopias are utopistically accepted by hearts of their dwellers. Foucault’s utopias are ultimately private: their universality is at best the one of liberalism, devoid of metaphysics, “a liberalism with a sceptical face” (cf. Kurelić 2002), as the least bad political vehicle accommodated to accept differences. Western universality, as he claimed, was achieved by exclusion of the mad and the marginal. Mais quoi? ce sont des fous, exclaimed Descartes. Now, we have free speech and strategic games, perhaps more of a heterotopia than a utopia, since strategic games, if taken seriously, by definition go with the risk of domination (cf. Plant 2007).

To conclude: a strange encounter ends up in partial convergence, a strange congeniality of two spirits in different roles, times and epochs. They both start from death. Chateaubriand’s childhood friend Gesril, undisciplined to the core and the master of audacious tests of courage, as a grown up swims back to his ship to be hanged by the English since he gave his word (1,1,5). Foucault ends up with techniques of spirituality of the utopian bodies, substituting or, more accurately, euphemizing death with risk. A strange encounter in political theology is the one of the quest for spirituality in two remarkable lives. Do they end up the same, with failure and death? Perhaps. But we may end more cheerfully—with life, putting aside the scholastic question whether it is utopian or heterotopian. Then, instead of a tranquil heaven of eternal life in one case, in the other we may see a never-ending earthly orgy. Is it consensual and how long it is going to last? I should leave that question for another occasion.

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